A CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGICAL METHODS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract: This paper is a critique of traditional pedagogical method in the teaching of English skills. In Indonesia, the emphasis of the teaching of English skill is on preparing students for jobs and standardized tests. While these purposes are necessary to improve students' language fluency, they are insufficient to equip students with skills they need to perform beyond college life. This paper argues that the focus of English teaching in college should be on the improvement of higher order thinking skills and the fostering of self-authorship. The paper uses socio-cultural theories of learning to discuss self-authorship and offers pedagogical implications on the basis of those theories.

Key words: *socio-cultural theories of learning, self-authorship, pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the teaching of English necessitate both curricular and pedagogical changes. Hinkel (2006:110) suggests that "recognition of the essential roles of the teacher and the learner and of the need for situationally relevant language pedagogy has brought about the

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decline of methods, with their specific philosophies and prescribed sets of classroom procedures". He adds, in the EFL setting, "communicating in English may have a reduced value relative to preparing for entrance exams or tests for securing employment" (Hinkel 2006:110). Hinkel's concern accurately portrays the most common challenge in education, the tension between learning for standardized tests and exams and learning as character building and social and civic responsibilities. The most commonly articulated mission of English Departments is to produce graduates with a good mastery in written and oral English. However, the L2 curriculum and pedagogy are designed to prepare students for standardized tests for securing employment. They focus more on accuracy than competency. Teachers are still maintaining their traditional pedagogical method emphasizing structures and language forms instead of function and language in use (*Kompas*, 2007).

In Indonesia, English is offered as early as in preschool or nursery schools. While the emphasis of the English curriculum in K-12 is on language form, the emphasis of the English curriculum in college should encompass a broader definition of learning, i.e. learning as an on-going process. College curriculum should take into account "what students should and do learn across the curriculum, and how graduate should and do learn, develop, and perform beyond college" (Mentowski 2005:336). The focus of English curriculum in college should be more on sharpening students' English skills for higher order thinking skills and foster students' development of self-authorship. In other words, teaching the forms and the structure of language is necessary but insufficient to produce graduates to enter the world beyond college. After all, college is a place to nurture higher learning---"an active, interactive process that results in meaningful, long-lasting changes in knowledge, understanding, behavior, disposition, appreciation, belief, and the like" (Angelo 2005: 452).

This paper is a critique to the traditional L2 pedagogical method in English Departments in Indonesia. The key argument of this paper is that the pedagogical methods in English Departments in Indonesia should adjust to the current developments in L2 teaching and should be designed in such a way that they improve the quality of higher learning in general and students' development of self-authorship in particular.

This paper will begin with narrative situations that reflect common practices in L2 English teaching skills in Indonesia. Then, Magolda's concept of self-authorship is discussed through the lenses of recent socio-cultural theories of learning: 'Vygotksy's Zone of Proximal Development, Bakhtin's Dialogic Heteroglossia', and 'Wenger's Community of Practice'. These socio-cultural theories are pertinent to the discussions of higher learning and self-authorship because they place emphasis on bringing students' knowledge through cultural practices, language, and society (Marton and Booth 2005). This paper will also offer some insights on pedagogical implications by applying the aforementioned concepts and theories

SETTING THE CONTEXT: ENGLISH SKILL COURSES AND COMMON PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

A. Situation 1: Elementary writing class

The writing teacher comes into the room with his textbooks on the mechanics of writing. He instructs students to open the page and he begins his lecture about the conjunctions. Students lazily open their books and pretend to listen to the teacher. The teacher, who is still talking about the types and the functions of conjunctions, is not aware of the fact that some students are doodling, some are sending text messages, some are looking outside the window. Only very few students paying attention and are interested in various types of fancy conjunctions. An hour later, the teacher asks the students to do the exercises in their books. They hastily ask each other what page the exercises are on and do the exercises in groups. Many students who have no clue whatsoever as to what the teacher has explained try to get the answers from other students. When it's time to discuss the answers, the teacher is frustrated because students cannot satisfactorily answer the exercises. When the class ends, he leaves the class feeling disappointed.

B. Situation 2: Reading class

Today's topic is 'Human Brain'. The reading teacher begins by asking students what they know to explore students' background knowledge. Some

students try to recollect information about the human brain that they learned in their high school years. Several students do not even try to answer and just depend on other students. Several feel that they are lost in the discussion of the human brain, a topic that reminds them of their science class teachers in high school. Then, the teacher asks the students to read the reading passage silently. Fifteen minutes later, she proceeds with the questions provided in the textbooks to test students' reading comprehension and reading strategies. Students try to accomplish the tasks even though they still have no clue about how the brain works and how pertinent this topic is for their literature or linguistics class they have to take this semester. Nonetheless, they obediently carry out the tasks. After the class ends, the teacher feels happy because she thinks she has done her job well.

