RE-APPRAISING THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHICAL BASES
FOR TEACHING ENGLISH REFLECTED
IN THE CURRENT CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the philosophical bases of the current curriculum—*School-Based Curriculum*, which is considered as the simplified version of the previous—*Competency Based Curriculum*. The aim of this discussion is primary to re-visit the theories that teacher may have overlooked. It also deals with possible application of the theories in the real teaching and learning of English. Hopefully, this may contribute to the understanding of the current curriculum better.

Keywords: curriculum, communicative competence, systemic functional linguistics, ZPD, literacy education

INTRODUCTION

Most students in my class do not seem to know the philosophical bases for the current English curriculum in Indonesia. Even, they do not know that the goal of the teaching and learning of a language (English) is developing learners' *communicative competence* (Hymes in Celce-Murcia 1995, 2007). Moreover, they may not have read the theories. This is reasonable since in the document of the current *School-Based Curriculum*, there is no mention of the theories. What I can tell them is just to ask them to revisit and restudy the previous curriculum—*2004 Competency-Based Curriculum*. Hopefully, they can read the philosophical bases to understand the theories underlying the teaching and learning of English in the context of this country.

This paper deals with brief discussions of the theories underpinning *2004 English Curriculum* (Pusat Kurikulum, 2004), which, I think, is the complete version of *2006 School-Based Curriculum*. The premises on the curriculum were well-developed, considering them from the point of view of language acquisition theories on how

they examine the nature of *language*, *language learning* and *language learners*. These three basic parameters of *Second Language Acquisition* are the proper tools used for analyzing the presentation of the materials, activities, media and other supporting details of the curriculum.

Historically, in 2004 in Indonesia, the government offered a totally new curriculum (*Competence-Based Curriculum*) that was intended to solve educational problems faced by the country—especially in dealing with the teaching and learning of English within the context of English as a foreign language. Completely different from the preceding ones, this curriculum had a very clear goal to achieve, materials and steps to follow, and well-developed supporting theories that made it ready to implement. All the things in this new curriculum were based on the current trends on the area of second language acquisition. Agustien (2004) states, that there are at least four theoretical foundations for this new development, i.e. Pedagogically motivated model of communicative

competence (Celce-Murcia et.al. 1995); Model of language seen from social semiotic perspective (Halliday, 1985/1994); Socially-Oriented Perspective on learning process(Vygotsky in Agustien, 2004); Language education in literacy education (Kern, 2000).

These four bases underpinning the curriculum make it strong and ready for users to apply it and run their assignments confidently. These foundations blend together to develop the *Competency-Based Curriculum* elemental in coping with the problems faced in developing literacy level in Indonesian context.

Logically, following this trend teachers (and student-teachers) should be familiar with the above considerations since those help teachers prepare and do the teaching and learning of English. Meaning that by comprehending them all, teachers are able to facilitate language learners for achieving of *communicative competence* (Celce-Murcia et.al., 1995) with the application of *language as resource for making meaning* (Halliday, 1985, 1994) and of language *as a tool to facilitate learners to get out from their ZPD* (Vygotsky in Agustien, 2004) by considering the *literacy education* (Kern, 2000). By regarding these four considerations, teachers will hopefully be able to perfectly facilitate the learning of English in Indonesia.

The next important point is how teachers should be able to a *help* for *scaffolding* language learners. It deals with how they present materials, activities/tasks, pictures, and others, to scaffold the learning of English. Also, it deals with how they reflect and apply the theory of language, how they consider the learners, and how they prepare the learning that facilitates the development of communicative competence.

Based on the considerations above, to guide readers in understanding the concepts, I focus the discussion based on the following question:

"How does *current curriculum* assume language learning/acquisition with regards to the nature of *language, language learning* and *learner*?"

DISCUSSION

In this part, I would like to review the theories mentioned above one by one and analyze how these theories are applied in the curriculum. Also, I would add some discussion of the topic in dealing with the application of them in the real teaching and learning process of English. The discussion embraces the four basic premises mentioned above.

Communicative Competence

It is stated in the *2004 English Curriculum* that the ultimate goal of the teaching and learning of a language (English) is to develop the learners' *communicative competence*. Originally, the term *competence* (*linguistic competence*) was firstly introduced by Chomsky (1965) to differentiate it as what people know about language from how people use it (*performance*). However, Celce-Murcia (2007) disagrees with him and states:

> "*Hymes argued that in addition to linguistic competence (the rules for describing sound systems and for combining sounds into morphemes and morphemes into sentences), one also needed notions of sociolinguistic competence (the rules for using language appropriately in context) to account for language acquisition and language use.*"

Since then, the term *communicative competence* has changed into something different but more comprehensible; not only it deals with what people know about language solely, but also how to use the knowledge to communicate appropriately in context.

