

Oral Test: A Powerful Tool for Assessing Students' Actual Achievement in Language Learning

Muhamad Ahsanu

Making the Best Use of a Textbook in Indonesian Tertiary EFL Reading Classrooms

Anna Marietta da Silva

Indonesian EFL Teachers Studying Overseas: Feelings, Expectations, and Perspectives on Professional Development

Bambang Yudi Cahyono

Catering Student's Needs to Promote Aesthetic Experience in EFL Literature Class with Reference to Response-Centered Curriculum

Ishkak Said

Access Ritual in Eastern Sumba, Indonesia

B. Retang Wohangara

The Tragic Elements in Brad Silberling's (2004) *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*

Marcellina Ariska P.N. and G.M. Adhyanggono

A Book Review:

The Alchemist Graphic Novel

Brian Locker

Celt

A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching and Literature

A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching and Literature (**Celt**) is published biannually in the months of July and December (ISSN: 1412-3320) presenting articles on culture, English language teaching and learning, linguistics, and literature. Contents include analysis, studies, application of theories, research reports, material development, and book reviews. **Celt** was firstly published in December 2001. From July 2005 to December 2007 edition, the journal has been accredited with the decree from *Hasil Akreditasi Jurnal Ilmiah, SK Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, No. 56/DIKTI/Kp/2005/ dated on 30 May 2005.*

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Address: The Editors, **Celt**, Faculty of Letters of Soegijapranata Catholic University, Henricus Constance building, 4th floor, Jl. Pawiyatan Luhur IV/1, Benda Dhuwur, Semarang 50234, Indonesia; email: celtunika@gmail.com; celt.unika@yahoo.com; celt@unika.ac.id; website: <http://www.journalcelt.com>; <http://journalcelt.blogspot.com>; Telephone: +62-24-8316142, 8441555 (hunting) ext. 1705, 110. Fax no.: +62-24-8445265

Celt is published by the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University. Rector: Prof. Dr. Ir. Yohanes Budi Widianaiko, M.Sc., Vice Rector for Academic Affairs: Dr. Angelina Ika Rahutami, M.Si., Vice Rector for Financial and Administration Affairs: Theresia Dwi Hastuti, S.E., M.Si., Akt., Vice Rector for Students' Affairs: Ferdinandus Hlindarto, S.Psi, Msi, Vice Rector for External Affairs: Benedictus Danang Seliarto, S.H., LL.M., Dean: Henry Hartono, S.S., M.P.d., Vice Dean for Academic Affairs and for Student Affairs: Gerardus Majella Adhyanggono, S.S.M.A., Vice Dean of Financial and Administration Affairs: Emilia Nirik Aydawati, S.P., M.Hum.

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Printed by Tirtasari Offset, Semarang.

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CATERING STUDENTS' NEEDS TO PROMOTE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN EFL LITERATURE CLASS WITH REFERENCE TO RESPONSE-CENTRED CURRICULUM¹

Iskhak Said²

Abstract: The success of literature instruction is dependent upon not only the teaching strategies, but also the well-developed curriculum, which accommodates student needs. Teaching practice of literature in the multicultural contexts has to do with teachers' beliefs in approaching to their day-to-day practice endowed in the curriculum they are concerned with. In this respect, the existing literature curricula should ideally reflect aesthetic experiences that enhance students' freedom and enjoyment with literary works assigned. The present study examines how three case High School English teachers from different sites with different multicultural entities in West Java, Indonesia, developed literature curricula in such a way that their students got 'free room' to express what they wanted and needed to say and to do. Following the traditions of a qualitative multi-case and -site study, the present study investigated the process of teaching literature in language studies streams of the three sites by occupying classroom observation and interview, and administering questionnaires as well. The

¹ This article is a part of the thesis the writer wrote for his Doctorate Degree in EFL Literature pedagogy.

