EXPLORING AND DEALING WITH ISSUES OF 'IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE' AT MY WORKPLACE CONTEXT IN SURABAYA

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ABSTRACT

Article explored the ways an identity was shaped within societies and how these might have affected the work as an EFL teacher in a workplace context. Data were collected from reflective data that was autobiography and other related research. Analysis was done by analyzing autobiography that was working environment approach and reflection analysis. It can be concluded that awareness of global context, local knowledge, and ability to listen support English teaching activities having many differences and the available condition.

Keywords: difference identity, workplace, teacher

ABSTRAK

Artikel membahas bagaimana identitas pribadi terbentuk karena masyarakat dan bagaimana hal tersebut berpengaruh terhadap pendekatan kerja sebagai tenaga pengajar EFL dalam konteks lingkungan kerja. Data diperoleh dari pengembangan reflektif, yaitu otobiografi dan penelitian literatur yang terkait. Analisis mendiskusikan otobiografi, yaitu pendekatan dengan lingkungan kerja dan bahasan refleksi. Disimpulkan bahwa kesadaran konteks global, pengetahuan lokal, dan kemampuan mendengar dapat membantu cara mengajar bahasa Inggris dengan segala perbedaan dan situasi yang ada.

Kata kunci: identitas perbedaan, lingkungan kerja, pengajar

INTRODUCTION

In this journal, other literature works discussing on the issue of identity and difference are first examined to provide the theoretical background and foundation for the description on my identity development. Then, the findings of the struggling and changing process of my identity (as presented in the appendix) are further described so as to link its effects on the ways I was able to approach my work as an English teacher in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context in Indonesia, where the complex issue of identity and difference cannot be underestimated. In the reflective discussion, through reflective practices and by considering valuable ideas from other writers' works, I will be better informed in the search of finding ways of teaching English in an attempt to work with such circumstances.

The appendix that I attach in the report presents a storytelling of my past experiences, which consist of some experiences, ideas, and certain aspects in my life that are described and explored so as to show how these might have changed me, made me what I am, and in what ways I have remained unchanged.

The workplace context that I choose to describe in the project is in the academic environment of an educational institution (a private technical college) in Surabaya, Indonesia, where I have worked for two years as an EFL teacher to teach undergraduate students of informatics, electrical and industrial engineering. The observation within the context is based on the argument that I have observed the prevailing issue of social differences among students, and how these together with the local practices and customs can be so influential in determining the general nature of the learning and teaching environment in the classroom, which concern me as a language teacher.

Through writing the journal, I hope that I am able to locate the focus of my inquiry better, in the hope of finding alternative solution in dealing with the issue of identity and difference within my workplace contexts, which apparently influence my role, ways of approaching, behaviors and actions as an EFL teacher in such contexts. As I locate issues of concern in the journal, I am committed to make use of my reflective practices and other literature resources to generate a better informed understanding about the things that I consider important in my workplace, the nature of the workplace itself, my behaviors as a teacher and the ways the students respond to my teaching. In achieving this, I am willing to unveil some personal things in my life experiences by storytelling my past experiences and aspects in my life that I deem necessary, as well as my past teaching approaches as an EFL teacher.

Having more than two-year experiences of teaching English as a foreign language to undergraduate students in a private technical college in Surabaya, and being in the academic association of other teacher-colleagues in the institution, I hope that these can contribute some significant inputs to the reflective discussion in the journal, as this area of focus is closely related with the larger cultural contexts of the place where I have lived in, and with some aspects of the local practices and customs in the workplace environment where I have worked in.

Rationale

I chose this area of focus due to the following reasons: I am an English teacher working in Surabaya, Indonesia, where the issues of identities and differences that exists in a particular society can not just be ignored, and where these can have some effects directly or indirectly, in particular, on my work approaches, and in general, on the nature of teaching and learning process in the educational environment. Moreover, in my consideration, inherent in the teaching of language becomes the issue of identity as well, for identity is closely related to language and culture, and thus learning a foreign

language can also bring identity change for my students too; As an EFL teacher dealing with such circumstances, I am in the position that enables me to observe and analyze the situation directly, so that any reflective practices can be generated best to represent the past events for further reflection and consideration. Also, the experiences that I have in this regard might be the experiences that my students also have, in which I should be aware of, with an attempt to understand them better when they undergo the process of learning English as a foreign language.