Referring to the concept, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) propose a model of communicative competence, which offers well-developed and

very explicitly specific details covering what language learners need to accomplish for them to develop the competence. This model suggests that communicative competence basically represents *discourse competence*—the ability to participate in developing discourse (text). Discourse competence can be achieved through the other four supporting competencies including *linguistic* competence, *actional* competence, *socio-cultural* competence, and *strategic* competence. Moreover, they also specify the lists of "micro" competencies for each competency; so that this model in fact helps the users distinguish what they must develop to achieve communicative competence.

The theory of communicative competence covers the *2004 English Curriculum*, by shaping it with well-developed explanations of what the goal is and how to achieve it. With clear and detailed explanation, it is easy for users to interpret the curriculum in their own context. Teachers are well-guided for their teaching and learning in their classes. Ministry of Education officers, from the central office up to the sub-district also know what to do. Moreover, textbook writers have a perfect manual to develop textbooks. Consequently, the facilities for learners to learn English are all there, so that the learning will be successful.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

In Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, *language is a system for making meanings: a semantic system, with other system for encoding the meaning it produces* (Halliday 1994: xvii). Language is a tool, besides others, for construing an experience to be a meaning so that it can be communicated and negotiated among members of a society. Matthiessen (1995: 1) confirms that

"*Language is resource for making and expressing meanings, both what we would think*

as linguistic meanings and higher-level meanings relating to various aspects of the social system (culture)".

This model of language illustrates the realization and exchange of meanings by the interactants involved. Once a person experiences a happening/phenomenon, he has to interpret his experience to be a meaning by using the lexicon and grammar of a language that then are realized through *writing* or *speech system*, so that he is able to communicate the phenomenon to others. In doing so he faces various choices to use. Both the sender and the receiver have to be in one-cultural boundaries, since language cannot be separated from the culture.

Matthiessen (1995: 3) conforms that "*the overall organization of the linguistics resources in an interaction could be interpreted simultaneously according to two symbolic principles, (i) orders of abstraction and (ii) functional diversification*". By orders of abstractions, semantics is realized (expressed, coded, symbolized) by lexicogrammar, and then lexicogrammar is realized by phonology/graphology. In other words, a *communicative intent* of a language user, which is situated by *context of culture* and *of situation*, should be interpreted/realized with certain choices of grammar and lexicon, which then are realized by *phonological* or *graphological representations*. Each stratum deals with functional diversification, meaning that, it involves "(1) *enactment of roles and relations*, (2) *construal of experience*, and (3) *presentation of the meanings created through enactment and construal as information organized into text in context*" (Matthiessen 1995: 3).

This theory of language is the basis for the *text (genre)-based language learning*. This is represented in the design of the syllabus—text-based syllabus. As the bases for designing the

syllabus, Feez and Joyce (1998: 5) summarize the main concepts of the model of language, as the following:

- *language is a resource for making meaning*
- *the resource of language consists of a set of interrelated systems*
- *language users draw on this resource each time they use language*
- *language users create texts to make meaning*
- *texts are shaped by the social context in which they are used*
- *the social context is shaped by people using the language*

These all considerations are used in the development of the 2004 English Syllabus/Curriculum in Indonesia that, *consequently*, the users of it have to follow them all. Especially for teachers, they have to use them as their guidance in developing materials of the teaching and learning of language.

Socio-Oriented Perspectives on the Learning Process

Learning happens in the zone between the level of *independent performance* and the level of *potential performance* (Freez and Joyce, 1998: 26) -- *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). It deals with approaching *self-regulation* from *object regulation* by *other regulation* or the mediation of more capable other. According to Vygotsky (in Hammond and Gibbons in Hammond, 2001) "*ZPD… is the distance between the actual development level (of the learner) 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.*" This mediation is the *scaffolding* (Bruner in Freez and Joyce. 1998). In sum, the process of learning requires the society that influences

the process. This society can mean the whole societal members or just the more capable other.

Feez and Joyce (1998) also indicate that "*Approaching language learning from the perspective of texts requires an accompanying methodology which can enable the students the knowledge and skills to deal with spoken and written texts in social contexts*" (1998: 24). Both argue that "*the most effective methodology for implementing a text-based syllabus is the genre approach.*" This approach is developed based on three assumptions about language learning. In their words the assumption are that:

(1) learning language is a social activity
Language learning is a social activity and is the outcome of collaboration between the teacher and the student and between the student and the other students in the group. Halliday (1992:19) describes language learning as "learning how to mean and to expand one's meaning potential".

(2) learning occurs more effectively if teachers are explicit about what is expected of students
…. Many educators are proposing more principled approaches to teaching and learning based on a "visible pedagogy" (Bernstein 1990:73) which clearly identifies what is to be learned and what is to be assessed. The role of the teacher in these more explicit approaches is to use methodologies which collaborate with the student in the learning process….. The genre approach is concerned with providing students with explicit knowledge about language. It values teacher-learner interaction as well as interaction between students.

