

TEACHING SPEAKING BY CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the teaching of speaking by context at a junior high school in Bogor, West Java. The data were collected through the teacher's journal and questionnaires interpreted descriptively. The results indicate that teaching by context is useful in terms of creating a logical and well-structured teaching strategy, exposing students to a variety of learning activities, and connecting students to their real life and experiences. As a result, speaking performance and activity of the students could improve and become better. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the improvement of students' speaking learning.

Key words: Teaching, Speaking, Context

INTRODUCTION

In the teaching of speaking, a good method will not automatically result in a successful learning, but it depends on how effective the material used to boost students' engagement when required to speak. For this reason, there have been then numerous studies attempting to search possibilities to improve students' engagement in speaking (Shabir, 2012).

One of the latest studies in relation to boosting students' engagement in learning is called Contextual Teaching Learning (CTL). This principle has been widely implemented, especially in the teaching of sciences in many schools today. The studies indicated that teaching by context could help teachers improve their students' engagement in learning.

Lynch & Harnish (2003) report that teaching by context is useful for students in their learning. Their studies pointed out that teaching this way could make students more interested that their engagement in learning activities could be more maximal.

Inspired by those studies, the current study presents a descriptive study at a

junior high school in West Java on how students are taught to speak by context which so far has not much been investigated.

Significance of the Study

The study may help English teachers formulate an effective teaching and improve their students' learning. The study also may be useful for non-English teachers in enhancing their students' engagement in learning.

Research Questions

The study has two questions to address:

- a. How can the teaching of speaking by context improve the students speaking activities?
- b. What is possible example of the implementation of teaching speaking by context?

Aims of the Study

Based on the questions, the study aims to

- a. To investigate how the teaching of speaking by context can improve students speaking activities.

- b. To provide an example of the implementation of teaching speaking by context.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Teaching by Context

Johnson (in Shabir, 2012) defines teaching by context as an educational process that aims to help students see meaning in the academic material they are studying by connecting academic subjects with the context of their daily lives: personal, social, and cultural circumstances. Berns & Erickson (2001:2) define teaching by context as conception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate learning content to real world situations.

The definitions presented above clearly emphasize that the focus of teaching by context is connecting what is taught to the learners to their real life experiences which is the translation of theoretically-based pedagogy into practice, or it is the framework wherein the learners are facilitated to the real world.

Why teaching by context

Sears (2002) and Johnson (2002) say that to make students' learning activities have personal values, generate interests, and produce functional knowledge and skills, the act of learning must be in the context of and directly relevant to the students' knowledge, skills, and performances. Johnson (2002) says teaching by context can develop students to be self-regulated. Sears (2002) elaborates a number of characteristics of self-regulated learners including that the learners take responsibility for their own learning, that the learners know how to avoid or deal with distraction, and that the learners highly value their learning. Sears (in Shabir 2012) elaborate further that teaching by context can engage learners in learning. Sears (2002) says by connecting the subject matter with real life experiences, the learners prepare to

be self-directed, collaborative problem solvers and encounter a situation that invites them to define one or more problems and to propose hunches, actions, and so forth. As Borich & Tombari (1997) suggest that by teaching by context can generate students' sense of relatedness that learning can be engaging. Besides, teaching by context also engages inquiry and investigation that will lead learning more dynamic (Sears in Shabir 2012).

It can be concluded that teaching by context will contribute to the promotion of students' activities in learning since it can improve, and make the learning inherently more interesting.

Cited in Sears, (2002:11) Borko and Putnam said that theories of situated cognition suggest that knowledge is inseparable from the context and activities in which it develops. This statement clearly implies that teachers should situate learning in the context of students. In short, it can be concluded that how and where a set of knowledge and skills the learners learn are fundamental to what they learn. In addition, Niemiec & Ryan (2009) indicate that by connecting the students to their real life activities could generate the students' sense of competence.

Speaking in the Curriculum

In line with the current curriculum, there two functions of speaking: transaction and interpersonal. The curriculum says: *"Mengungkapkan nuansa makna yang terkait dengan wacana transaksional... dan interpersonal (bersosialisasi) resmi dan tak resmi secara akurat, lancar berterimakasih dengan menggunakan ragam bahasa lisan sederhana dalam konteks kehidupan sehari-hari dan melibatkan tindak tutur: berterimakasih, memuji dan mengucapkan selamat"*. (Depdiknas, 2004).