My aims of the research are to explore: How my own identities have been shaped and made within societies in Indonesia so as to find out the outcome of my identity formation; How my identities have had some influences on the ways I approached my work as an English teacher so as to find out the link of my identity formation with my teaching approaches; How to be better informed in discussing ways of teaching English in such contexts, through reflective practices and research literature, in an attempt to work within contexts where the existence of complex issues of identities and differences prevail.

Review of Related Literature

In Hall's perspective (in Woodward, 1997), the construction of identity is a complex process. Hall argues that identity is relational. Its existence depends partly on what it is not. Here, identities are formed in relation to other identities, in relation to what they are not. Identities are demarcated through *symbols,* which function as an important signifier of difference. Hence, *symbolic marking sets up difference,* and identities are forged through the marking of difference. Some differences are considered as more important than the others, especially in particular places and at particular time. The marking of difference takes place not only through *the symbolic systems of representation,* but also through *forms of social relations.* These forms of symbolic and social difference are established through the operation of *classificatory system,* in which meaning is produced. The systems are always constructed around difference and the ways in which differences are marked out. In this process, difference is marked by symbolic representations that, then, give meaning to social relations. As a result, social relations are organized and divided. Thus, the construction of identity is both *symbolic* and *social,* which each is needed to mark and maintain identities.

Hall argues that recovery of the past is also part of the process of constructing identity, so identities are not static phenomenon. Rather, they are fluid and dynamic. Identities are also contingent, intersecting between various elements of political and cultural discourses and particular histories. In the process of identification, they are continuously being formed and reformed in struggles between discourses, and they can even position us within historical specificity to the extent that we sometimes are not free to determine what kind of people we want to be. Identities are not unified either, in a way that there may be a contradiction between the collective and individual level. Identities are strongly contested and oppositional and often presented with construction of binary oppositions, and the difference marking is very essential to construct such positions. Hall also refers to the view that identity formation can happen at the 'local and personal' level due to the change in social class or 'dislocation' factor from which 'new identities can emerge and where new subjects can be articulated' (Laclau, 1990:40 in Hall in Woodward, 1997).

In my consideration, Hall has provided a very comprehensive description of the concept of 'identities' as to show how they are formed and operate within a delicate and complex process of interconnectivity between difference, social and symbolic marking and classificatory system. His explanation underpins my further description on the case of my identity process in this journal, so as to show how this framework can be illuminated in my own experiences.

Wendy Holland, in her chapter about 'Mis/taken identity' (in Vasta, E. and Castles, S., 1996), shows how her identities have been deeply affected by what occurred in the society, which in turn

made her aware of the issue of 'difference', and how being as a 'white' outside and as a 'murri' inside has made her identities struggle and contested through different discourses in her life experiences. She describes how her affirming effort of her own identities sometimes led to some conflicts with her surroundings, and how she finally acknowledges the existence of 'the complexities and contradictions inherent in the process of naming one's identity' (p. 110). She also notes how her ideas and experiences about identity and difference influenced her approach as educator in a way that she tried to eliminate the commonly negative image developed among her students towards the 'Aborigines'. Holland's experiences clearly show how her identities were struggling and never static in the process of becoming, and how sometimes she was caught up in a particular society where she had no choice other than representing the expected 'image' as in the classificatory system in certain contexts and at a particular time.

Based on her 'diasporic' experiences of living in four different continents, Brah (in Brah, A., 1996) gives another example of how her identities were formed and shaped through different contexts as she took part in different discourses. During the process, she also mentions how she once reacted in opposition to the 'subjected' constitution within a particular discourse, and how these experiences affected her perspective on identities to the extent that she acknowledges, "there is a changing core that I recognize as me" (p. 10). By her reference on 'Asian women', she shows how identities are contingent, intersecting between various elements of discourses and historical contexts.

Both authors have shown that identities are not fixed but always changing in the process of becoming and how they can be greatly affected by the discourses through which individual might have been a part of it. Their stories illuminate my own situation and help me to clarify the explanation of my identity process.