C. Situation 3: Listening class

Students enthusiastically gather in the most comfortable room in the whole department, the listening lab. The expensive multimedia lab is equipped with surround speakers, teacher-controlled equipment, wall-to-wall carpet, air condition, a big plasma TV, and a projector. They hurriedly pick their seats and listen to the song that the teacher is playing while he is busy preparing his lessons and organizing the worksheets. When the class begins, students listen to a lecture about the 'Ice Age'. They have to listen to this 30-second lecture twice and then do the exercises in their worksheet. The exercises include the true-false statements, multiple choice questions, cloze passages, and some additional writing exercises. By the end of the class, the class has completed all the exercises and the teacher assigns the writing assignment for homework for the next class.

D. Situation 4: The speaking class

The speaking class teacher is already in the room when students enter the class. She greets the students and engages in informal talks with several students before the class begins. The topic for the day is 'Debate'. She begins by explaining the expressions they will use for the debate and how the debate proceeds. She then distributes a page containing a reading passage on capital punishment and asks the students to read it before they begin the

debate. Some students consult the difficult words to the teacher. Students are then divided into two groups: the pro and the against groups. They gather in both sides of the room discussing their strategies. When the teacher approaches they discuss in English and when the teacher is a few feet away, they converse in Indonesian. When the debate finally begins, several students lead the debate, the others are just silent, or maybe trying to write down or whisper their arguments to the students who lead the discussion. The teacher gives opportunities for those who do not speak to express their opinions. Some say one or two sentences and stop. The teacher wants to give more time to such students but she cannot help noticing some impatient students. Finally, she decides to just continue the debate even though only few people participate.

The above situations are not real; yet they are similar to my personal experience as a student and a teacher in English Department in two universities. Such situations reflect the most common problems and challenges for students and teachers in English skill courses such as the role of students' background knowledge (situation 2), too much focus on accuracy (situation 1 and 3), imbalanced class control (situation 4), rigid lesson plans (all situations), and teacher-centered (all situations). What is largely absent in the above situations is the role of students in the teaching and learning process. In all situations, the teacher is the key player in the learning process.

Situation 1 clearly reflects the role of teacher as the transmitter of knowledge and students' role as the receptacles of knowledge. This is what Freire refers to as banking education whereby education is viewed as "an act of depositing" (1973:72). The banking approach to education does not view knowledge as the process of inquiry but rather as a "gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire 1973:72). At the end of the class, the teacher is upset because he assumes that students are too lazy to pay attention to his lecture or to respond to his questions.

'In situation 2, the topic of reading class does not seem to be a meaningful reading passage for students. The text merely serves as a means to teach reading strategies, the focus of the teaching of L2 reading in Indonesia. Once students accomplish their tasks, they do not learn much

about how the brain works; yet they become increasingly aware of the strategies to locate the main ideas and the supporting details. In other words, the text itself becomes the periphery to the reading class. Similar to the reading class, the topic of 'Ice Age' is peripheral to the listening comprehension exercises. In both reading and listening class, interactions take place mainly between the teacher and the students. Interaction among students barely exists.

In situation 4, student interaction exists but only among the most fluent students. In conversation class, the teacher's task in providing ample time for all students to participate is very challenging. In most universities, the number of students in the speaking class is about 20. In some universities, the class size is even bigger. Thus, each student does not have enough opportunity to practice speaking. In situation 4, in addition to lack of opportunity, some students are reluctant to express their ideas for other reasons. Only few students lead the debate and this leaves other students feel excluded from the activities. The teacher as the facilitator of the debate is constrained by the need to maintain the flow of the debate. She decides to give more opportunities to the most active members of the group than to students who need more encouragement.

Focus on accuracy, the mechanics of writing, or the listening and reading strategies is good to produce students who have good mastery of written and oral English skills. However, teachers are also responsible for student learning in a broader sense. When teachers overemphasize accuracy and ignore students' learning development, it is likely that students become more detached from their classroom experience.

Magolda (2005) in her article "The developmental nature of self-authorship: The world of students" contends that teachers who lack understanding students' epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development are likely to judge students who are quiet to be lazy and hopeless. They are likely to forget that people are actually born learners. They are born with a gift of curiosity to explore the world around them, but when they grow up, the education system repressed this very gift. Rule memorization, drill, and less freedom to express their curiosity make students feel less valued and this leads to the confinement of their critical thinking development (Shor 1992).

