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Conference Paper

Building Cultural Awareness and Critical Thinking Skills through Project-Based Task: A Workshop for Indonesian Context

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Abstract

Facing the Third Millennium, any countries should prepare young generation with cultural awareness and critical thinking skills so as to survive in the global era. According to Scriven and Paul (2001), critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Whereas, cultural awareness refers to the foundation of communication involving the ability of standing back from ourselves and getting aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions (Cunningham, 2013). These two conceptual insights can be appropriately practiced by pedagogically and professionally competent teachers through the language classroom activities, one of which is 'project-based task' which requires learners to think critically to complete cultural-based tasks, and at the same time appreciate the cultural norms. Therefore, the **workshop** is intended to equip participants with the practical knowledge and skills of building cultural awareness and critical thinking skills through the project-based task.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness, Critical Thinking Skills, Project-Based Task

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1. Rationale

To anticipate challenges of the third millenium, Indonesian human resources require to become individuals who have competitive advantages in the globalized world. One of the efforts of producing such generation is through education with teachers and their credentials. Through the modification of the recent curriculum the Indonesian government has done its best to prepare students of all levels of education to be prospective citizens being ready for the global competition especially taking active participation in the Community of Asian Economy being effective since December 2015. In other words, the Ministry of Education and Culture has launched a modified curriculum called "Curriculum 2013" which are characterized by among others the following attributes: (1) implementing inquiry-based learning in which students are required to explore rather than to be spoon fed by teachers; (2) promoting student active learning in which students are reinforced to be more active in learning employing the critical thinking

skills through collecting data from vast learning sources, analyzing, making inferences, and finally communicating the result of analysis, or probably creating something after having acquired particular competences; (3) being competent in making use of learning community to learn (collaborative as well as cooperative learning); (4) cultivating strong character in appreciating both own and other culture; (5) learning does not only happen in class but also outside; (6) employing task-based learning in which students are more involved in doing tasks (Kurikulum 2013).

To realize these all, the government is mandatory to prepare pedagogically and professionally competent teachers to implement the concept of the recent curriculum. Such teachers are badly needed to facilitate students in accomplishing the final goal of education. As a previous study conducted by [9] in a CLIL-based context, it was evident that pedagogically most of the teachers lack the competence in classroom management, and the knowledge of specific terms of the subjects. Whereas, professionally most of the teachers find diffulties in translating the framework into materials, and finding suitable teaching method and media.

Therefore, the present workshop is conducted as an attempt to contribute to the provision of English teachers in Indonesia with pedagogical skills particularly in applying student active learning involving cultural awareness and high order thinking skills, essential skills inevitably required in the global competition in Millenium 21.

2. Critical Thinking Skills

According to [10], critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Critical thinking, in fact, has interwoven modes of thinking: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking. In [1], on the other hand, classifies the dimensions of knowledge which are part of cognitive processes into four: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive being reflected in the low order thinking skills (remembering, understading and applying) and the high order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating and creating).

A previous study conducted by [7] verified that explicit instruction and practice adopting critical thinking strategies in the high school classroom can improve student academic performance leading to the development of skills indispensable to compete economically in a global environment. It was evident that students who experienced instruction in a critical thinking strategy were better able to demonstrate critical thinking in a post-strategy instruction assessment than those who had received no strategy instruction. Hence, the requirements of promoting critical thinking skills

should be enforced by examining such structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning as purpose, problem, or question-at-issue, assumptions, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions, implications and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints, and frame of reference. In fact, in classroom practice the enhancement of the skills of critical thinking will be more beneficial if the students are getting aware of cultural diversity as part of character building. Therefore, it is recommended for teachers to intertwine the competence of critical thinking with cultural awareness.

3. Cultural Awareness

According to [2] cultural awareness refers to the foundation of communication involving the ability of standing back from ourselves and getting aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Developing *cultural awareness* is of great importance in international communication, particularly for any countries developing partnership in global interaction. Commonly speaking, there are **two guiding principles** that must be kept in mind in the process of enhancing cultural competency awareness, knowledge, and skills: (1) **cultural identity is composed of a myriad of aspects**, and (2) eventhough we can learn much from generalizations about cultures, there should be things to be considered **to avoid applying stereotypes or over-simplification** of these ideas. There should be prominent care to be taken on any discussion of diversity issues with strong declarations that all people have cultural identity and that all forms of diversity are valued, whether they be majority or minority.

In relation to this, there has been a study conducted by [6] for the Taiwan pre-service teachers joining a Pasport Program. Dealing with cultural awareness, it was inferred that (1) educators should help all students learn how to function within society without taking them away from their own cultural beliefs and values; and (2) they should realize that students learn in different ways and how they learn relies much on their cultural backgrounds. The teacher must take these various learning styles into account. A teacher who can achieve both of these tasks is one that would qualify as being culturally aware.

4. Project-Based Task

Task-based learning caters to English language learners for using the target language meaningfully in the sense that they communicate naturally to complete a predetermined task. Interaction occurs between a teacher and learners or among learners resulting in authentic and meaningful communication. According to [8] task-based learning is characterized by (1) the employment of the target language (in this case

English) in handling a task; (2) the interrelation of classroom practice and real life experiences which make it more meaningful; (3) the idea of product-oriented; and (4) the involvement of input, process, and output. Input here refers to systematic planning including the selection of who will be involved in completing a task (commonly in pair work or group work), facilities needed, and time limit to do the task. Process means procedural steps to accomplish predetermined leaning goal(s), and output is the final product in the forms of performance, demonstration, recordings, art works, and the like. One sample model of task-based learning is the implementation of project-based learning.