The curriculum clearly states that students are directed to be able to explain a need or intention, describe something,

ask a question, confirm information, justify an opinion, make suggestions, clarify understanding, make comparisons, and agree and disagree which are all used in their daily life context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research employed a descriptive method in order to provide a detailed and systemic description of the phenomenon being investigated (Kothari, 1985, Dawson 2002, Kumar 2005 in Shabir 2014). Regarding data collection, an intensive observation and note taking were conducted.

Participants

One class of 8th grade students of a junior high school was the participants of the study. They were 40 students involved. Based on the interviews with the teacher before the study took place, students' engagement in speaking class was low. In the meantime, the students expected their English teachers to teach them speaking through a way that could make them speak.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect the data needed, *teacher's diary*, and *yes/no questions* were used. The diaries were used to provide useful information about students' response to teaching speaking activities. The use of diaries is supported by Jane (2001) and Peck (1996). Teacher's diary was also used to provide data about the events happening in the class. The use of such diary is described as an excellent way to monitor teaching practice in a systematic but flexible way (Miller, 2004: 41). The questionnaire was yes/no type designed to provide data about students' response to their learning. All the data were interpreted qualitatively supported by simple statistical computation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The teacher chose discussion which is a commonly used technique in teaching speaking to the students. Activity started with giving a number of topics based on the context of the students' lives. As Sears (2002) and Johnson (2002) say that to make students' learning activities have personal values, generate interests, and produce functional knowledge and skills, the act of learning must be in the context of and directly relevant to the students' knowledge, skills, and performances. After the teacher was sure enough about the students' understandings of the topics, he required each student to select four topics that she/he felt most interesting. The selected topics should be written on the prepared papers and then to be proposed as topics of discussion in the pair work.

Up to this point, the students seemed enthusiastic. They rushed doing the task required by the teacher. It might be assumed that the students were interested in doing the learning. There were two reasons identified that might make the students interested in the learning. The first relates to the teacher's effort in making the task doable and possible for the students to carry out. The second reason relates to the topics given to the students. The topics were very familiar to the students and have direct relevancies to their experiences.

Next activity was that the teacher asked each student to discuss with his/her nearby partner. They were required to compare each other their respective topics and, finally they should present two common issues to be proposed as the topics of discussion. Then, the pair work discussion started. The teacher observed closely each pair in order to ensure that communication really took place. The teacher sometimes interacted with some of the pairs raising questions about the topics they chose. The teacher also gave the students opportunities for asking in case they found words, phrases, and

expressions they did not know saying them in English during the discussion. It was expected that by giving the students such opportunities, the discussion could last a bit long and finally could be functioned maximally for their speaking practices. In addition, it also aimed to create a relaxed learning atmosphere for the students as well as enhance their engagement in learning activities.

There were two important notes found up to this point. First, situating the students in such pair work was helpful to make students speak. The students' speaking practices were more intense as compared to the previous individual work. Each student tried to speak to his/her partner about his or her respective topics. They shared each other about the topics they had. The students even began using the transactional speech such as "Are you sure your topics are interesting?" (asking for confirmations), "How are my topics?" (asking for opinions), "We take one topic from you and one topic from me" (making negotiations), "I do not like your topics (making disagreements). Such expressions were heard oftentimes during the pair work. The pair work seemed effective to make the students speak. Second, situating the students in such pair work was useful to generate sense of care and positive cooperation between two students in pair work. Each student tried to help his/her partner when problems appeared. As Borich & Tombari (1997) suggest that by generating students' sense of relatedness, learning can be engaging.

When the pair work was completed, the students then were prepared for group work. An important event was noted at the end of the pair work. It was that when the students were informed about the group work, they rushed to find other friends to make a group. There were five groups of students at this stage. Each group consisted of eight students. The starting

activity was the students were required to compare each other about the topics that they had selected when they were in the pair work discussion. They would have to present one common issue to be proposed as the topic of discussion in the whole class work.