Higher education institutions should be a place where teacher's main responsibility is to guide and facilitate students in developing their learning development. The main purpose of college education is to promote and nurture students' high order thinking skills development, a type of education that promotes "the process of developing one's own perspectives in the context of understandings of the world" (Magolda 2005:394). This idea of self-authorship is further defined as "believing one can construct knowledge claims, make one's own inner psychological life, and regulate relationships with others to maintain one's own identity" (Magolda 2005:394).

Magolda's definition of self-authority seems to be intricately linked to the socio-cultural theory of learning. This approach to learning is also known as "social constructivism"---an approach in which human acts are explained "not in terms of individual or several individual mental states, but in terms of what goes on between individuals, and between individuals and situations" (Marton and Booth 2005:385).

Self-authorship has three dimensions: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Cognitive dimension of self-authorship refers to people's "assumptions about the nature, limit, and certainty of knowledge, or their epistemic assumptions" (Magolda 2005:394). A person in general begins by assuming that knowledge is certain and comes from the person who has the authority to transmit knowledge (absolute knowing). When he interacts with other people, he may begin to 'understand' knowledge, and that knowledge is dependent upon contexts (transitional knowing). The intrapersonal dimension of meaning making is related to a person's assumptions about himself. The development of meaning making begins from identifying one's own quality, experiencing, and to finally authoring one's own psychological voice. The interpersonal dimension refers to one's assumption about himself in relation to other people. In this dimension, a person begins by organizing his own point of view, integrating his view and that of others, evaluating both views, and making judgment about an issue under consideration.

In the traditional pedagogical approach to language learning, teachers assume the responsibility as the constructor of meaning. They fail to underline the connection between the content of the course and its practical

application in real life. They fail to recognize the importance of peer interactions in the classroom for students' development of meaning making.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING THROUGH VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE OF LEARNING

Vygotsky's theory attempts to connect the cognitive approach and social constructivism. His theory underlines the connection between the "inner" (consciousness) and the "outer" (society) by means of "internalization" (Marton and Booth 2005). The mental function first takes place in the social arena, the interpsychological plane, and then moves to intrapsychological plane, the inner plane. The movement from the social plane to inner plane is called internalization (McMahon and Raphael 1997).

In Vygotsky's view, social interaction is the source of the cognitive growth. His concept of Zone of Proximal Development highlights the role of social interaction for one's cognitive development. He defines Zone of Proximal Development as "the distance of the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978:86). This definition implies that students are likely to be able to develop their potential when interactions take place. The teaching implication of the Zone of Proximal Development is that "teaching should extend the student beyond what he or she can do without assistance, but not beyond the links to what the students already know" (Lee and Smagorinsky 2000:2).

Teaching, in Vygotskian psychology, has to put student into a compelling situations that provide sufficient challenge for students to achieve their potential development and opportunity to connect their prior and present knowledge. Bruner in McMahon and Raphael (1997) mentions two important conditions that can maximize students' Zone of Proximal Development. First, learners' willingness to try and second, teachers provide models to accomplish the tasks if they are challenging enough for students.

Vygotskian perspective also emphasizes interactions that allow students to share their individual knowledge while at the same time learn

and use distributed knowledge to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate information. Thus, meaning is "constructed through joint activity rather than being transmitted from teacher to learner" (McMahon and Raphael 1997:2)

In the EFL setting, Vygotsky's perspective is useful to understand the intertwining relationships between social environment, language, and human higher mental function. Language competence originates from social reality, in language use. Social contexts shape language and language creates social contexts. Language competence, therefore, is shaped by the multitude of socio-cultural and institutional settings, and various discursive practices in which students participate (Johnson 2004).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING THROUGH BAKHTINIAN VIEW OF LEARNING

Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, began writing and published his works in Russia in the early twentieth century. Not until 1970 did he make his writing known to the American public (Johnson, 2004). Like Vygotsky's, Bakhtinian perspective of learning is classified under the social constructivism of the learning theory. One of his major contributions to the theory of learning is the role of dialogues in the construction of meaning. In his book, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, he underlines the idea that language use is embedded in social circumstances. It is highly dependent on contexts. He contends 'The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accentuated as an individual utterance' (Bakhtin 1980:272). Moreover, he adds "The word of language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantics and expressive intention" (Bakhtin 1980:293). To some extent, Bakhtin's view is similar to Vygotsky's. Both philosophers highlight the importance of dialogue for a person's construction of meaning. Only by interacting with other people, a person can learn other's point of view, internalize it, integrate it with his own view and use this new information to develop his new way of viewing the world. From Bakhtin's point of view,

learning takes place efficiently when dialogues take place in contextual circumstances. Learning is most effective when it takes place in circumstances full of tensions and conflict because struggles that people have when they encounter these tension is useful for them to come to a new understanding. The struggle to accept other people's view often result in miscommunication; however, only when people look beyond their conflict will people realize the positive value of the dialogic process in conflict (Freedman and Ball 2004).