Approach

In this article, I use the research approach of narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:3) note that, "The educational importance of this line of work is that it brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experiences as lived". I use storytelling of past events in my life experiences as my main data source (as attached in the appendix). I have found that storytelling is very useful in exploring the issue in a way that it allows me a considerable time to reflect upon as well as to search for relevant second hand data in the literature research to suggest some ideas for recommendation or a workplace initiative. Thus, I have chosen to reflect on my own experiences as I have lived and been a part of a society where, from my personal point of view, the complex issues of 'identities and differences' can be perceived as reality and cannot just be ignored.

I use autobiographical writing as my method of data collection. Here, I depend much on the recollection and reconstruction of events in my memories which consist of any past experiences, ideas, and some aspects in my own life that have significance in meaning and relevancy with the issue. In explaining a sample of an autobiographical writing, Connelly and Clandinin (1990:6) refer to it as the source of data that allows one to 'draw one's attention to the ways in which one's experience shape one's interest in, and ways of constructing, particular research and teaching interests'. Hopefully, by using autobiography as my main data source as well as telling my past teaching approaches, I am able to allow my reflective practices to generate any ideas, possibilities, or information that spring to mind, so that it allows me to expand further on any ideas and suggestions developed in the reflection.

In the theoretical reviews, I seek for any information and inputs, which are relevant to the issue, so that I am able to further extend the formulation process of the suggested alternatives or ways of solution to the existing problem.

My data source of autobiographical writing is presented in the appendix attached in the journal, as I want to focus more in revealing the findings of the story in relation with the nature of my teaching approaches in the past as a result of the events in my story, so that I can make links between the story and my past teaching approaches in the reflective discussion.

DISCUSSION

The Story of My Identity

My story of identity process (as presented in the appendix) reveals how my identities are continuously changing, shaped and reshaped in struggles between discourses, particularly in my association with Indonesian people, especially those of Javanese Surabaya background, and with those who have Chinese background in Surabaya. The changing and developing of my identities might put me in such a way that it is difficult to position myself into the kind of group that I want to be. It also presents me conflicts not only within myself but also in the social interactions and communication with the two social groups.

The underlying understanding is also based on my observation of how physical things like the ways of dress, material possessions, color of the skin, the dialect aspects (including accents, styles, vocabulary, etc), ideas, values and principles in life can constitute symbols of the 'classificatory system', and all contribute to the marked differences between the Chinese-background people and the Javanese Surabaya people in the society to the level that clear distinction in social communication and interaction can be perceived as reality between the two social groups.

How My Work Approaches Affected

In the institution that I have worked as an EFL teacher in Surabaya, most of my students were of Chinese backgrounds, and only few of them were of non-Chinese backgrounds. There was a growing tendency of my students in establishing the clear social distinction in their association in terms of the two different groups.

I decided to use my role as an English teacher in the workplace context as an opportunity to introduce a different way of teaching and learning environment, where the local customs and practices were still prevalent and dominating the nature of the teaching and learning process in the institution.

Having the experiences of growing up in different cities in Indonesia, and the fact that my first language has always been Bahasa Indonesia at home, I possess no particular local dialect or accent. My accent of using Bahasa Indonesia has always been of the common standard accent, and not influenced by the local accent. This had an impact on the way I taught lessons by using the type of medium of instruction in the classroom. For example, whenever I explained lessons in Bahasa Indonesia (sometimes, it was more appropriate to clarify some points in the lesson), the students of the Chinese background seemed to be less responsive than when I did it in English. It seemed that for them, it was more comfortable listening to my instruction in English rather than in Bahasa Indonesia with the common standard accent, or even worse, in Bahasa Indonesia with the local accent. As for students with non-Chinese backgrounds, it seemed that my using of either English or Bahasa Indonesia with the standard accent showed no difference in their response to my explanation. Thus, based on the observation, I assume that both groups didn't show any negative response to my using English as the preferred choice of the medium of instruction in the classroom, though sometimes they couldn't follow the instruction in English fully.

Another thing that was still apparent in the teaching and learning process was the growing tendency of the lecturers to maintain a distance in their communicative interaction with their students in the classroom, either in their teaching behavior or their speech. In such cases, teacher-centered approach clearly became the nature of the environment. Lecturers were more dominant in the discussion, and students were more likely to be reluctant to actively participate by asking questions or giving comments. One-way communication characterized the nature of teaching and learning process.

