PROFILING PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHERS' CREATIVITY THROUGH THEIR LESSON PLANS

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ABSTRACT: Creating creative theme-based lesson plans for teaching English to young learners is essential. Therefore, primary English teachers should have creativity in designing their lesson plans. This study aimed to identify the creativity features in the teachers' lesson plans and to reveal the considerations taken by the teachers. This study employed qualitative research and applied descriptive study as its framework. This study used teachers' documents and interviews in data collection. The respondents of this study were three primary English teachers who taught at three different schools in Bandung. The results of this study showed that there were five creativity features of the teachers found in teachers' lesson plans: profiling meaning and purpose; foreground potent affectively engaging texts and media; fostering play; encourage collaborations and making connections; and fostering originality. Moreover, the findings from the interviews showed that the teachers had their own consideration in choosing the designed activities which was different from one another. The results of this research can enrich creativity literature in education and help primary English teachers to be knowledgeable, discover, and develop their creative abilities in designing theme-based lesson plans.

Keywords: *Creativity Features, Teacher's Creativity, Theme-based Instruction, Theme-based Lesson Plan*

Introduction

The main principle of teaching foreign language to young learners is to provide teaching and learning activities that is meaningful in contexts and can achieve the learning objectives effectively in the same time (Cameron, 2001). One of the ways to reach this is by using theme-based instruction. Karli (2009; p.71-73) showed in her study that the implementation of theme-based instruction in education in Indonesia is not going well yet. The Ministry of Education gave many easiness and facilities regarding the implementation of theme-based teaching for primary schools in accordance to current curriculums, Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) 2006, such as the availability of theme-based textbooks, and syllabuses. She claimed that the teachers in fact did not fully understand the whole idea of 'theme-based teaching', how to implement it, and how to

adjust and insert many creative ideas into creative activities in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Theme-based teaching or theme-based instruction is an approach in which children, as the students, have the opportunity to acquire English as a second language through the integration of four skills around a theme which suits the way they naturally learn (Cameron, 2001; p. 181). Children will comprehend and recall the new vocabulary items easily; create experiences in the learning activities which are meaningful in content, try out the new phrases or sentences in the foreign language, and be motivated because the theme is in accordance to their interest; learn to use the foreign language naturally in both spoken and written in line with the theme around classroom activities; and be encouraged to use the foreign language precisely and accurately in order to express their ideas correctly (Cameron, 2001; p. 191-194).

By focusing on the themes which are based on students' interest, the teaching and learning activities will be appealing and engaging for the students (Johannessen, 2000; p. 8). Thus, English teachers have to be aware in designing theme-based lesson plan. They need not only to comprehend the steps in planning theme-based lesson plan,

but also to create a creative theme-based lesson plan, as Karli (2009; p.72) stated that one of the main problems of primary English teachers is to design creative activities in the classroom.

There were some studies regarding teacher's creativity and theme-based instruction to teaching English to young learners. Although there was surprisingly no exact study that examines the teacher's creativity in designing lesson plan in implementing theme-based instruction for teaching English to young learners, there were some studies that examined these variables separately. A study employed by Yang (2009; p. 161-176) investigated the ESL students' perceptions and the impact of a theme-based teaching in an English primary course for ESL students in a non-school setting in Hong Kong. There was also a study by Graham (2002, cited in Safford and Barrs, 2005; p.17) which proposed that the creative and imaginative classroom activities can affect significantly on literacy development of children**.**

Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap in which there is no exact study on the relationship between teacher's creativity and planning theme-based instruction for teaching English to young learners. Thus, this study focuses on the analysis of

teacher's creativity in designing theme-based lesson plan in teaching English to young learners. Two research questions are formulated as follows.

1. What aspects of creativity features in teaching English to young learners are included in teachers' theme-based lesson plans?

2. What were considerations taken by the teachers in designing creative theme-based lesson plans in teaching English to young learners?

