TEACHING ENGLISH FOR STUDENT FLOURISHING

Sugiono
Universitas Nurul Jadid
ss.sugiono@gmail.com

Abstract
Teaching for student flourishing is part of social justice education, which highlights positive changes in society through education. It opens a space for teachers, English language teachers in particular, to accommodate different backgrounds and characteristics of students, from which it gives them opportunities to flourish. However, teaching within this perspective is not that easy. The English teachers face a number of problematic challenges during the teaching learning activities. They need to find the ways to overcome these challenges. This paper aims to determine the challenges faced by the English teachers and gives some insights on how to surmount the problems. It employs a qualitative study, and argues that the English teachers have some challenges in teaching English for a flourishing life of students. They need to concern identifying the challenges and figure out the ways to solve it.

Keywords: *social justice education, flourishing life, challenges, teaching English*

INTRODUCTION

The study has investigated how rural English teachers in Indonesia's Probolinggo regency engage in teaching for human flourishing, which is part of social justice education. In Indonesia, The *Pancasila* policy – the five principles on national life – encourages social justice within education and schooling. The aim of this policy is to maintain inclusivity in schools and to advocate a flourishing life on the basis of the state slogan *unity in diversity*. It is acknowledged in Indonesia's curriculum that school teachers need to offer learning experiences that enable students to achieve their potential, and that prepare them to become agents of social change in society. Nonetheless, the notion of social justice in Indonesia is largely superficial and not theorized. This study supports the major thrust of the policy in that, if adequately adopted, *Pancasila* allows for students' life to flourish. It represents a small contribution towards a broader understanding of how the flourishing-life teaching contribute to positive changes in society.

The study is informed by the capabilities approach. The capabilities approach accommodates the rich diversity of people and is helpful to establish a particular notion of life flourishing in relation to education and schooling (Robeyns 2003a; Walker & Unterhalter 2007). Compared to other approaches that are also associated with notions of human

flourishing and development, Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argue that the capabilities approach has offered a newer perspective of teaching. The capabilities approach can link a normative idea of justice with practice both in education and in a wide range of political, economic and socio-cultural fields that bear on education (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). Viewed in this way, the capabilities approach can then provide convincing responses to questions of justice and the distribution of schooling and connections between classrooms (schools) and student homes, communities and national education policy making. Walker (2006b, p. 62) adds that with its major focus on capability in and through education, the capabilities approach is suggestive of practice that is merged with the three key aspects of social justice, namely 'redistribution, recognition of diversity and identities, and participation' (see also Gale & Molla 2014).

Teacher Capabilities and Student Flourishing

The capabilities approach has been developed by Sen and Nussbaum in different areas of study; Sen in economics and Nussbaum in political philosophy. It began in 1979, when Sen gave a lecture at Stanford University, known as the Tanner Lecture on Human Values. The lecture title was in the form of a question: Equality of what? (Sen 1980). This question was a key foundation for Sen to deliver the best evaluative measures of justice and equality: human capabilities. Sen (1993, p. 30) defines capabilities as 'a person's potential ability to do valuable things or reach valuable states of being, and it represents a thing a person is able to do or to be'. The capabilities approach does not focus solely on the resources or primary goods that a person holds.

Capability is also linked with substantive freedom or actual opportunities that a person has, which encourages a person to do things that he or she values doing or 'achieves what an individual reflectively considers valuable' (Walker & Unterhalter 2007, p. 2). Central to the capabilities approach is the view that justice ought to be determined by people's capabilities to freely 'decide to live as we would like and to promote the ends that we may want to advance' (Sen 2009, p. 228). People's wellbeing, justice and fairness in the distribution of resources are evaluated from people's freedoms to be able to make valuable decisions and their efforts to overcome obstacles to their freedoms through expansion of their capabilities and increased real opportunities. Ignoring the capabilities and provision of actual

opportunities or freedoms, as Sen and Nussbaum indicate, means disrespect for people's human dignity.

The capabilities approach underlines the enhancement of human development that goes beyond such detached objects as material resources, incomes or commodities, whereas in welfare economics these are the major indicators of people's wellbeing and human flourishing of life. From the perspective of the capabilities approach, what should be taken into account is not only the basic primary goods and material resources the persons respectively hold and possess, but also the relevant personal accounts that govern the conversion of the goods and resources into a persons' potential ability to achieve flourishing ends. What matters to people is that they are able to achieve actual valuable functionings, that is the actual valuable living that people manage to achieve (Sen 1999).

The focus on capabilities in teaching and learning refers not only to processes of learning, but also to the kind of valued lives that individuals want to lead and how diverse socio-cultural and economic dimensions develop or limit capabilities. As Walker and Unterhalter (2007) indicate, central to teaching in the capabilities approach is 'equal valuing of diversity along the intersecting axes of gender, social class, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and so on' (p. 251). Teaching in the capabilities approach suggests that each and every person has the freedom and rights to choose a good life that they have reason to value. Walker and Unterhalter (2007) acknowledge that following the notion of reason to value in teaching can encourage students to value whatever styles of life they choose.