Having the access to learn and experience the cultural aspects of English native speaking environment has made me to try a different approach in my teaching methodology. Rather than acting as a sole instructor, as commonly represented in the local practice, I tried to be more of a facilitator instead. I was trying to develop a more student-approach in most of my teaching practices. For example, when it came to a discussion session, I refused to sit in the designated chair in front of the class, but instead, sit in one of the students' chairs, and tried to create a more two-way communication with the students by mingling with them and by involving them as far as I could. I tried to elicit their ideas, invite them to ask questions or to give any comments on the subject of discussion. As a result, my students generally had the difficulty with the approach, especially when it had to be conducted in English. What surprised me though was that the different approach seemed to provide my students with the opportunity as well to struggle their own identity so as to be compatible with the different practice of learning. I remembered that one student of mine once tried hard to ask me a question. His voice was trembling and his grammar was messy. His identity was being challenged and contested to break the prevailing nature of learning. However, his willingness to take the risk encouraged me to maintain and develop the new approach.

Another instance where my identity was at work in my approaches to teaching was when I decided the nature of assignments to the students. Having the access of acquiring information through many English literature and Academic resources has influenced my way of expressing ideas and concepts. I tried to emphasize a more straightforward style of communication in all of their assignments. For example, I encouraged my students to focus more on the *quality* the message in their writing assignments as well as in their presentation. What matters is located not on the number of words they present but on *the number of ideas* they present in their assignments. This was done to minimize the common mindset tendency of 'flowery style' of communication in writing and an excessive way of a 'showy display' in presentation, in which the quantity of words became the most prominent feature.

Reflective Discussion

The course of my identity formation shows how my identities, which were very much influenced by the western mindset, were struggling and contested when confronted with different social interactions, which are, in one side, students with Chinese background, and in the other side, those with non-Chinese background. The struggling process often leads to the inner conflict within me, so as to try to find a way out of the perplexed feelings in such situations. This eventually results in my own positioning in such contexts where I want to establish the alternative way of dealing with the two different social groups by detaching some cultural aspects inherent in the local practice and adopting a more western approach as a neutral way clearly manifested and reflected through my teaching practices in the classroom settings.

Laclau (1990:40, in Hall in Woodward, 1997) refers to the possibility that identity formation can happen at the 'local and personal' level due to the change in social class or 'dislocation' factor from which 'new identities can emerge and where new subjects can be articulated'. In line with this, I could see how my identities being formed and reformed in such situations and finally establishing my own positioning as an English lecturer in a workplace context where the local culture and practices prevail even in the educational setting. The 'new kind of identity' of my own, which was reflected in

my teaching practices in the workplace context, tend to be characterized by my efforts and struggles to detach any local cultural aspects, which are likely to: Inhibit the dynamic progress in the academic achievements and targets; Maintain, or even worse, strengthen the existing gap of identity formation of the two different social groups; Be impractical or irrelevant in the academic activities and contexts.

All of these efforts are underpinned by the strong expectation that I wish to reconcile, in one way or another, the growing tendency of the distinction between students of Chinese background and those of non-Chinese background in my classroom. This understanding mainly underpins the reflective discussion on the way I approached my teaching behaviors and actions in the classroom.

In line with the issue in my workplace context, I can personally agree with Kramsch' perspective (1993:241) when she notes, "Instruction in a foreign linguistic and cultural framework provides an opportunity to suspend traditional forms of instruction and experiment with new ones." These, as she continues, include "the diversification of instructional formats for the development of communicative competence… alternative teaching styles (e.g. styles that are sensitive to national… differences), and alternative learning styles (e.g. more or less orate or literate, contextualized or decontextualized, analogical or analytical)" (p. 241). These views also provide valuable input for the analysis of my teaching procedures in the way I can consider the value and purpose behind approaches that I should or should not take.

Through my teaching practices, I introduced English not as a medium of strengthening and maintaining local cultures and practices which can be a dilemma in the academic setting, but as a medium of a neutral marker, where identities can be renegotiated through the use of a language, in this case English, in a different space. Regarding the quality of *neutrality* inherent in English, Kachru (1986:8) notes:

> English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally and linguistically: it has acquired neutrality in a linguistic context where native languages, dialects, and styles sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations. Whereas native codes are functionally marked in terms of caste, religion, region, and so forth, English has no such "markers," at least in the non-native context.