- **Nature of Creativity in General**

According to Stein (1953; cited in Runco and Jaeger, 2012) and Alencar and Fleith (2003, cited in Almeida *et al.*, 2008), creativity is the creation of a new product which is based on whether the combination of the existing idea with the new idea or inventing an original idea.

Creativity requires six aspects of the resources of creativity in the confluence approaches: 1. *Intellectual Skills*, which cover synthetic skill (the skill to see problems in other or in the new point of view in order to create viewpoint apart of the conventional thinking; and is used to create new ideas); analytic skill, (the skill to distinguish and selecting which ideas are worth pursuing; and it results in powerful critical thinking); and practical-contextual

Skill (the skill to recognize the way to make people believe in the value of the ideas; and it results in societal acceptance of ideas).

2. *Knowledge*, which has twisted advantages, where it can help to engender creativity or indeed hold back creativity. It can help when understanding about a particular field is needed if someone wants to make the field moving beyond where it is. However, when someone has a closed and firmed knowledge about a particular field, it can lead him or her to stay firm and not changing everything in the field as well as his/her first knowledge in the particular field.

3. *Thinking Styles*, which are the selection of how a person used his/her skill. One of thinking styles is legislative style, which is the preference for thinking and a decision to think in other point of views. It can help someone to distinguish two similar things.

4. *Personality*, which are the willingness to overcome obstacles, willingness to take sensible risks, willingness to tolerate ambiguity, and self-efficacy (Lubart, 1994; and Stenberg & Lubart, 1991, 1995, all cited in Stenberg, 2006).

5. *Motivation*, which is not something that permanently exists within someone. If there is no motivation in doing something, someone needs to look from different point

of view in order to trigger his/her interest in that particular thing and eventually will be motivated.

6. *Environment*, which is needed to engender all of the creative resources. The creative ideas may never be displayed if there is no environment that supports and rewards the creative ideas. The obstacles that may exist in the environment may be major or minor, so a creative person should decide how to respond to it, whether by letting the environment burry the creative ideas or keep persisting.

There are also two levels of creativity, as suggested by Cropley (2001): *Sublime Creativity*, which refers to the level that a creative person has because the creative product that he/she creates is beyond widely acknowledged. People around the world regard the product as an outstanding and extraordinary piece and give countless appreciation and admiration; and *Everyday Creativity*, which is the level that is given to everybody whether he/she creates creative product or not. This level represents the belief that creativity is a personal characteristic that exists within everybody, as well as the analogy that says it is impossible that someone has zero intelligence just as it is impossible for someone to have zero creativity.

- **Creativity in Primary Education**

Creativity in education is initially developed in England as it is embedded in its Foundation Stage Curriculum and National Curriculum for School (Craft, 2009). It was started by the publishing report of National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) of UK in 1999, which defined creativity as the thinking and behaving imaginatively in order to achieve a valuable objective by engendering a novel process (Horner and Ryf, 2007). It means that creativity begun by the preparation of imaginatively thinking about something with the intention to accomplish a creative work by adding new or adjusting ideas from the existing ones.

Based on the definition given by NACCCE in 1999, creativity can be divided into three terms. The first one is *creative teaching*, which is the ability of teacher to take the power and transform it into interesting, fun, and suitable activities that fit to students' interest, characteristics, and the need of educational goals (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Woods and Jeffrey, 1996; cited in Craft, 2009). The second one is *teaching for creativity*, which focused on the children as the learner. Teacher needs to identify children's creative strength and

foster their creativity (Craft, 2009). The last one is *creative learning*, which is in the middle field between creative teaching and teaching for creativity. It concerns with children's experiences of learning (Jeffrey and Craft, 2006).

- **Creativity Features of Primary English Teacher**

There are seven creativity features of primary English teachers as suggested by four experts: Cremin (2009; p. 5-9); Grainger, *et al*., (2006, cited in Craft, 2009; p. 40-43); Horner and Ryf (2007; p. 77-102; p. 161-186); and Jones and Wyse (2004; p. 12-30).