From this perspective, school teachers need to provide opportunities for individual students to bring their funds of knowledge into the curriculum, as well as reflect on social and cultural issues potentially affecting their lives. They also need to enable students to make choices that matter to lead a flourishing life. Teachers need to prepare students to have a sense of diversity within a democratic lifestyle, and show their compassion to others different from them (Walker 2009). As Degeng (1999) indicates, the effect of teaching practice merely highlighting uniformity rather than diversity potentially generates individuals or members of society that ignore difference.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to research. It focused on the teaching of English

designed to describe the teachers' engagement in teaching for student flourishing. Inferring from Creswell (2003), people have different perspectives of perceiving the world, and hence it was essential to find different views from the teachers regarding challenges and problems they found in their teaching and how they solve them.

The data were generated from an observation, interview, and documentation. Creswell (2003) suggests that one of the limitations of observation is that participants might act differently knowing that they are being observed, thus this could lead to a lack of important information needed as informants act differently with the observer around. Therefore, the data were also gathered from interviewing teacher participants and analyzing their curricular documents. Five English teachers were observed and interviewed. They were from various primary schools in rural areas in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data generated by this study, there is still more work that rural primary school English teachers in Indonesia's Probolinggo regency need to do to advance the use of the capabilities approach in their teaching, particularly if they seek to teach for student flourishing. Results of the interviews have indicated the teachers' efforts to be culturally responsive to their students. Similarly, analyses of the curricular documents reveal opportunities to do so. However, some lesson plans and teacher comments overplay basic academic skills and competencies, potentially constraining capability expansion. The data from classroom observations suggest that teaching and learning within a capability perspective is given less emphasis. In choosing and directing students, teachers were too dominant, rendering students relatively passive and less critically engaged in learning.

Most indications from this research were that learning for students focused on recalling content knowledge rather than debate, interactive dialogue, inquiry on students' life experiences and critical reflection on certain social and cultural life issues. Drawing on Couldry (2010), focusing on recalling content knowledge ignores individuals' capacity of voice and, more broadly, their social environments. Voice is an expression of agency, and this allows for students to actively participate and share socio-cultural experiences with their peers (see Couldry 2010; Walker 2007). Walker (2007) acknowledges that the capability of voice and aspiration has the potential to enrich curriculum topics as well as enable the development

of other capabilities. In other words, the capability of voice and aspiration can remove students' silence and passivity, and thus assist in developing their autonomy, independence, self-confidence and engagement in learning.

This study also suggests that teaching for student flourishing should not only be approachable, but also capable of being inclusive of all students, capable of bridging homes (society) with classrooms (social institutions) and capable of creating spaces for students to practice their reasoning abilities. In this regard, processes of learning need to encourage discussions on social and cultural issues and the development of students' higher order thinking and deep understanding of knowledge (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). This could lead to students' critical engagement in learning. It is the contention of this research that students' voices and diverse cultural backgrounds can be 'conditions of …confidence in learning, of provocation of thinking, of independence in thinking, and of respect and recognition of differences in perspectives and identities' (Walker 2006b p. 87; see also Couldry 2010). Hence, local English teachers need to develop cultural literacy on the basis of students' life experiences in homes and communities. This is to enable explorations of students' understanding of their own culture and others in their classrooms and communities, by which the interrelationships between homes, classrooms and communities could be maintained.

Unterhalter (2003) indicates that capability in and through education is less centered on what teachers teach and what students learn, but rather, deals with how practices of teaching and learning contribute to human flourishing. The conception of flourishing within this perspective is not mainly associated with academic performance, skills, competencies, contribution to economic growth and/or teachers' expectations that schooling can help students get good employment and high income. As Flores-Crespo (2007) notes, being academically competent or relatively well-paid is not necessarily a guarantee of a thriving life in that individuals may still experience certain inequalities and discrimination in their workplaces or during processes of selection, in employment for example.

In addition, English language learning contexts need to enable educational opportunity (freedom) for students to develop their reasoning and rationality for both present and future choices. On this point Walker (2006a) suggests that student identity relates to the extent to which the topics students have learnt in schools are valuable, 'not only for their present lives in schools, but also their futures beyond as lawyers, teachers, researchers, managers, town

planners, and so forth' (p. 87). In other words, the key aspect of teaching for human flourishing within a capability perspective is to question what human beings need to lead a human life that they value and how education and schooling promote rather than impede their flourishing (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). Thus, to advance the use of the capabilities approach in teaching and learning, rural English teachers in Indonesia's Probolinggo regency need to look at pedagogical aspects in terms of how knowledge is to be delivered to students. In this respect, their instruction, curricular content and written or visual teaching materials should reflect what Flores-Crespo (2007) categorizes 'a comprehensive idea for a pedagogy of inclusion' (p.57).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of English teaching for human flourishing in rural schools in Indonesia's Probolinggo regency is still problematic. In articulating this finding, what local English teachers do in the classroom was juxtaposed with their claims in the interviews and with the learning objectives of the official national school curriculum. This finding has implications for education policy and for teacher education, which should prepare teachers to face any challenges and negotiate the complex world of teaching and learning.