My expectation is also underpinned by the notion that a 'neutral' language would hopefully become the best means of communication and negotiating process of racial differences. In the surrounding of different social groups, students would feel free to talk in a language in which they do not have to worry about certain cultural constraints inherent in it, as they try to express their own ideas, feelings and thoughts in such situation. Kramsch (1993:233) notes, "The language that is being learned can be used to maintain traditional social practices, and to bring about *change* (italics by myself) in the very practices that brought about this learning". Of course, the role of the teacher is critical in this matter. Inherent in their teaching, English teachers actually set the model of introducing what *kind* of English, or more precisely, what *kind of identity* they are trying to expose on their students through the ways they are teaching in the classroom. In my observation, many local teachers of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Surabaya, Indonesia, have the tendency to inculcate some cultural values into the English they teach, such as the formality-informality codes, rules of addressing respected or older people, flowery style in writing and speech, ceremonial rules in speech and meeting, and many more. It is also important to note that there are some aspects of these cultural values and principles that might be shared differently, or shared at different levels, by the two different social groups of the Chinese background and non-Chinese background.

As I have mentioned before, my using English as the medium of instruction in the classroom tends to be fairly welcomed by students of both groups, so I should maintain the image of English in a way that both groups can feel comfortable in learning, and gradually in using it. Hence, presenting the image of English in a way that they could see it differently from the local dialect or Bahasa Indonesia perspective is my contemporary and alternative effort to minimize the existing trend of differences in the classroom. Thus, whenever I spoke English in the class, through my non-verbal cues (e.g. tones,

body languages, facial expressions, etc), I tried to give them the notion of 'neutrality' which is free from the complicated cultural aspects inherent in the local dialect or Bahasa Indonesia, and free from the anxiety of using the wrong word for the wrong use for example, as it could happen if they tried to use Bahasa Indonesia in certain contexts. Through my teaching actions and behaviors, I always tried to make them understand how all of my students, no matter what background they may have, could explore a different space of communication through using English, in which they do not have to worry about things that exists in using the local dialect or Bahasa Indonesia, and how this alternative way, if they are willing, could affect their identity formation as well, so as to allow them to reconsider their existing perspectives on their own identity, which might be very much influenced by their own social groups and backgrounds where they have been growing up and interacting with mostly.

The range of teaching activities that I tried to apply these understandings into classroom activities are varied based on the nature and purpose of the assignments. For example, in the writing task of an academic topic in English, I told students how the general style of writing, characterized by the local cultural thought pattern, is to be considered less significant in writing academic topics in English. I always showed them how originality of ideas and straightforwardness of message are more significant in expressing their thoughts and feelings. As Kaplan (1996, in Pennycook 1998) made diagrams of different 'cultural thought patterns' with oriental students tend to produce a circular and round spiral pattern, compared to western students who tend to produce a more linear and straightforward pattern. I could see that these oriental patterns were so much manifested on the writing works of my students. These oriental patterns, when used in writing academic topics, could create a certain degree of difficulty both for the lecturer and the students. From the lecturer's perspective in the educational institution, the pattern would result in the confusion of getting the right message due to the additional and redundant information that was presented around, as well as the lack of organizational structure that showed no clear indication of the introduction, topic sentences and conclusion. From the student's perspective, the pattern may also became a hindrance for those who were mainly of the technical majors, and who did not get used to the circular pattern in writing, especially in English. Hence, I tried to minimize the problem by encouraging them to be more straightforward and clear in their writing style. I also helped them realize how English can be used in a different space of writing where they could try and explore a new way of expression without the anxiety of the cultural rules and restrictions. By doing this, it is expected that my students are more encouraged to express their ideas freely and recognize the value of originality better in their writing assignment.