First, it is *profiling meaning and purpose*. Profiling meaning and purpose is fundamental in a creative classroom. Teacher should explain the purpose of the teaching and learning process explicitly to the students so that the students will make sense of what they are going to do during the teaching and learning process in the whole meeting (Cremin, 2009). Moreover, in reading and writing activities, the teacher should teach the linguistic features of the texts given to the students (Cremin, 2009).

Second, it is *foregrounding potent affectively engaging texts and media*. It is important for creative teachers to provide children with various forms of learning media, technologies, and texts in order to engage the children to be interested in the teaching and learning process so as to develop their literacy skills (Horner and Ryf, 2007; Cremin, 2009). Teacher should use various forms of texts that can be in the forms of film that contained texts from the dialogues of the characters in the film; colorful and creative books that contained many pictures in the form of stories; and other multimedia to help them comprehend literary texts from the collaboration of visual images and sounds (Horner and Ryf, 2007; and Cremin, 2009). Moreover, teacher should use various forms of teaching media in order to provide the students with suitable media, such as songs, visual arts, videos, flashcards, musical instruments, or puppets (Jones and Wyse, 2004). Furthermore, teachers need to give the children opportunities to give responses toward various kinds of texts, such as poetry, drama, pictures, story, and film; by exploring the texts through describing characters, settings, and language study (Horner and Ryf, 2007).

Third, it is *fostering play*. Fostering play in the teaching and learning process is important (Cremin, 2009). It motivates and triggers the children to experience and involve in the multiple contexts. The

teachers need to have the creativity in creating a play which ensuring the children to comprehend the materials of the play while getting involve in the play (Cremin, 2009). There are two characteristics in fostering play. The first one is creating a play that is in the form of story-telling, discussion, art, drawing, dance, or drama. The second one is creating a play that can make children getting involve and comprehend the materials at the same time.

Fourth, it is *promoting curiosity and questioning stance*. Teachers need to create learning activities that indicate core elements of creativity, which are the sense of curiosity, wonder, posing questions, and pondering (Cremin, 2009). They ought to make the children generate their own questions in order to expand their interest, acquisition, and then think about the solution of the problems the children have (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009). There are three characteristics in the aspect of promoting curiosity and questioning stance. The first characteristic is to share teacher's own interest and passion regarding the theme that will be done and the text that will be employed (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009). The second characteristic is to generate activities that foster students' curiosity, wonder, posing

questions, and pondering (Cremin, 2009). The third characteristic is to generate circumstances in which children will have the chances to think about the solutions of the problems or questions they have encountered (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009).

Fifth, it is *encouraging collaboration and making connections*. Encouraging collaboration and making connections among students is important for creative teachers to be fostered (Cremin, 2009). It enables the children to engage in the learning process both individually and collaboratively. There are three characteristics of the aspect of encouraging collaboration and making connections among students. The first characteristic is creating activities that foster collaboration among children (inside school) or between children and parents or professional (outside school) (Horner and Ryf, 2007). The second characteristic is creating activities which are based on students' interest and passions that is in line with the objectives of the lesson (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009). The last characteristic is creating possibilities to link the theme of English subject to different subject area as long as it relates to students' previous knowledge and

personal experience (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009).

Sixth, it is *autonomy*. There are five characteristics of a creative teacher in terms of autonomy in the classroom. The first characteristic is making the teacher's own lesson plan and clear assessment schema for the students (Cremin, 2009; and Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009). The second characteristic is providing numerous texts that can be sorted by the students in accordance to their personal interest (Jones and Wyse, 2004). The third characteristic is creating possibilities that enable students to learn to evaluate and make self-judgment regarding their ideas (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009; and Cremin, 2009). The fourth characteristic is giving supportive and truthful feedback towards students' works (Cremin, 2009). The last characteristic is publishing students' work in order to appreciate their works (Cremin, 2009; and Jones and Wyse, 2004).

The last one, it is *fostering originality*. In fostering originality in the classroom, there is only one characteristic (Grainger, *et al*., 2006, cited in Craft, 2009) that can be seen from the teacher's designed lesson plans. The characteristic is trying out new ideas and experiment with a variety of resources.