² **Iskhak Said, M.Pd.** <ishkhak.said@yahoo.com> +628122179216 is a full time lecturer from Galuh University, Ciamis, West Java.

findings revealed that, in their classroom practices, the three cases endeavored to cater their students' needs through developing negotiated response-based literature curriculum that led to varied and unique activities in the forms of celebrations showing their personal engagements in responding to literature assigned. Yet, their different schooling systems and contextual factors, and the subjects' perspectives in literature pedagogy and their lived-through literary reading experiences, have made each case indicate typical and unique phenomena, which is in accordance with the spirit of school-based curriculum.

Key words: *response-based approach, freedom, enjoyment, multicultural*

INTRODUCTION

Designing teaching strategies for creating conducive classroom practices cannot be separated from the realm of curriculum development. As the advocates suggest (e.g. Cox 1999, Langer 1995), the trends of literature instruction also have to do with the basics of approaching to reading practices. The underlying theories the teacher occupies will greatly affect his/her proposed premises that support the process of designing instructional planning. For example, under the umbrella of reader-response theory, teaching literature will lead to response-based instruction, relevant and corresponding to the principles of response-centered curriculum that promotes students' active roles in their own creating meanings (Cox 1999: 20).

The present study was grounded from three cases of literature instruction conducted by three High School English teachers from different sites in West Java with multicultural

entities. On the basis of the emerging data, the study implicitly reflected that the three case study teachers have uniquely employed typical day-to-day practice for literature classes with reference to their school-based curriculum promoting students' enjoyment and freedom in expressing their ideas and feeling.

With regard to the interplay between curriculum and classroom practice, philosophically speaking, there is an important ideological drive underpinning classroom practice. Ornstein (2009) argues that "teaching, learning, and curriculum are all interwoven in school practices and should reflect a school's and a community's philosophy." Regarding the existing trends of literature teaching, seen from the time frame, there has been evidence showing that the paradigm has shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered approach; from information-based to aesthetic experience-based strategy. which is much supported by reader-response theory, a literary criticism promoting reader's engagement (see Rosenblatt 1978, 1991).

Previous studies on curriculum development for literature suggest that teacher's day-to-day practices have its relationship with her/his way of developing curriculum. For example, Applebee et al (2000) suggest that diversity in classroom teaching dynamics is masked by the teacher's perspectives in approaching to teaching pedagogy. Yet, the teaching of literature at high school in Indonesia in relation to its curriculum development has a scant attention (cf. Kristiyani 2007). Regarding the pitfalls of literature pedagogy, Langer (1995: IX) argues that students' intellectual, social, and personal development is often underestimated. In addition, Guitierrez (2001) affirms that recent development in literary analysis and language pedagogy reveals its inadequacies.

The success of literature instruction is in fact influenced by its curricular orientation. The recent school-based curriculum (the so-called Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan/KTSP) should be developed by each school, which is characterized by school's typical entities and its different schooling system. Thus, local content embedded from each school should be one of the bases of developing curriculum for any subject, including literature. In a sense, the developed curriculum should cater students' different needs shaped and influenced by their socio-cultural contexts.

Trends of teaching literature also go hand-in-hand with the principles of curriculum development. The development of curriculum for literature, as advocates suggest, has relationship with its underlying theories and philosophies illuminating the chosen teaching pedagogy. For example, the sophistication of literary criticism also gives significance to both literature instruction and curriculum development (Agee 2001). In this regard, Agee's study suggests that classroom practices of literature instruction were once influenced by teachers' understanding about teaching literature focusing on information-based approach or text-based analysis promoting close reading. Previous studies (e.g. Hamel 2003, Langer 1995) indicate that there have been shifts from New Criticism to Reader-response, which promotes readers roles as active meaning makers.

Reading literary works is a process which is sometimes differently conceptualized. For example, Rosenblatt (1978, 1991) sees it a process of transaction between readers and texts. Readers, in this sense, are active meaning makers who tend to bring their own experiences by showing idiosyncratic individual entities. Each individual has their own different wants, needs, expectations, and ways of interpretation.