Another way to detach some local customs that might become a hindrance in the academic contexts was by establishing a more student-centered approach in the environment. Local cultures have developed among students the custom to view their teacher as a person of higher status with an expectation that teachers are supposed to know everything about the subject they teach and also, as the only person where the final answer for a perplexing problem or issue should be looked upon. This has created a teacher-centered approach, where teachers did most of the talking, and more likely, students became passive-rote learners. I tried to break the custom by establishing a more two-way communication with the students during lessons. For example, as far as it was relevant with the topic discussion, I would prefer to arrange students in group discussion rather than to deliver the lesson in a one-way presentation. Through most of the activities in class, I tried to be more of a facilitator rather than a sole instructor. I showed them how important the process of problem solving through class discussion by not always depending on the teacher for the only answer, but also through students' comments and ideas. Depending on the nature and purpose of the activity, I showed them how answer could always be reprocessed, reconsidered and reformulated.

Regarding one feature of 'a critical language pedagogy' proposed by Kramsch (1993:245), teachers are encouraged to attend to the meanings behind the expressions of beginning learners despite their limited or low-level grammar. By encouraging my students to focus more on the message behind their utterances rather than on the rules in speaking, I could develop a more communicative approach

in my teaching methodology and allowed my students to see English differently and use it as a new channel of expression in their communication in EFL classroom.

Regarding the value of group works, Kramsch (1993:243) suggests how English teachers 'can subvert the traditional forms of existing instructional discourse' by "having small groups of students responsible for sharing information and collaborating on a joint outcome, and *by grading the collaborative outcome rather than the individual achievement"* (p. 243). In my case, group works can also serve another purpose. By mixing the students of Chinese background and those of non-Chinese in a discussion group together, I expected an opportunity which could allow them to recognize differences among them, and how they could learn to deal with it by viewing difference, not as a threat to their existing identity formation with all of its values and principles inherent in it, but as a resource which they could use together to overcome problems among them.

It is interesting to note that Kramsch proposes to create 'a third culture' that "grows in the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and the new cultures he or she is being introduced to" (p. 236). In order to create such third space in the classroom, Kramsch suggests how teachers and learners should operate "within and across multiple discourse worlds", which are instructional, transactional, and interact ional, by integrating some aspects of 'a critical language pedagogy' into the English classroom. I try to reflect on some of these aspects and see how they can be made linked with, and possibly applied into, my current work approaches:

"Awareness of Global Context"

In this perspective, teachers are encouraged to be attuned to 'larger cultural context' of the learners' background by focusing on the *meanings* that beginning learners can express or convey despite their limited or low-level grammar. This is in line with the underlying concept of the communicative approach, where learners are expected to engage in activities such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. Learners are encouraged to act as a negotiator of meaning, and teacher as a facilitator of the communication process. In my view, it is highly beneficial to develop the learner's confidence in expressing their ideas, feelings and thoughts in the news space, so as to allow them to generate their 'poetic insights' which might be hindered or unveiled if teachers are more concerned with referential meanings only. Thus, the best way I could manifest these understandings in my teaching practice is by encouraging my students to express and convey their inner thoughts and ideas in English despite their limited grammar and/or low-level vocabulary.

"Local Knowledge"

Teachers are encouraged to "understand in ever more sensitive ways why (students) talk the way they do, and why they remain silent" (Kramsch, 1993:245). The best way I could manifest this is by considering the fact that learners, of whichever cultural backgrounds they might have, have their own 'learning styles, conversational styles, and logics' which are individually unique and personal. Hence, I should not 'force' them to accept the new patterns of socialization that I introduce into the classroom. Instead, I should allow them to be aware of the benefits and consequences of the 'third space' through their own process of consciousness and awareness, so as to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the new approaches.

"Ability to Listen"

Teachers are invited to "listen to silences and to their students' implicit assumptions and beliefs" as well as to listen "to themselves and reflecting on their own assumptions and beliefs" (Kramsch, 1993). The best way I could apply this is by creating a more student-centered classroom environment and by always exercising introspection and self-assessment in my work approaches in order to redefine the third space that I tried to establish in the classroom to meet my students' needs more effectively, and to always look for better ways of teaching approaches in dealing with the issue of difference.

This research has helped me to reflect on the effectiveness of my current work approaches to reshape and redefine it better to deal with the issue in my workplace context in Surabaya, as well as to reconsider its values and purposes by considering other literature inputs, in the effort of 'helping (my students) assimilate into the mainstream culture (in this case, the third space of language classroom that I create) and use assimilation as a social and political tool to transform consciousness bringing into focus the similarities within differences (in this case, differences among themselves as individual learners and between two social groups)' (Kanpol, 1990:247 in Kramsch 1993:243).

