

WHY DO STUDENT TEACHERS NEED CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE?

AN EXAMPLE FROM FIELD TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract

People especially teenagers tend to use language to represent their characters, for example they use slang and inappropriate words in the wrong situation. One attempt had been done to give young generation, especially English student teachers in Indonesia, English lesson, which was inserted with multicultural values. This effort was not only adding and applying universal values and cultural identities, which match with students' needs, but also managing, and running good strategies in teaching learning process. Why multicultural? Indonesia consists of 17.506 islands, 746 languages, and 1.128 tribes. It can be said that Indonesia is a multicultural country, which enriches the national heritage and strengthens the identity of Indonesians as well. However, the diversity itself may trigger potential conflict among Indonesian. Knowing, learning, comprehending and applying the knowledge of culture in daily life will glue them and avoid the future conflict. Therefore, giving multicultural knowledge to student teachers is one of the practical ways to enlighten them how to appreciate differences then go hand in hand with others in Indonesia and in the world. At the end, they will not only play as good model for their students but also occupy themselves as transformers of multicultural knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of National Education has determined to integrate character education into Indonesian classroom instruction. This policy roots from many reported facts of acute sadism, lack of respect for parents, elders, and teachers, increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating and stealing), nepotism, and corruption. The number of sadism is growing rapidly lately in Indonesia. In some areas, people do not hesitate to assassinate a person or a group of people for foolish things such as for sake of solidarism of their motorcycle gang. In some areas that are well known for the religious conflicts are worse than other parts of Indonesia. A conflict occurred because insignificant issues or a group of people kill people randomly just to spread terror. They did it on purpose, to trigger conflict. Some students in the big city do crime in the street, like stabbing each other, making riot in the environment, and stealing. Nowadays, people especially teenagers tend to use **language** to represent their characters, for example they use slang and inappropriate words in the wrong situation. It means that language is a part of their fashion and identity (Tri Floriasti,

2011). As stated by Holmes young learners are the fastest of shift languages. According to Thomas Lickona in Zuchdi (2011: 216) that the use of bad language is one of the signals, which leads a nation to the crushed situation. Educators, parents, and government need to find a way and try to organize a program or education that promote values in life, such as appreciate others, elders, teachers with different background (Megawangi, 2004: 95)

DISCUSSION

Changing in Indonesian society has demanded in teacher education programs as future teachers will teach greater diversity of students. Student teachers should be prepared with teaching competencies, pedagogy and curriculum to deal with the challenges of an increasingly diverse in communities. Many subjects in teacher training education have added multicultural and character education in order to address this need. Are individuals involved in the process willing to reflect and examine their belief systems toward this changing?

I admit that some educators continue to assume that most of schools will continue to be monoculture societies for instance, most schools in Yogyakarta. Thus, there is no need to prepare students teachers with necessary cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them teach classes of socioculturally diverse students without any direct instruction. Student teachers, with diverse cultural knowledge, will make sense of unexpected perspectives from their students, who come from various cultural backgrounds (Min Chou, 2007: 143).

Who are the future teachers?

Preparing student teachers to teach in twenty century classrooms, which will be more culturally diverse unique than before is one possible way to deal with the changing. Educators need to see the connection between the connection between teacher education, school culture, and the social context of communities because they are the red line that student teachers need to catch. In order to meet the connection, student teachers should be immersed in cultural learning, for instance they should be exposed to various culture knowledge.

Once student teachers got and comprehended the connection, their students would get the benefit from them. Then, the first role in academic life is student

teachers play as a guide for students to learn different perspectives, which occur in the classes, English classes in particular. English plays as a foreign language in Indonesia. In teaching a foreign language, it needs to be sensitivity to the fragility of the students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding. Learning a foreign language implies some degree of learning a second culture. If people understand differing worldviews, they will usually adopt open-minded attitude toward cross-cultural differences (Floriasti, 2012). Showing and applying cultural knowledge in not only teaching learning process but also society is one of the interpersonal skills that student teachers should have (Brown, 2001).

According to Allen (1980 in Brown, 2001:429) characteristics of a good language teacher is having such important skills as interpersonal Skills:

1. Is aware of cross-cultural differences and is sensitive to students' cultural traditions
2. Enjoys people, shows enthusiasm, warmth, rapport, and appropriate humor
3. Values the opinions and abilities of students
4. Is patient in working with students of lesser ability
5. Offers challenges to students of exceptionally high ability
6. Cooperates harmoniously and candidly with colleagues (fellow teachers)
7. Seeks opportunities to share thoughts, ideas, and techniques with colleagues

The language-cultural connection is an important factor in the learning of a second language or foreign language. That is why both learners and teachers of a language need to understand cultural differences. Therefore, giving cultural knowledge to students is one of the practical way to enlighten them how to appreciate differences then go hand in hand with others in Indonesia and in the world. Securing this knowledge is a process to develop good characters such as appreciative, democratic, and tolerant. It can be said that Indonesia is multicultural country, which enrich the national heritage and strengthen the identity of Indonesian as well. The uniqueness of Indonesia is priceless treasures that unite people in diversity as Indonesia consists of 17.506 islands, 746 languages, and 1.128 tribes (Floriasti, 2012). However, the diversity itself may trigger potential conflict between Indonesian. Knowing, learning, comprehending and applying the knowledge of culture in daily

life will glue them and avoid the future conflict. Special materials are needed for students by inserting the local cultures into English subject.