(3) the process of learning is a series of scaffolded development developmental steps which address different aspects of language.

The methodology applied within the genre approach is based on the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1934/1978) and the American educational psychologist Bruner (1986). Vygotsky proposed that … each learner has two levels of development: a level of independent performance and a 'level of potential performance' which is made possible through social interaction and joint construction with 'more capable other'. The gap between these two levels Vygotsky called "the zone of proximal development" (Feeze and Joyce, 1998: 25-26).

It is clear that, to achieve independent performance of learners, scaffolding is needed either from teachers, other learners, or other sources of learning including a textbook. Vygotsky (in Feez and Joyce, 1998) suggests that the presence of more capable others in a child's learning environments enables a child to be involved in cultural events at social level that eventually develop the child's individual cultural identity. Moreover, Vygotsky then provide us with a model of learning "*which emphasizes the role of talk and places social discourse at the centre*" (Corden, 2000).

Consequently, after the learners' potential development is acknowledged, this potential can only develop to its maximum capacity when the learners undergo learning processes involving more knowledgeable others that scaffold them by creating social interaction, negotiation, and shared learning. In classroom context, Corden (2000) suggests that "*classroom learning can best be seen as an interaction between teacher's meanings and those of the pupils, so what they take away is partly shared and partly unique to each of them*". Teacher should organize the classroom activities very carefully in order to provide learners with learning experiences that

trigger their development as an individual and social being.

Putting theory into practices, teachers should be aware the three underlying assumptions regarding what language learning is and how learning languages can best take place in the learning cycles and stages recommended by the 2004 English curriculum in which joint construction and scaffolding talk play important roles. They should consider the importance of *teachers' talk* in helping learners achieve their potential performance. Teachers should provide themselves and others for scaffolding language learning.

Literacy Education
Dealing with literacy means to train people to be completely literate not only with writing symbols but also with social and cultural norms the modern society produce and apply. Freebody and Luke (in Hammond et.al. 1992) argue that an adequate description of the minimal elements involved in being literate must include: (1) *Learning to be a text user* meaning that learners should learn to use the text. They have to learn how to put themselves in the society where the text is used by participating in the social activities which the text plays a central role; (2) *Being a text analyst.* In this part, it deals with how to train learners to realize that a text is developed by a writer or writers that compose the text in a certain context for a certain purpose by applying choice of lexicon and grammar suitable with the context. Thus, learners should be wise and critical in using the treating of the text and be able to read between the line of the message brought by the text to reveal the ideological value.

So being literate in this sense requires being able to use and treat the text appropriately, and being able to analyze the text critically. Consequently, learners should appreciate the

text and adopt or adapt it suitably with their context. They need to be able to analyze all components in the text that may be brought along in the text to get a closer understanding about the text.

Putting this in the context of this discussion, in carrying out activities at the two cycles and all stages, teachers need to use various teaching techniques to make the teaching and learning activities meaningful to the learners to develop their literacy level. Teachers do not need to stick on a certain technique(s), but the techniques have to be relevant to this approach used. The most important thing to remember in preparing their lessons is that every activity they design has to be aimed at providing learning experiences to use language and, thus, to achieve communicative competence.

According to *New London Group* (Kern, 2000: 16-17), there are seven literacy principles that can be used by in planning language classes—'that literacy involve *interpretation, collaboration, convention, cultural knowledge, problem solving, reflection and self reflection,* and *language use*.
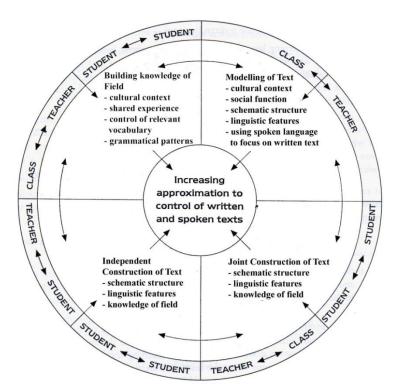
Interpretation means that both interactants (writers and readers) interpret each other, which starts by writers' interpretation of the world and then readers interpret this interpretation. *Collaboration* implies that in understanding text both sides have to collaborate to get to the point

of agreement about meaning. *Convention* indicates that the text they communicate is situated by certain context (convention) known to both sides. *Cultural knowledge* suggests that reading and writing function in certain cultural context that each proposes certain expectations known by the society. *Problem solving* points out that performing reading and/or writing involve the actions of solving problem in dealing with the texts. *Reflection and self-reflection* show that both readers and writers assume language and its relation to the world and to themselves. And the last one, *language use* concerns about the role of literacy for being not only about language but also language use.