In the end, it is highly expected that both parties, language teachers and learners, together can establish the nature of teaching and learning environment as it should be, when the focus alters from the existing issue of difference to the real challenges emerging in the natural process of educational inquiry to allow hidden potentials in learners' ability be further explored and new understanding of knowledge be discovered.

CONCLUSION

It is considerably difficult to be a teacher in a workplace context where the issue of identity and difference is highly noticeable and very influential in shaping the nature of the teaching and learning environment. It becomes a challenge for a teacher who work at such contexts to put efforts in solving the problems arising, and to minimize the differences among students of two different social groups, in which each group might bring into the classroom their own views of cultural aspects from the larger cultural backgrounds that they have been brought into.

However, the efforts are worth doing and mentally rewarding in a way that I could allow my students to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of my teaching approaches, and thus enable them to reconsider their existing views of teaching and learning process in a different way of exploring and approaching knowledge. More importantly, through my teaching attitude and behaviors, I could hopefully help them to reconsider and renegotiate their existing perspectives on identity in a way that they could reconcile in one way or another the differences found among them and how to view it, not as a threat to their identity standing and cultural formation, but as a powerful resource to overcome problems together through a different space of interaction and communication.

On the other hand, I should also be more attuned to my students' agenda as well, so as to bring their own consciousness in creating the third space of their own, and to avoid creating another situation where English is eventually used as another marker of difference of another social group or class distinction in the society.

Due to the nature of my research which is relatively influenced by my subjective perspective, and mostly limited to a local unique context, the approaches that I have described in the journal along with its reflective discussion and valuable suggestions from the research literature should be subject to further analysis and critical consideration, as more research and new experiences emerge in the future to generate new ideas, suggestions and inputs into the area of focus.

Finally, I should agree and maintain with the view that another crucial job of any language teachers in any similar situation is to keep their students' differences in a safe way, and keep it from falling into the dangerous trap of 'conflict', as different social groups experience directly ways of interacting and communicating process together with the possibility of a change in one group or another, in one way or another, in each other's views or practice.

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Appendix

When I was at the first year of Senior High School, I had to move with my parents to Surabaya, the second biggest city in Indonesia. In my view, the city, to some extents, presented an issue of a social distinction between different social groups living in the city. The phenomenon that caught my attention was the difference between people of Chinese background that became the minority group, and those of the local people who were of non-Chinese background. The latter group constituted the majority group which mainly consisted of Javanese Surabaya People.

Generally speaking, the distinction gap was clearly seen in some aspects of the two groups' economic levels, the dialects being used, and mindsets as well as religious beliefs. For instance, one group was relatively higher in their economic status, whereas the other group was relatively lower in the economic sector. The distinction was so obvious that it affected the intensity and the kind of relationships in their social existence so that it was quite clearly demarcated that each group mainly interacted with its own group under the common discourse of purposes.

The difference was even articulated by the particular dialect that each group used in their communication. To foreigners, they might sound the same as Javanese Surabaya Dialect. However, to the majority group, it seemed that the minority group had developed their own unique way of the dialect, including accents and vocabularies, which made their dialects 'different'.

The social phenomenon concerned me personally at that time. There were conflicts arising as to decide which social group that I should attach into my social existence. I even made my own 'assessment' as to weigh the plusses and minuses of both groups. Thus, my own consideration developed to show that one group might be very renowned for their business mindsets and hard-working attitudes towards financial success, whereas the other group might be very strong in maintaining and upholding their cultural values and principles in life. The contrasted thoughts slowly made me learn to take the balancing attitudes towards my association with the two different groups.

However, it wasn't as easy as it might seem to be. Each time I mingled in one of the groups, I could feel that there was a strong sense of affiliation developed and established within the network of a certain group, so that it created further contradictory feelings within me. The contradictory feelings were so complicated that I finally decided to create my own positioning so as to attach some of the aspects that I deemed 'necessary' from each group, as well as to detach some of the aspects that I considered 'inappropriate' from both groups. This resulted in a bit uncomfortable 'neutral' position in dealing with the two different social groups as my own identity was always negotiated, contrasted and redefined.