THE USE OF MODERN DRAMA ON THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXT

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Abstract: modern drama scripts are valuable authentic materials in EFL curriculum framework. Commonly, the use of drama script in EFL context is either limited to adapting an extract as a resource of classroom discussion or using the full version of the script to perform drama on stage. This essay presents an innovation in using modern drama in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) context by providing five components in the learning process: knowledge on literary competence, close reading by doing role play, content group discussion, aesthetic/efferent response, and using movie. This essay also elaborates the literature-based unit of work and the design of assessment tasks. The course design refers to social-constructionist theory (Vygotsky), three approaches of literary teaching (Lazar, 1993), process-based teaching (Carter and McRae, 1994), and balancing between aesthetic and efferent response (Tutas as cited in Paran, 2006). This course design offers a comprehensive literature learning that can be implemented in any EFL learning programs.

Keywords: Modern Drama, Curriculum Framework, TEFL

The literature teaching in language classrooms began to revive thirty years ago. A genre in literature, drama has some advantages such as providing meaningful context, exposing students to language use in a conversation, practicing oral skill, and promoting personal involvement (Lazar, 2010). Dialogues in a drama script are essential resource of authentic material for language use in context in teaching English as a foreign language context /TEFL (Hapsari, 2012). Western drama varies from classical Greek and Roman drama to modern/postmodern drama. In TEFL context, modern drama gives more favor to students because the language and cultural context are easier than those of Elizabethan or classical drama. This paper aims to discuss an educational modern drama program in EFL context with its assessment tasks in the curriculum framework.

The Overview of EFL Educational Program

The course design intended to be the revision of the previous design of “Introduction to English Drama” taught in STBA Prayoga, Padang, West Sumatera for fifth semester students in English Literature. Scaffolding techniques are needed because the students vary in language competence and cultural background. Scaffolding techniques are based on Vygotsky’s social constructivism which views that new knowledge is socially constructed “in the interactive processes that occur in contexts of learning” (Hammond, 2006, p.271). Scaffolding techniques from the teachers (such as split materials, verbal scaffolding) and peers (such as group discussion, collaborative work in role play) will facilitate the students’ language and literary competence.

The Literature-Based Unit of Work

The modern drama used is Arthur Miller’s Death of Salesman which won the Pulitzer Prize and Drama Critics’ Circle Award. The course will be divided into two (2x 150 minutes) or three (3x 100 minutes) meetings per week. The unit aims: to discuss the elements of the drama (theme, setting, character, plot), to perform drama on stage, and to analyse the elements of the drama.

Related to the aims, Lazar’s approach in teaching literature as content/personal enrichment and language-based is used in balance proportion so that EFL students achieve aesthetic reading from careful study of language used in text, learning about background information of the text, and relating their personal response to the text. From the previous course design, it was learned that if students miss one of the those approaches, they were likely to stay in the stage of efferent reading which only develops their literary knowledge (or knowledge about literature), but not their literary skill which is necessary to get the knowledge of literature.

Considering literature teaching as process is also essential in order to get on the stage of aesthetic reading. In process-based teaching, the starting point is close reading because familiarization of the text’s structure is important to grasp the meaning. It will develop the students’ “knowledge of literature”, said Carter & McRae (1994, p. xxi-xxii). As a consequence, the first thing to consider while designing is that the students should develop both their aesthetic and efferent reading at the same time without dealing with post-
structuralist theory of literature. As Misson (1994, p. 33) argues, “theory stops you from actually developing a response to a text”. Therefore, the design basically covers:

1. Explicit explanation about skills students need to acquire as components of literary competence. In order to have aesthetic reading ability, literary study should involve the recognition of literary competence (Culler, 1997, p.61) which focuses “the conventions that make possible literary structure and meaning: what are the codes or system of convention that enable readers to identify literary genres, recognize plots, create characters out of the scattered details provided in text, identify themes in literary works, and pursue the kind of symbolic interpretation that allows us to gauge the significance of poems and stories.”