Pedagogically, taking into account those idiosyncrasies teaching literature needs philosophical understanding. Purves, Rogers and Soter (1990) argue that reader-response strategy plays significant and meaningful construction to empower students' aesthetic experiences. Purves et al further argue that students are ideally invited to respond to literary works after reading, and they can activate their capacities ranging from knowledge (cognitive domain) to very personal (affective) domain. Rosenblatt also suggests that reading can take place from the orientation which is information-based (“*efferent*” or to carry away) to emotional ways (*aesthetic*).

Reader-response theory has much influenced the developing trend of response-centered curriculum (Cox 1999). In this curriculum, as Purves et al (1990) argue, literature instruction is designed merely to help students aesthetically engage in literary works. not to help them answer such a multiple-choice questions, or information-based assessment (see also Aveling 2006). Response-centered curriculum, as Purves et al further argue, can make students 1) feel secure in his/her response; 2) know why she responds the way she does; 3) respect the responses of others and also recognizes differences from others; and 4) recognize that there are common elements in people's responses and recognize similarities with others. In this trend, students are brought to freely utter wide range of expressions through talking to others, sharing ideas, questioning-answering problems, and discussing with their poor, and critical interpreting texts assigned. Freedom, enjoyment, engagement, and classroom democracy are offered to students within their diverse classroom. In this way students' multicultural awareness can be enhanced (see Lie 2001). In addition. this project-based curriculum (Posner 1997: 150) allows for process-based literature instruction, which virtually emphasizes on students' experience of freely

and expressively engaging and enjoying literary works assigned.

Response-centered literature curriculum basically offers students social engagement. Parallel to Purves's et al (1990) views, Cox (1999: 20) also mentions that in this kind of curriculum students get involved in interaction, cooperation, and collaboration. In a sense, there is interplay between Rosenblatt's reader-response theory and Vygotsky's social constructivism views (Beach 1993: 105). Beach further argues that "learning evolves from social interactions and collaboration..." and "...response is often driven by social need to share those responses with others." Since learning takes place in social context (see also Kaufman 2004), classroom can function as a place for creating literary criticism or 'classroom criticism' (Reyes 2007) so that all members of the community can get involved in literary enjoyment and critical thinking process through social events in the classroom.

Needs analysis in curriculum development is indeed a systematic process. Brown (1995: 36) argues that needs assessment refers to "the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation." Basically, needs analysis is aimed at meeting students' hopes and/or expectations in their learning goals (Crookes 2009, Stern 1983, Richards and Rogers 2001, White 1988). In addition, Brindley (1989) argues that needs analysis is aimed at "trying to identify and take into account a multiplicity of affective and cognitive variables which affect learning, such as learners' attitudes, motivations, awareness, personality, wants, expectations, and learning styles." Catering

students' needs and interests in creating conducive literature classes needs empirical investigation. In this respect, Brown (1995) asserts that needs analysis can help teachers appropriately design the lesson planning. As such, studies on the curriculum development in literature pedagogy needs exploring. Previous studies reveal that needs assessment can give significances to literature curriculum development. For example, We's (2008) study, regarding the materials expected, using young adult literary books can improve students' literacy.

Pedagogically speaking, Goel (2010) suggests that reader-response theory gives significant implications to classroom practices. While the studies of needs analysis for literature instruction in multicultural context are limited, as its nature reflects, the present study gives the accounts. The proposed research question for this study is, "With reference to response-centered curriculum, how do the three English teachers approach their teaching through catering their students' needs to make them expressively enjoy literary works in free ways?"

METHODOLOGY

The present study occupied a qualitative multi-case and -site study (Berg 2007, Bogdan and Biklen 1998, Hood 2009, Renzi 2005, Stake 1994, Yin 1984). Based on the emerging data revealed from process-based inquiry through observations and interviews, the study was intended to portray the curricular dimensions of uniquely patterned classroom practices of three case study high school English teachers from different sites promoting response-based instruction. Differences and uniqueness reflected by each case are illuminated by its diverse context of each high school consistently offering language studies stream (language studies program), and schooling

systems. Moreover, the three subjects also had different academic and professional experiences. Site A, the religious spirit-driven private high school located at the centre of Bandung city was well-managed school with adequate facilities. Its student body indicated diversity in socioeconomic, racial and ethnical, and cultural backgrounds. The English teacher, Salman (pseudonym), graduated from Faculty of Letters (literature) and was concerned with project-based classroom activities (see Posner 1992), emphasizing literary celebrations with higher order tasks. His best classroom practices were much influenced by his past academic experiences when he was at college.