In Curriculum 2013 project-based learning model is supposed to be implemented based on the following steps. Firstly, students working in groups and teacher discuss what theme or topic is to be determined for the project-based task. Then, the teacher caters for the opportunity for the students to plan and manage the procedures how to accomplish the project. Afterwards, they, with the teacher as mentor, discuss the timeline of the planned project. If the project schedule is confirmed, they commence to carry out the task given. Whenever they have been through with the project-based task, it is time for each group to present and publish what they have done. At the end, as feedback for betterment for future project, there must be reflection.

Examining the activities inherent in the model, I can assume that the project-based learning model contributes some beneficial points: (1) each individual student in the project has its own accountability to reach the shared group goal as each is assigned to do part of the project; (2) group members learn to be creative (the involvement of critical thinking skills) to produce a product or an activity; (3) group members are inherently attached since they have to finish a project on given time allocation; (4) if cultural items are inclusive in the project, the members are trained to be aware of cultural norms; (5) they are trained to be a solid team to accomplish the project; and (6) they experience an authentic meaningful task which is fruitful for their future life.

5. A Sample of Project-Based Learning Model

Underneath is a sample of project-based task which requires students/participants involved in the accomplishment of the project to empower their skills of critical thinking and raise their cultural awareness.

First of all, before conducting the project, a teacher/facilitator should prepare what we call 'the project-based task kit' containing of a piece of 80cm-by-60cm plain or colourful poster paper, scissors, glue, colour pencils/crayon, a ruler, artificial mini accessories like plants, animals, balloons, grass, origami paper, beads of various colors

and size. After that group the students/participants and distribute the individual group's the project-based task kit.

Instructions

1. Work in a group of five students/participants;

2. Have a leader in the group to later distribute a task card to each individual student/participant;

3. Prior to carrying out the project, the leader has to check the number of individual task cards in an envelope to make sure that the cards are sufficient for individual members. There are one group task card and five task cards in the envelope for each group;

4. All group members need to examine the project-based task kit prepeared before doing the task;

5. Now, open the envelope. First, read the group task card, and then follow the instructions in each individual task card. Manage the time limit. **GOOD LUCK**.

Group Task Card

> Your task is to draw an outline of a topography of an imaginative island with geographical features like rivers, forests, mountains, inhabitants etc. Please make use of the poster paper provided and name the island you all make up.

Individual Task Card 1

> Create the fauna and flora of the island (Language focus is on animals, plants, and their habitats)

Individual Task Card 2

> Create the handcrafts and popular food of the island (Language focus is on the description of the handcrafts and popular food)

Individual Task Card 3

> Create history and legends of the island (Language focus is the use of past tenses)

Individual Task Card 4

> Create a travel itinerary for prospective visitors (Language focus is procedural text)

Individual Task Card 5

> Create the local language and dance of the island (Language focus is linguistic system of the island)

The following is the sample of make-up island as the final product of the group project. Using the make up island, each group member has to communicate her/his own task, for instance, describing the traditional house the so-called 'Sade' or making an itinerary for a tourist to visit some echanting tourism spots in the island.

6. The Make up Island

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Having conducted such a project-based task, the students/participants do not only promote their skills of critical thinking reflected in the creation of the island and its properties, but also the sense of appreciating cultural diversity as well as strengthening teamwork. This kind of task is also recommended for students of any ages.
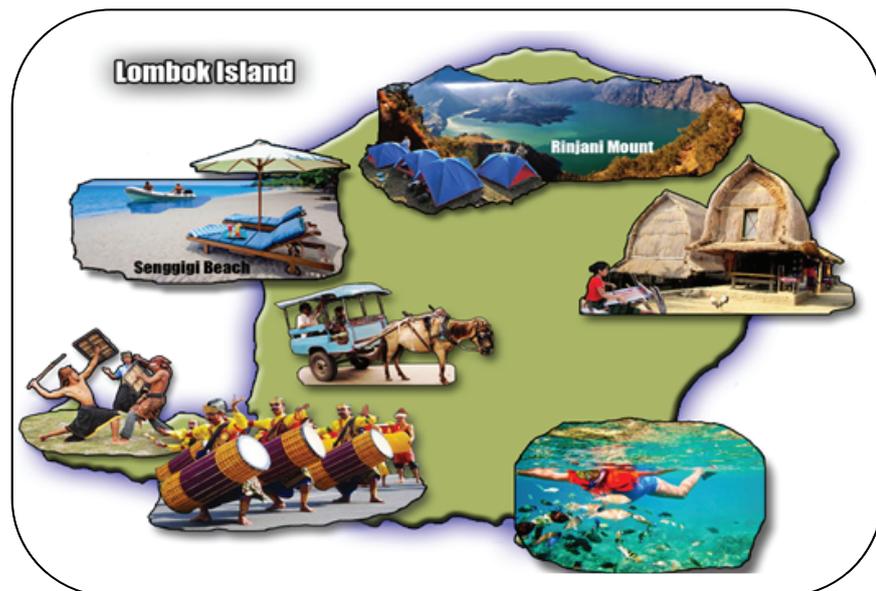
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