In regard to the Magolda's notion of the development of student self-authorship, Bakhtin's perspective resonates with all three dimensions of self-authorship, that is the meddling between outside voices and students' inner voices is essential for students' cognitive development. Teacher's main responsibility, therefore, lies in his ability to create a knowledge-building context where inner vs. outside voices, and new vs. old voices can mingle and interact, a context where voices are equally valuable and where students can absorb and share what they have learned and what they know. Teacher is no longer the authority and the transmitter of knowledge. In a knowledge-building context, teachers need to create tasks where students can engage in creative discovery of knowledge.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING-MAKING THROUGH WENGER'S THEORY OF LEARNING

Wenger's social theory of meaning is based on the these premises: 1) the fact that humans are social beings is the central aspect of learning; 2) learning takes place when knowledge is valued; 3) learning involves active participation; 4) learning is to produce meaning. Fundamental to those premises is the idea that participation refers "to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (Wenger 1998:4). Wenger identifies four essential components that characterize his social theory of learning: meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging), and identity (learning as becoming). In practice, these components are interconnected and continually shifting depending on the focus of the social interactions.

In Wenger's view, in any social practice, a person actively engages in the construction of meaning. The interaction allows the members of the community to negotiate meaning because they can affect and be affected by other people with whom they interact. The interaction also exposes members of the community to a multiplicity of views and perspectives. Negotiation of meaning entails participation and reification. Participation is an essential part of negotiation of meaning because "participation...shapes our experience and it also shapes those communities"(Wenger 1998:56). Reification is "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness' (Wenger 1998:58). Thus, reification is a process of producing an artifact that make our negotiation of meaning more concrete. In the classroom, reification can be something that students make for class projects such as posters, wall-magazine, papers, journals, and many other forms of artifacts that make their classroom experience more meaningful.

One of the notions that somewhat differentiate Wenger's theory from those of Vygotsky and Bakhtin is Wenger's emphasis on the role of identity in a social practice. A person participates in a practice with a certain identity. A new member of the community may view their identity as marginal whereas the identities of old members of the community are more toward the center because they have greater attachment to the community. The extent to which one's identity is marginal or central in relation to others reflects one's sense of belonging. The identity of a new member can move to the central position as he/she is able to identify himself/herself with the values and practices in the community. On the other hand, the identity of an old member of the community can shift from the center to the peripheral if he/she can no longer adapt with the values.

Wenger's community of practice comprises three distinct yet interconnected elements: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. Like Vygotsky's and Bakthin's, Wenger's theory of learning posits that learning is effective when a person is actively engaged in interactions with others and develop shared repertoire which "includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identity as members" (Wenger 1998:83). Such engagement is

characterized by the multiplicity of voices and perspectives and each member will learn and benefit from their similarities and differences.

Classroom is also regarded as a community of practice because students are in mutual engagement, work together to achieve a goal, and develop certain discourses that reflect their identity and membership in the classroom. In the classroom, no one has privileges over another. Each student brings a significant contribution to the development of self-authorship with their diverse perspectives. The more students interact, the stronger the membership become, and the more information they can share.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

When meaning is constructed through collaborative activity, teachers need to create learning atmosphere where all students have the opportunity to learn from one another. More importantly, teachers should be able to create tasks that are meaningful for students, tasks that they can use in real life. In the writing class example (situation 1), the teacher can divide students into small groups and brainstorm what the students know about conjunctions and how they are used in real-life. In addition, he can use simple printed materials such as news, ads, notice containing different types of conjunction. To challenge students with more compelling tasks, the teacher can ask the students to produce a collaborative writing artifacts such as posters, flyers, brochures, or any other projects that they commonly use in their daily life.

Genre-based pedagogy is a current approach in the teaching of L2 writing. This approach emerges as a response towards "changing views of discourse and of learning to write which incorporate better understandings of how language is structured to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use" (Hyland 2007:148). Genre-based pedagogy is characterized by the integration of language, content, and contexts in writing as a means to communicate. Grounded in a premise that writing and learning to write as a social activity, this approach employ several strategies to engage learners is multitude of tasks. The most important key is that teachers assign meaningful tasks, ones that students need in real life, such as writing resumes, application letters. The writing activities can be

accompanied by reading tasks; for instance reading job advertisement, reading job requirements, and many other relevant tasks that can make students engage in a meaningful manner.