• **Theme-based Instruction**

Theme-Based Instruction is one of teaching models in integrated-skills approaches. It organizes a lesson around a theme or topic (Harmer, 2007). It is not only providing students with various interests on themes and its content, but also help the students to achieve institutional needs to improve their language skills (Brown, 2000). As suggested by Mumford (2000), this teaching model can help students to improve their attitudes, skills, and knowledge in meaningful ways because the lessons that they are studied are based on their interests that lead to encouragement of their curiosity to learn more and their passionate involvement in the learning process. Theme-Based instruction also countenance teacher to realize the real life issues to be themes on teaching and learning process so the students can be aware of their circumstances while improving their language skills (Lúðvíksdóttir, 2011).

• **Theme-Based Lesson Plan**

Lesson plan is a set of steps of classroom activities in which a teacher designed as guidance to teach one particular subject over a period of particular time (Brown, 2000; p. 149). Once teachers have made lesson plans, it means that they have already been knowledgeable about what

activities they are going to do in the classroom and how to do it. Lesson plan is beneficial not only as guidance to refer to during teaching and learning activities, but also to help teachers reduce their anxiety and nervous feeling because they already got prepared and have a set of things to do in the classroom (Harmer, 2007; and Woodward, 2009).

Therefore, by looking at the definitions of theme-based instruction and lesson plan, it can be concluded that theme-based lesson plan is set of steps of classroom activities in which a teacher designed as guidance to teach one particular subject over a period of time which is organized around a theme or topic and integrated skills approach (Harmer, 2007; Hinkel, 2006; and Brown, 2000).

- **Young Learners**

Children or young learners cannot be treated the same as adults. While adults can rely on numbers of resources and are able to analyze a new language in an abstract way, children need to have a willingness to learn a new language by feeling that the circumstances in the learning process are interesting, engaging, and fun; and they can make sense of what they are doing in meaningful contexts, without any intent to learn the abstract language forms (Pinter, 2006; p. 17-18). Thus, teachers need to capture children's interest in order to make the teaching and learning process successful.

Methodology

This research employed qualitative research and applied descriptive study as its framework. Qualitative research is employed to find detailed data because of directness source of data, the concern to the process and product of the data (Fraenkel, *et al.*, 2012; p. 426-427).

Table 1
Respondents of the Study

Teacher	Grade	Theme	Number of Meetings	Educational Background	Length of English Teaching Experience
Teacher 1 (T1)	I	"Family Members"	2	English Education (undergraduate)	± 9 years
		"Nico and I Can Make (letters p – z)"	2		
		"Parts of Body"	2		
		"Colors"	2		

Teacher 2 (T2)	II	"Greeting"	2	English Education (undergraduate)	± 4 years
		"My Classroom"	2		
		"My Number (11 – 20)"	2		
		"Farm Animals"	2	English Education (magister program - ongoing)	
Teacher 3 (T3)	IV	"Comparing Two Persons and Giving a Compliment"	2	English Education (undergraduate)	± 8 years
		"Inviting and Accepting Invitation"	2		
		"Thanking and Acknowledging"	2	English Education (magister program - ongoing)	
		"Asking for and Telling Times"	2		

This research was conducted in three different private and public Primary Schools in Bandung. The participants of this study were three primary English teachers. . The teachers then were abbreviated with the label of T1, for the first teacher who teaches first graders; T2, for the second teacher who teaches second graders; T3, for the fourth teacher who teaches fourth graders. The description of the three teachers and the lesson plans is presented in Table 3.1 below.

The data collection in this study is done through analyzing archived documents and interviewing the participants. The data obtained from documents of the teachers were analyzed in terms of their content. The content of the theme-based lesson plans will be matched with the theories of creativity features of primary English teacher proposed by Cremin (2009); Grainger, Barnes, and Scoffham (2006); Horner and Ryf (2007); and Jones and Wyse (2004) to analyze the creativity features contained in the lesson plans. The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed to see the teachers' consideration in designing the lesson plans.