Site B, the state-owned high school located in the southern part, suburban area of southern Bandung regency, was a medium-sized high school with vision-based management. It also had a good academic reputation. Its student body reflected diversity in socio-economical backgrounds. The teacher of site B, Anna (pseudonym), graduated from English education department of Teachers Training College. She was concerned with literature instruction to make students creative in writing literary responses. Her past literacy (reading and writing) experience in her college with her professor who was committed to writing influenced her way of teaching.

Site C, a small-sized state high school, situated in a town in eastern part of West Java (Tasikmalaya), about three-hour ride from Bandung, belonged to medium-sized high school and had good academic reputation. Its student body also indicated diversity in socio-economical and cultural backgrounds. The English teacher, Siti (pseudonym), graduated from English education program from Teachers Training College. Her rich past literacy experience such as reading articles when she was

young, had made her concerned with promoting moral values and building students' good characters.

Voluntary basis was taken into account in choosing case study teachers and focal students as the purposively selected subjects. The inquiry included observation by videotaping the classroom practices, administering grounded questionnaires (Alwasilah 2002), interviewing the subjects, and analyzing documents and artifacts. The expected data were grounded from the emerging phenomena concerning curriculum development for their day-to-day practice of literature classes. The collected data were categorized and analyzed to construct 'the themes' as grounded theories. An analysis of each case preceded its cross-case analysis by which the shared points of the three cases indicated the similarities or 'commonalities' and differences as uniqueness. Both similarities and uniqueness of the cases are then considered as new insights for pedagogical significances for syllabus and curriculum development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As the aim of the present study shows, the discussion of curriculum development grounded from each case suggests that each teacher had their own ways of approaching to literature teaching pedagogy. Different context and its schooling system, and academic and professional experience have shaped their typical and unique entities in their classroom practices. The research findings revealed the subjects' perspectives or "voices" of their curricular stances and preferred day-to-day classroom practices (Applebee 1993, 1997, Applebee et al 2000). The coverage of salient points ranges from defining and choosing materials (literary genres) to assessment strategies.

Analysis of each case will precede cross-case, and pseudonyms will be used to display the findings.

A. Case Study: Salman's orientation, "Literature for enjoyment and freedom"

Salman's conception of literature teaching pedagogy is driven by his redefinition of literary works. He argued that literature refers to artistic works which have artistic values, and cover three literary genres such as poetry, prose, and drama. He was also concerned with another genre, film. He tried to develop the syllabus by referring to BSNP'S (2006) guidelines, though some adjustments and negotiations were made to cater students' needs and interest. Students were once let to browse drama text and film script from internets. He tended to more focus on film and drama than poetry. Poetry class was designed to enable students to enjoy the assigned texts and then recreate their own texts. Drama class made students active in practicing the dialogue many times in front of the class and performed their own script at the multimedia room for their final examination. In addition, students were required to present reviews of film they had enjoyed, *The Dead Poet Society*, through classroom or teacher-led discussions.

To enhance students' knowledge of literature, Salman preferred to implement theory into practice' strategy. Yet, to him, enjoyment should come first. He had such an experience in enjoying literature at his college when his professor tended to play a role as his partner or facilitator. Students deserved freedom and chances to freely express their feelings or thoughts and wants. In his literature class, laughs and repeated practices of pronouncing words and utterances of provided dialogues dominated the classroom dynamics. Such a conducive

atmosphere led to process of shaping a critical community, the so-called 'classroom criticism' (Reyes 2007).