Field teaching practice

Teachers, lecturers and educators have responsibility in designing and developing curriculum, which is broke down into syllabus then applied material in the schools. The syllabus and the material should be matched not only with the national teaching aims but also the students who come from various sociocultural backgrounds. Teaching and learning reflect situation where the teaching learning takes place in certain sociocultural context (Lee, 1999).

Thus, at the end, it can be expected that the material in one area will be different from another as it consists of the local culture, which exists in the particular area. Such pictures which capture unequal position and role in professional and social life between men and women in big cities will not printed as teaching media in English book for junior and senior high schools. Finally, it will meet the updated situation that women no longer play as second-class citizen and then students aware of appreciating and respecting both sides.

Student teachers had designed two cultural activities that contain foreign customs of other country. First, it was a wall magazine called "USA's Fun Facts". It can be seen in picture 1 below. It played as input for junior high school students so that they got more information about other culture. Student teachers realized that their students need more knowledge other than what they got from English book and classroom discussion. It supports their field teaching practical program since teaching is not only in the class but also outside the class.

Second, it was a poster which contains long list of wisdom, idiom and motivating sentences that usefull for junior high students in daily and academicaly life which can be seen from picture 1 below. Junior high students learnt the sentences, tried to find the meaning then compared them with what they have in Bahasa Indonesia. It was expected that they applied what they comprehended from the list in their life to reach a key of sucess.



Picture 1. USA's Fun Facts and Poster

Their capability in designing and applying cultural integrated material for their students meet with the skills that student teachers must keep in order to fulfill the quality (Allen, 1980 in Brown, 2001:429). Characteristics of good language teachers are:

Technical Knowledge

1. Understands the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar, and discourse
2. Comprehensively grasps basic principles of language learning and teaching
3. Has fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening to, and reading English
4. Knows through experience what it is like to learn a foreign language
5. Understands the close connection between language and culture
6. Keeps up with the field through regular reading and conference/workshop attendance

Pedagogical Skills

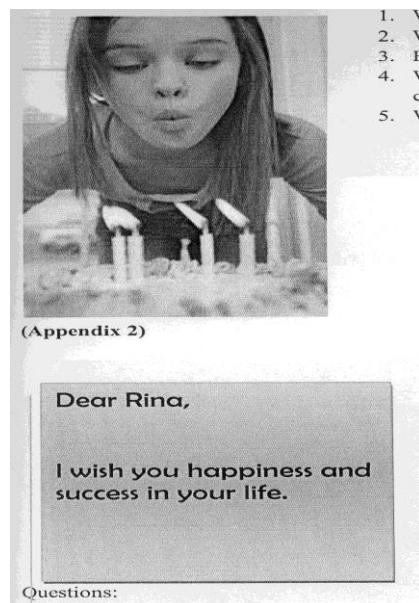
1. Has a well-thought-out, informed approach to language teaching
2. Understands and uses a wide variety of techniques
3. Efficiently designs and executes lesson plans
4. Monitor lessons as they unfold and makes effective mid-lesson alterations
5. Effectively perceives students' linguistic needs
6. Gives optimal feedback to students
7. Stimulates interaction, cooperation, and teamwork in the classroom
8. Uses appropriate principles of classroom management
9. Uses effective, clear presentation skills
10. Creatively adapts textbook material and other audio, visual, and mechanical aids
11. Innovatively creates brand-new materials when needed
12. Uses interactive, intrinsically motivating techniques to create effective tests and lessons

It is true that student teachers need to meet the qualification and have cultural knowledge then apply them in daily teaching life. Cultural knowledge covers not only

about art, beauty, tourism, unique culture and other traditional ancient things, but also the thought, norm, and values of certain intended areas. According to Saratri Wilonoyudho (2012) culture is not only about art, beauty, tourism but also about the complexity of thought, pattern of action or behaviour which lead to master peace of the whole notion.

Another example that had been done by student teachers which can be found in picture 2 below is also a good material for junior high students. It needed deeper explanation and comparison between two cultures. Student teachers described and explained the picture of a girl who is blowing birthday candle then started comparing it with junior high students' habit. It can be assumed that what in the picture is not originally from students' local culture. For some students, birthday is not a special day that need to be celebrated.

It was a good example how people see one thing differently. Students knew that in some part of the world that people blowing birthday candle, while some people in other part cut "rice tumpeng". They learnt different things and appreciated the differences.



Picture 2. Brithday candle and card

Teachers are agent of culture

Teachers play important role in introducing culture to students. It is a big window for students so that they can see what they need to know, comprehend and may be deal with it in the future. It can be say that teachers are agent of culture. It can be fulfilled if teachers have ability to use the subject as media in planting and transferring at least three things such as values of life, point of view and life skills (Saratri Wilonoyudho (2012).

From the above explanation, it can be said that student teachers play such important role as material designer for their students so that they can learn how to appreciate others. They also play as good model how to build good characters from one good character to other one. Since they provide students with sense of the depth of cultural norms and patterns of people who speak the language, students can learn how to appreciate members of another culture and go hand in hand with them. It may become an effort to shape the civil society. This condition does not stop at that step. It leads the students to act and response critically in daily life. Then, this beneficial actions form good characters. Students are no longer passive participants who take everything are given in the class and daily life, without questioning the ideas. They start judging and evaluating information critically, and decide to accept or refuse information. This critical character is just a starting point of other magnificent characters, such as innovative, creative and accountable which are go side by side in developing outstanding characters.

CONCLUSION

Students will get benefit from student teachers that equip themselves with cultural knowledge. Therefore, it can be seen from the intertwined connection between teaching English language, culture and students teachers that securing this knowledge give student teachers extra help in their practices as they play important roles for their students such as guide, designer, and model of good characters.

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