Data Presentation and Discussion

From data analysis for T1, it showed that T1 only met two aspects of creativity, which were fostering play and fostering originality. Data from interview analysis showed the teacher's knowledge as well on

the importance of these aspects. However, other five aspects of creativity did not meet in T1's lesson plans. It was because the lesson plans did not contained several characteristics of those aspects. In contrary, results from the interview showed that mostly T1 was well-informed and aware about the importance of profiling meaning and purpose; foregrounding potent affectively engaging texts and media; promoting curiosity and questioning stance; encouraging collaboration and making connection; and autonomy.

Moving aside to T2, results from lesson plans analysis showed that T2's lesson plan contained three aspects of creativity, which were profiling meaning and purpose; fostering play; and fostering originality. Similar with what has found in T1, result from interview analysis showed that T2 was aware and well-informed of the significances of the remaining aspects that she failed to meet in her lesson plans, which were foregrounding potent affectively engaging texts and media; promoting curiosity and questioning stance; encouraging collaboration and making connection; and autonomy.

Moving aside to lesson plans analysis for T3, it showed that T3's lesson plans contained four aspects of creativity,

which were profiling meaning and purpose; foregrounding potent affectively engaging texts and media; fostering play; and encouraging collaboration and making connection. Similar to the results of interview analysis of T1 and T2, T3 showed that he was well-informed of the importance of the remaining aspects as well, but failed to apply it through his lesson plans, which were promoting curiosity and questioning stance; autonomy; and fostering originality.

Moreover, findings from interview analysis showed that the three teachers had different considerations in choosing certain activities to be implemented in the classroom. T1 preferred the activities that could make the students review previous materials easily and happy at the same time while doing the activities. On the other hand, T2 preferred activities that the students could relate to their daily lives, so that they could connect their prior knowledge to the new knowledge from the activities conducted during the teaching and learning process. In the contrary, T3 preferred activities that could help the students to comprehend the materials more easily. Although the three teachers had different considerations in choosing activities conducted in the classroom, the main aims of them was similar. All of them

wanted to provide teaching and learning activities that is meaningful in contexts and can achieve the learning objectives effectively in the same time (Cameron, 2001).

Conclusions

The purposes of this study are to identify the creativity features in teaching English to young learners that the teachers employed in designing theme-based lesson plans and to reveal the considerations taken by the teachers in designing creative theme-based lesson plans in teaching English to young learners. To answer the first question of this research, which is based on document analysis of teachers' theme-based lesson plan, it can be concluded that there are five creativity features that appeared in the teachers' lesson plan. They are profiling meaning and purpose; foregrounding potent affectively engaging texts and media; fostering play; encouraging collaborations and making connections; and fostering originality. Thus, the creativity aspects of promoting curiosity and questioning stance; and autonomy could not be seen from the entire lesson plans of the three teachers. On that account, it can be concluded that T3 is a creative teacher, since he possessed four aspects of creativity features in his lesson

plans. Moreover, T1 and T2 cannot be considered as creative teachers since they only met two aspects of creativity features for T1 and three aspects of creativity features for T2.

Addressing the second question of this research, from the transcribed interviews can be concluded that all of the teachers had different considerations and purposes in every activity that they designed in the lesson plans, as can be seen in details in chapter four. Overall, the three teachers can be considered as not reliable teachers, because oftentimes they were knowledgeable about the importance of those seven creativity features, but failed to prove it through their lesson plans. However, all of them agreed and well informed on the importance of designing creative theme-based lesson plans for the children.

However, a further study would be needed to investigate comprehensively with regard to the creativity features of English teachers in designing theme-based lesson plans for teaching English to young learners. By the same token, it would be better to observe the implementation of the creativity features that the teachers possessed in the classroom during teaching and learning activities. In addition, the subject of further

study may cover higher level of education apart from primary school, namely junior high school English teachers.

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