Kern then suggests that "*These principles, although they are framed in terms of reading and writing, are not unique to literacy, but can be applied broadly to human communication in general*" (2000:17). The implication is that when teachers plan an activity, they need to keep in mind that the activity needs to engage learners in activities that involve as many of these principles as possible. It is done to improve learners' literacy level.

Teaching-Learning Cycle

In implementing the curriculum, it is recommended to apply a model of the teaching-learning cycle (Hammond et al. 1992: 17) that offers two cycles and four stages as in the following diagram.

STUDENT — **STUDENT** — **STUDENT** — **CLASS** — **TEACHER** — **TEACHER** — **CLASS** — **STUDENT**

Building knowledge of Field
- cultural context
- shared experience
- control of relevant vocabulary
- grammatical patterns

Modelling of Text
- cultural context
- social function
- schematic structure
- linguistic features
- using spoken language to focus on written text

Increasing approximation to control of written and spoken texts

Independent Construction of Text
- schematic structure
- linguistic features
- knowledge of field

Joint Construction of Text
- schematic structure
- linguistic features
- knowledge of field

TEACHER — **STUDENT** — **STUDENT** — **STUDENT** — **CLASS** — **TEACHER** — **STUDENT**

The basic consideration of this model is that before we ask students to speak, we have to train them to do so by giving some models (listening). It happens also for written language—before we ask them to write, we have to train them and have them read the model texts. In doing both language types, teachers need to go around the cycle twice: first spoken and then written. For the first cycle, they start *Building Knowledge of the Field* (BKOF) where teachers and students build cultural context, share experiences, discuss vocabulary, grammatical patterns and so on, of the text-type and the topic under discussion.

The next step is Modeling of Text (MOT). Here teachers give students model texts (listening) of short functional texts, conversations, and monologues situated by the social purpose of the text. Here students and teachers and students and students interact to listen and respond to various texts with similar communicative purposes.

The third step is Joint Construction of Text (JCT) in which it is the students turn to actively develop spoken texts with their peers and with the help from the teachers. Still the texts have to be in the same topic as in the previous steps, consisting short functional texts, conversations, and monologues. They have to demonstrate their ability and confidence to speak.

The last stage in the first cycle is Independent Construction of Text (ICT) which is similar to the third stage. Students have to develop their text independently that is they are asked to speak spontaneously or to carry out monologues

Having finished with the first cycle, students then start to study the written cycle with similar stages. It is aimed at developing the ability to use written language for communicating ideas in the same text and the same topic as in the previous cycle. Both teachers and students go through all the four stages in which the discussion is now dealing with written texts. Thus, for BKOF it is important to stress the differences between this

kind of text and the spoken one. In MOT, students learn to read the model texts. For JCOT and ICOT, they develop spoken version of the texts.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

Assuming that the concepts, especially the first concept of *Communicative Competence*, above are comprehensive, following Celce-Murcia (2007) there are five principles teachers should consider in implementing them into the teaching and learning of language. They are:

The Importance of Culture

The Importance of Discourse and Context

The Need to Balance Language as System and Language as Formula

The Need to Focus on Dynamic Aspects of Interaction

The Need to Focus on Strategies From Time to Time

Teachers have to focus of the discussion on how they have to be able to develop learners' *communicative competence* in dealing with exchanging meaning through genres/texts. Texts should be considered as vehicles to reach the goal of language learning by considering the principles above.

I do believe that the second consideration, *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, is the right grammar to deal with the business. It is considered as the precise linguistics for the curriculum as it offers a wide discussion for *making and expressing meanings* (Mathiessen, 1995). As a consequence, teachers should color the linguistic discussion in their teaching by referring to the theory. They have to use them as their guidance in developing materials of the teaching and learning of language.

The third theory deals with psychological consideration. Teachers should play role as more capable other (MCO) for making language learners reach the potential performance. Teachers should be aware of the three underlying assumptions regarding what language learning is and how learning languages can best take place in the learning cycles and stages recommended by the 2004 English curriculum in which joint construction and scaffolding talk play important roles.

The first consideration in putting *literacy education principles* is that teachers should *at least* be able to make language learners as *text users* and *text analysts*. The teaching and learning process should make students familiar with using and analyzing genres. In so doing, they should engage students with the processes of developing and analyzing texts.

CONCLUSION

As a summary, putting the theories underlying the current curriculum into practice, teachers should be able to facilitate language learners for achieving of *communicative competence* (Celce-Murcia et.al., 1995) within the context of *language as resource for making meaning* (Halliday, 1985, 1994) and of language as a tool to facilitate learners to get out from their ZPD (Vygotsky) by considering the *literacy education* (Kern, 2000). By regarding these four considerations, teachers will hopefully be able to perfectly facilitate the learning of English in Indonesia. Consequently, teachers or student-teachers should be familiar with all the above considerations for the success of their teaching and learning processes.

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