In a play, this convention includes stage convention, character, plots, setting, theme, structure, and stage direction. Therefore, in the first week, these codes should be explained and the scaffolding in setting the context of the drama should be done. By having these skills, students will have the clue what they will encounter in the drama script (play text) which will help them to construct the meaning of the text. The explicit explanation on the skills is also implemented in week 8 and 9 when the students prepare to write an essay about the play text.

2. Gradual close reading by doing role-play

This while-reading activity combines Richard’s close-reading technique in practical criticism (1929) and Lazar’s perform-a-role-play technique (1993, p.140). Close reading activities will develop students’ knowledge of literature. This technique leads to active response in reading the play text rather than to passive reception of information about the texts. In the case of lengthier play, dividing the whole play text into some play extractswill help personalize the students’ response (Collie and Slater, 1987, p. 36). Role plays give an advantage on “focusing functional/linguistic area in the text” (Lazar, 1993, p. 146) and increase students’ engagement while reading.

3. Content group discussion

In this post-reading activity, the students share with their friends about their response to the drama extract. Vygotsky’s ideas about zone of proximal development (ZPD) assume that social interaction and cognitive development are in close relationship since “learners co-construct knowledge based on their interaction with their interlocutor or in private speech” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 47). Therefore, group discussion will scaffold students to gain literary skill and knowledge.

4. Aesthetic and efferent response in meaning interpretation

The response is built in the social interaction in group works from gradual close-reading-role-playing activities of the extracts (in week 1-4) to adapting the extracts into drama performance (in week 5-7) and writing individual-response essay about the whole play text (in week 8-10). In adapting the extract into performance, each member of the group should choose certain role (such as director, actor, actress, or make-up artist) to give them opportunity to show their “aesthetic response” of the play text (Tutas as cited in Paran, 2006, p.138). In writing the essay about the play text, the students have to show their critical response about the codes or system of convention in the play text and support their argument by using appropriate quotation from the play text, which are more efferent response (Tutas, as cited in Paran, 2006, p.138).

5. The use of movie to increase students’ motivation in comprehending the play text.

The movie is used after the student finish with their close reading because the language study in the written form of the play text should be the main material. The movie is extra material to help the students’ comprehension and a source of the acting model for their drama performance.

Assessment Tasks

There are three tasks involved in the assessment framework: portfolio assignments (20% of the total score), drama performance (40% of the total score), and an essay (40% of the total score). Portfolio assignments are intended to record students’ progress in responding the play text. Drama performance will give the opportunity to the students to show their aesthetic response of the extract and their ability to apply the literary competence to a new situation. The criteria include personal engagement in teamwork, ability to interpret emotion and action written in the extract in the performance, and appropriate language use in adapting the extract. Finally, in writing an academic essay about the play text, students can choose whether they want to write about point of view, character, plot, structure, setting, idea/ theme or tone. Specific criteria for the performance-based assessment for academic essay are: evidence of close reading of the drama script, ability to justify interpretation through attention to, selection and use of the extract and coherence and cohesion of essay introduction, body and conclusion (Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005).
Conclusion And Suggestions

The strength of the unit of work proposed in this paper is the structuralist approach with explicit teaching of literary skills, collaborative work in close reading and role-playing, and sectioning the play text into some scripts which scaffold the process of the students to improve both their language and literary competence. Moreover, the assessment tasks test the students’ aesthetic and efferent response so that the students develop the literary knowledge and skill properly. The challenges will be in the essay assignment. Some students have problems with grammar accuracy so the mark will focus more on meaning and the organization of ideas. The allocation of time (300 minutes per week) is also predicted to be the biggest challenge because the previous syllabus only allocate 100 minute per week which equals to 2 credits for the one semester learning program design. However, this proposed design is worth trying if we would like to integrate content, language, and culture in the teaching of literature in more balance proportion in the curriculum framework.

References