While teaching reading comprehension strategies is good to prepare students for standardized tests, it is also essential for teachers to make the reading class a place where students can sharpen their critical thinking skills. Research on the teaching of L2 reading suggests that learners have to acquire enough vocabulary before they can move to higher reading strategies (Nation 2001, 2006). Therefore, teaching L2 reading in elementary class should focus on vocabulary building and developing reading interest. Vocabulary building can be achieved when learners are exposed to variety of reading material, from popular to academic texts, from low-brow to high brow texts. In elementary reading class, teacher should focus more on encouraging the development of self-authorship than accuracy or reading strategies.

One of the widely-adopted methods in the teaching of reading is the Book Club, a literacy program whose primary aim is to "create contexts where students can engage in meaningful conversations, on their own, about the text they read" (McMahon and Raphael 1997:4). Even though this program is employed mainly in L1 reading class, it can also offer significant benefit for students in EFL class given that it provides a context for experimenting language in use and acquiring second language input (Brock 1997). In elementary reading class, programs such as the Book Club can benefit learners in various ways. First, it promotes reading enjoyment as students can choose the books they are interested in. Second, it fosters the development of self-authorship as students learn from each other about certain issues raised from the book assigned or read. Third, the integration of writing in the program allows ample room for students to improve their writing skills, to self-evaluate their progress, and to produce any meaningful artifacts. Fourth, the student-led discussion can serve as a useful avenue for students to practice their fluency.

Current perspective in the teaching of L2 listening suggest that listening skill is more effective when taught in integration with other skills (Vandergrift 2004). In situation 3, the listening task actually includes a writing task. The teacher decides to assign the task as homework. It is,

therefore, necessary for him to review students' writing in the following meeting. In his article "Listening to learn or Learning to listen", Vandergrift describes the stages of listening instruction. In the first stage, students make prediction on the content and the vocabulary on the basis of the title of the reading passage. In the next stage, the first verification stage, students can verify their prediction and discuss the choice they make with their peers. In the second verification stage, the listening task is followed by class or group discussions where students can exhange ideas, write their reflection how they come up with a certain answer. The next stage, the final verification stage, students listen for specific information that they cannot decipher in the previous stage. The final stage, the reflection stage, students write goals for the next meeting. These stages reflect the development of meaning making. Students compare and contrast their own views with others. Inputs from peers are essential for students to verify their hypothesis. By listening to other people's views, they can analyze their own answers, evaluate them, and come to a better interpretation and understanding of the text. In the traditional listening class, interactions with peers are minimal. Yet, studies on the teaching of listening prove that class, in pair, or small-group discussions are strongly encouraged. Even in this seemingly rigid class discourse, social practice becomes a key to improve students' learning development. The opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction are open.

The role of a teacher in a classroom as a community of practice is to encourage students to participate actively and create atmosphere where students will feel that they are valued. In the speaking class (situation 4), the teacher can facilitate the class better by asking students to individually write what they think and feel about the issue and discuss it in their own groups (the pro and the against groups). In this way, students who are less fluent and have low self-confident will have the opportunity to share their thoughts. In addition, she can also use the scaffolding technique, modeling the expressions necessary for debate, for students who are less fluent and lack self-confident. Even though capital punishment is a controversial issue, some students may not understand the issue well. Therefore, it is necessary that students discuss briefly on their own, with the guide of the teacher, about the issue before making personal judgment.

To get students involved in meaningful interactions, the integration of skills seems to be an inevitable approach from socio-cultural theories. Language skills can no longer be regarded as separate knowledge. Rather, they are closely connected and complementary. Teachers of English in higher education need to be cognizant of the needs of students to learn and gain knowledge from peers, teachers, and even outsiders to develop their self-authorship.

A FINAL WORD: THE FUTURE OF THE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY IN THE TEACHING OF L2 SKILLS

Globalization and technological advancement demand on-going transformations and improvements in all spheres of life including higher education. In response to those changes, it is imperative that teachers of English in higher education institutions and policy makers take into account the current development in the teaching of L2 skills as well as the changes of sociopolitical and cultural aspects of society to make informed decision in regard to curricular or pedagogical transformations. Socio-cultural theories of learning are useful frameworks to adopt if the focus of L2 pedagogy is to improve learners' communicative and cognitive development.

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