In order to ensure that each student in each group would have an equal chance to speak, the teacher asked each group's members to elect their leaders who would be responsible in managing the discussion within their group. After the "leader election session" had completed, the teacher then briefed all the groups' leaders regarding what they should do in the discussion. The teacher also gave an emphasis to the groups' leaders that they should provide their members equal opportunities to speak. The groups' leaders were meant to help the teacher interact with the students in the class. It was not possible for him to interact with all students in such limited time. Through the leaders, it was expected that the available time could be used effectively for the students' speaking practices.

While the discussion by each group took place, the teacher walked round the class to ensure that the members of each group took part in the speaking activities. The teacher also sometimes took place in the group discussion, pretending to be a member of the group. By doing so, he could see directly how the discussion took place among the students. The teacher also pleased the students to ask while the discussion took place.

Up to this point, there were some important events noted. The first, students in each group participated in the speaking activities. The leader of each group managed to give equal opportunities to all his members to speak. When there was a student speaking, others tried to listen. They did not interrupt until the student finished. The students also did not hesitate to ask

others when they got problems. During the discussion, the statements such as “It is interesting because...” (to justify an opinion), “I want to tell you that...” (to explain a need or intention), “I want your topic, it is better” (to make comparisons), “I do not like to speak about that” (to make agreement and disagreement), and “My topic is about...” (to describe something) were often heard. Overall, the students carried out the speaking activities during the group discussion actively.

From the fact, it might be assumed that the students preferred to speak in such groups. They wanted to speak because there were others listening. In other words, interaction among students could be generated when there is somebody who listens and responds. It might be in line with a motivational theory suggesting that to motivate students to learn, it could be by generating their sense of relatedness (Borich & Tombari, 1997). In the context of the study, the teacher managed to make the students feel related to others through listening each other, respecting each other, and valuing each other.

The second note was some students who had better skills in the groups tried to help when problems appeared. For example, a student said an Indonesian word during the discussion, the student with the better skill then tried reactively to give a help by saying the word in English.

From the fact, it might be assumed that through the group work, the students could help each other, learn together, and improve together. There were friends who might have better skill ready to give help and support. This is in line with Sears (2002:9) suggesting that children could learn best in classroom communities that reflect diversity such as in skill, beliefs, experiences, and values. At the same time, they also developed mutual respect and inter-personal skills.

The next discussion activity was whole class discussion which was intended to give the students more opportunities to talk freely in the target language in an organized way, but without too much stresses on grammatical or structural accuracy. Before the activity had started, the teacher again reminded all the students about the need for them to be able to speak. The teacher then tried to encourage and motivate the students to speak by ensuring them that nothing to worry and that the thing they needed to do was to try to put forward their ideas about the topic at their best.

The starting point of the whole class discussion was that each group was required to write their respective selected topics on the white board. When this activity had completed, the teacher made a little negotiation with all the students to select one possible topic only that they preferred to discuss. In the selection process, the students were required to use their reasoning skill. The teacher wanted that the students’ activity was not just limited to doing the topic selection but it also aimed to stimulate the students to speak.

When the situation has ripened among the students, the procedure moved on to a general whole-class discussion in which each student was asked to put forward their ideas in a form of short speech presentation. This time, the students unanimously agreed to talk about music.

Prior to the presentation, the teacher provided the students a language input and an example of short presentation about music. The teacher expected that the language input would be able to generate the students’ sense of competence in doing the activity. When the language enrichment had completed, the teacher instructed the students to prepare their speeches. The students were also pleased the students to ask in case they found problems with their language

while they were preparing their speech presentation.

Due to limited time, the teacher asked the students to complete their speech presentation at their homes. They should have already been prepared for the presentation in the following week. The writer expected that with such long spare time, the students would have enough opportunity to prepare their presentations.

In the following week, all the students were asked to prepare for the speech presentation. Before they did it, the teacher had first encouraged the students not to worry about their language. The teacher told the students that the thing they should think was just to present what they had. After the teacher was sure enough that students were ready for the presentation, he selected randomly three of the students to present. When the three students had finished, the teacher invited the students, one by one, to deliver their presentations. The teacher spent a lot of time to listen the students. However, some students had not chance to do the task. The time was limited. Then, the teacher promised them that they would have the chance another time. The rest of time, the teacher then had the students write what had been discussed.