In response to the problematic issues of English language teaching for student flourishing in rural schools in Indonesia's Probolinggo regency, this research has established a list of capabilities, which represents a contribution to the field in terms of enabling capability development of students. Hence, rural English teachers in the regency could professionally learn to improve their classroom teaching performance. The suggested list of capabilities may not cover all aspects of the relevant capabilities, yet they are indicative of what local teachers require to advance their teaching, so that students can lead a flourishing life. These are: pedagogic integrity, connectedness, access and technology, and social networking, shown by the table below.

Table 1. Pedagogic integrity, connectedness, access and technology, and social networking

No	Capabilities	Aspects of Development
1.	Pedagogic Integrity	▪ Being socially inclusive of all students ▪ Creating a democratic learning environment ▪ Conducting an educative process of learning, minus harassment and/or domination
2.	Connectedness	▪ Relating curricular topics to students' socio-cultural backgrounds and real life worlds ▪ Creating a *connected* classroom to enhance students' engagement in

		learning
3.	Access and Technology	▪ Converting available resources into valuable functionings ▪ Applying technological tools to improve student learning
4.	Social Networking	▪ Utilising the local teacher network association to improve the quality of teaching ▪ Evaluating the outputs of education

The list of capabilities established from this study are relevant to Indonesia's most recent curriculum, the Kurikulum Merdeka. It is stated in the curriculum that all teachers should accommodate student diversity and highlight the importance of higher-order thinking. Hence, provisions of support for the advancement of English teacher capabilities need to be a major consideration not only at the introduction but also during the implementation and evaluation process. Drawing on Darling-Hammond (2010), an important aspect in need of change in curricular and teaching practices should be centered on the teachers themselves. The findings of this study supports an approach to professional teacher development in Indonesia that encourages English teachers' engagement with student flourishing issues in education and schooling and promotes their deep understanding of the complexities of classrooms. The government needs to provide in-service training for English teachers in particular that is specifically focused not only on curricular content and methods of delivery, but also on strategies for teaching for human flourishing.

REFERENCES

Couldry, N 2010, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism,* Sage, Los Angeles.

Creswell, JW 2007, Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches, CA: Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Darling-Hammond, L 2010, Teacher education and the American future, Journal of Teacher Education, vol. 61, no. 1-2, pp. 35-47.

Dreze, J & Sen, A 2002, India: development and participation, Oxford University Press, New York.

Flores-Crespo, P 2007, 'Situating Education in the Human Capabilities Approach', in M Walker & E Unterhalter (eds), Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education, Palgrave MacMillian, Basingstoke, pp. 45-66.

Gale, T 2010, 'Rethinking social justice in schools: how will we recognize it when we see it?', International Journal of Inclusive Education, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 253-269.

Gale, T & Densmore, K 2000, Just Schooling: explorations in the cultural politics of teaching, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Gale, T & Molla, T 2014, 'Social justice intents in policy: an analysis of capability for education and capability through education', Journal of Education Policy, doi: 10.1080/02680939.2014.987828.

Gonzalez, N 2005, 'Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge', in N Gonzalez, LC Moll & C Amanti (eds), Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey, pp. 29-46.

Gonzalez, N, Andrade, R, Civil, M & Moll, L 2005, 'Funds of Distributed Knowledge', in N Gonzalez, LC Moll & C Amanti (eds), Funds of Knowledge: Theorising Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey, pp. 257-271.

Lozano, JF, Boni, A, Peris, J & Hueso, A 2012, 'Competencies in Higher Education: A Critical Analysis from the Capabilities Approach', Journal of Philosophy of Education, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 132-147.

Moll, LC, Amanti, C, Neff, D & Gonzalez, N1992, 'Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: using a qualitative approach to connect homes to classrooms', Theory into Practice, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 132-141.

Nussbaum, MC 2006, Frontiers of Justice, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

Nussbaum, MC 2011, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Robeyns, I 2003a, 'The Capability Approach: An Interdisciplinary Introduction', A paper written for the Training Course preceding the 3rd International Conference on the Capability Approach, Pavia, Italy, 6 September 2003.

Sen, A 1980, 'Equality of What?', in SM McMurrin (eds), Tanner Lectures on Human Values, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, vol. 1, no. 6, pp. 195-220.

Sen, A 1999, Development as Freedom, New York Times Co., New York.

Unterhalter, E 2012, 'Inequality, capabilities and poverty in four African countries: girls' voice, schooling, and strategies for institutional change', Cambridge Journal of Education, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 307-325.

Walker, M 2006a, Higher Education Pedagogies: A capabilities approach, Open University Press, England.