In response-centered literature curriculum the emphasis of learning process is on students' active roles. As the findings of observation revealed, Salman always played as a friend of his students. His students were made to feel close to him as they enthusiastically always asked for his advice, inputs, corrections and opinions. Once, when practicing drama in the classroom, he acted as a film director-like to give instructions to his students to act out the drama well. Other examples of typical students' responses were reviewing film, and creating their own and performing drama. In film review, students presented their critical analysis about the moral values and textual elements of the film, *The Dead Poet Society*. Before performing drama for final examination (final course of study), students in group initiated the topic inspired by local story, legend of *Jaka Tarub*. In creating new model of story, students tried to modify the story with their own context and multimedia. Students' writing and creating the story needed teacher's corrections and refinement to make the story-script sound feasible to perform. Such a dynamic classroom reflected the good model for showing students a professional world, which is beneficial for their futures.

Salman's concern was also subject to the benefits of studying literature for language proficiency improvement (see also Carter and Long 1991). He always willingly helped his students to improve their pronunciation in practicing dialogues and their grammatical mastery when writing responses. He acknowledged that by studying and enjoying literary works students can learn a lot about linguistic aspects of the literary works assigned.

On the basis of students' subjective experience and enjoyment, the teacher was concerned with qualitative assessment. He claimed that there was no correct or right answer in students' responses to literature. Students' courage, joy, and self-confidence were paramount in the instruction process. Students seemed to behave as they were: there had been no burden in their learning process. Yet to assess drama performance, for example, he paid attention to the proper ways of pronouncing and using vocabulary and grammatical points.

B. Case Study: Anna's approach to "Teaching literature with enjoyment and creative thinking"

As Purves et al (1990) suggest, in response-centered literature curriculum the teacher should give students a room for free expressions. Anna was concerned with contemporary literary works covering English poems, drama, and film (for example, *Slumdog Millionaires*) and a narrative, a text-type of genre-based approach. She underscored that the objective of teaching literature was to amuse students as readers and help them to improve the target language. Her way of selecting materials was based on students' needs and level of language mastery. Some English literary works written in simple way were chosen to make readers feel easy to understand.

The designed activities in classroom embraced range of aesthetic responses such as reviewing film by which students expressed their critical comments on the story. Using worksheet or journaling paper, students deserved chances to say what they thought about the good and the bad of the characters, the quality of the story, and other aesthetic aspects of the film. Reading aloud and performing students' own created poems were intended to promote students' self-

confidence and enjoyment. Another example of celebrating event included film making project, which was very challenging to students. Students creatively and collaboratively prepared themselves to create a film script. One student acted as director-like of a film production. and the others played as actors and actresses. All prepared scenes were then videotaped.

To Anna, teaching literature also has to do with a way to increase or grow students' language acquisition, or to make students have good command and competence of both spoken and written English. Considering the lower academic entry behavior of students of Language Studies Stream (compared with Natural Sciences and Social Sciences), Anna was committed to design more challenging literature instruction to improve their English achievement. She acknowledged that there had been a proof showing that most students of the program achieved better scores in final examination. To sum up, teaching literature, for Anna, was aimed at making her students enjoy literary works, promoting students' creativity and critical thinking, and enhancing second language literacy as well.

C. Case Study: Siti's approach to "Teaching literature with moral values enhancement, freedom and enjoyment, and literacy development"

Graduated from the English Education Program of Teachers Training College, Siti was concerned with pedagogical implications of literature instruction to characters building and literacy events. To help grow students' better characters and personalities, she selected literary works that offered good moral values. For example, she chose Freedom Writers, a film about multicultural issues. Selected literary genres included English poems, short stories, drama, song, and

film. She did not introduce novel to the students for the limitation of time and insufficiencies of the books. Her concern of improving students' language literacy improvement (reading and writing) was supported by her past experience of being flooded by varied reading materials and other written sources at home.

In classroom practice, she always helped her students to correctly write critical responses to literary works assigned by using scaffolding strategy, social process thus took place in the framework of Vygotsky's social constructivism (see Kaufman 2004). Corrections were given to improve to improve students' vocabulary, grammatical accounts, and spelling. By reading aloud an English poem, and performing drama in front of the class, as Siti claimed, students could improve their oral/spoken English skill and self-confidence as well.