At this point, there were some significant events noted. The first, when the teacher said, "Are you ready to stand in front of the class to speak?" Most of the students answered "Yes!" However, there were some quiet. The teacher then again tried to encourage and motivate them to speak by ensuring them that nothing to worry and that the thing they needed to do was to try to put forward their ideas about the topic they had. Afterwards, the teacher again asked the students whether they were ready to speak. This time, the students answered and stated their readiness a much louder. The teacher assumed that they felt competent and able to do the presentation

since it was still connected to their previous activities. Such statement might be in line with Niemiec & Ryan (2009, 135) suggesting that to motivate students to learn, it could be by generating their sense of competence.

The second note, when the time allocated for the speaking had ended, the teacher heard some statements such as "Sir, I am not yet", "Sir, we continue, because we have not class after this". Other students also retorted such statement saying, "Yes sir, we have not teacher after this". From such statements, there was an assumption that the students enjoyed the learning.

Based on questionnaire, in general, the students felt eager to take part in the speaking activities. The questionnaire revealed that 98 % of the students admitted happy to learn speaking. To this point, it could be assumed that the students loved the teacher's teaching. In other words, the instruction had affected positively the students' learning that they loved to take part in it. They admitted that speaking was their favorite lesson that they enjoyed learning it. The students also did not mind if the material for the speaking given was not always easy.

To conclude, the writer now wants to deal with the first question the study has to answer. The question is "How can the teaching of speaking by context improve the students speaking activities? Based on the discussion, it is safe to say that students' speaking can improve by giving them the subject matter corresponding to their context. The following are the study has shown how students' speaking can improve through teaching by context.

The first is a logical and well-structured teaching strategy. Teaching by context is built on the bases of the students' worlds: their ages, experiences, thoughts, and skills. By taking into account these bases, teaching becomes

logical for students to carry out which then affects their motivation.

The second is a variety of learning activities. Teaching by context enables students to learn in a variety of activities. The move from one activity to another makes students remain motivated in the learning.

The third or the last is connectivity. The students feel connected to what they learn that supports the growth of their personal and inter-personal life experiences. Consequently,

their motivation in the learning is affected.

The second question the study has to answer is “What a possible example that can be implemented in teaching speaking by context?” Based on the study, a discussion-based activity could be developed and implemented in the teaching of speaking by context. The following is an example resulted from the study on the implementation of teaching speaking by context.

DISCUSSION	
Stages	Activities
1. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning the topics that might interest the students to discuss
2. Individual Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributing the selected topics to each student. • Requiring each student to select the topics that interest her/ him much to be discussed in the pair work. • Providing language input about initiating a discussion.
3. Pair Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring the students in each pair to consult and compare each their respective topics. • Requiring each pair to select one topic to be discussed in the group work. • Providing language input about initiating a discussion in the group work
4. Group Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring the students in the group work to consult and compare each other about the topics they selected in the pair work discussion. • Requiring the students to present one common issue to be proposed as the topic for whole class discussion.
5. Whole Class Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring the students to write the topics they selected when they were in the group work discussion. • Making negotiation with the students regarding the topic to be selected for their discussion. • Providing language input regarding the topic selected. • Requiring each student to speak about the selected topic.

CONCLUSION AND SUGESTION

Teaching speaking by context is a contributory study to developing students to be active language learners. The study has outlined that teaching by context could be useful for creating an engaging learning. There are two important aspects the study can demonstrate how this

teaching is useful for students’ speaking learning activity.

The first is that teaching by context enables the students to be exposed to various learning activities. The study has shown that with different learning activities, students’ eagerness could be maintained and improved. The move from one activity to another

activity is effective in generating the students' interest in learning thereby their motivation is affected positively. In the context of the study, with various activities including individual work, pair work, group work, and whole class work are helpful to engage students to learn. Having them learn in such situation, their interest in learning could be maintained because there are always other activities that make them curious. Consequently, they are willing to persist for a longer period of time, learn more, and enjoy participating in the learning activities. The second is that teaching by context could help the students feel connected to what they are learning. The study has indicated that the student could be motivated to speak something real and familiar with their experiences. They are eager to speak about the phenomena that have direct relevancies to their daily experiences. In other words, helping students see meaning in the materials they are studying by connecting the subjects to the context of their daily lives is the important key in the teaching.

Finally, the study is not without any difficulties. For further similar study, it is recommended to employ smaller number of participants for easy monitoring and observation.

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