Giving students chance to write their own drama also led to the process of promoting creativity and freedom. The class was divided into several groups and each was required to write script/dialogue and perform it. After being revised, the text/script was acted out. Acting out with well-prepared stage and costumes, students felt joyful and happy in celebrating their literary responses. Laughs and informal talks dominated the class as if they had got invoked in real and natural communities of society. Acting as caregiver or a guide, Siti sometimes gave directions and advice to students to better act out the drama.

Siti's literature class also promoted multicultural awareness. For example, after writing freedom writers, students were let to make a critical review on it. Evaluative comments, emotional involvements, and other critical responses to the work were appreciated by the teacher. One focal student acknowledged that by watching the film, she could get insights

of how multicultural education played an important role in diverse context at which race discrimination should be avoided. From students' experience of enjoying the film, there was also another indication of multicultural awareness as its determinants showing good cooperation and collaboration among students amidst the diversity of socio-economical and cultural backgrounds.

D. Cross-case analysis

Uniqueness and typical entities of each case's curricular tendencies have been greatly shaped by different sociocultural contexts of each site, the subjects' perspectives and/or voices about reading and enjoying literary works, and teachers' approaches to choosing their teaching pedagogy and conceptualizing learning principles. Within emerging phenomena embedded from the three cases, there have been some shared points of curricular aspects affecting their day-to-day practices as the shaped patterns of classroom cultures and routines. Those similarities have become 'commonalities' embracing certain curricular aspects such as the types of selected literary genres and types, objectives of teaching, classroom dynamics (teacher-student interaction), material development and the use of teaching and learning media, and assessment strategies.

The three cases basically offered students the same points such as freedom, enjoyment, and literacy improvement or language growth. Through project-oriented curricular enhancement (Posner 1995, p.179), driven by their interests and needs, students were elicited to aesthetically get involved in living through the assigned literary works. Students had equal position in the classroom in expressing their voices as their teacher did. There was no discrimination among them. Yet,

there were similar patterns of response events shared by only two cases or others. For example, being influenced by their past academic background, Case B and C tended to emphasize on pedagogy-illuminated literature instruction. To compare with, Case A and B were concerned with long-termed project for final course of study to enhance enjoyment and language or literacy growth, such as creating and performing local story-based drama and making film.

The differences existing among the cases were due to the variety of chosen materials, intensity of classroom dynamics, pedagogical stances and orientation, and foci of the assessment. For example, *The Dead Poet Society*, the film concerning democratic literature teaching pedagogy was chosen by Case Study A. While Case Study B was concerned with a film (*Slumdog Millionaire*) offering social issues, case C chose *Freedom Writers*, the film showing how multicultural awareness is developed at academic context. In classroom practices, Case Study A indicated a very relaxed situation: the classroom was informally arranged. In case study A's classroom situation, teacher-led discussions frequently dominated. To compare with, in Case Study C's classroom, teacher's scaffolding strategy, an effort of giving help and corrections to students' works, was evident. Different ways of assessment were also other indications. While Case Study A, for example, was more concerned with performance-based assessment. Case Study B and C focused more on written and spoken mastery or competencies reflected in their literary responses.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As the evidences suggest, the dynamics of literature classroom practices tended to be influenced by how curricular aspects were developed by the teachers. Curriculum development as negotiated process, has been reflected by teachers' perspectives, the contexts shaping and being shaped by, schooling system, and students' accounts, all of which corresponded to students' needs. Response-based literature curriculum and teaching under the influence of Rosenblatt's Reader-response Theory, can lead to the more democratic class. The present study suggests that each case, to some extent, has implicitly accommodated their students' needs by, for example, offering free choices in material development, qualitatively assessing their performances, freedom for expressing ideas and feelings, and celebrating their responses through varied activities. For further similar studies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, it is suggested to explore how response-based literature pedagogy can be carried out across level of age and education.

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