

# THE PRAISE OF PROSE IN ACHIEVING PARTICIPATORY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT)

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## *Abstract*

*There were great shifts in English Language Teaching (ELT) approaches and methodologies in recent years. At the same time, many researches occurred about the applications of teaching English as Second Language (ESL). It shows that, changes and innovations are something good in order to find a better pedagogic system and to be more professional in ELT. Sometimes, people resist new ways of looking, at least at the first, and it happened on ELT as well. This article is aimed at revealing ELT new ways of looking-to consider the beneficial factors of using prose in enriching interactive English language teaching into participatory English language teaching, whenever teacher and students are able to share power and come together in dialogue and mutual respect. It is considerable to reach the two components of English language pedagogy; cognitive abilities, and proficiency in English language. The writer is inspired by the thought of Shirley Brice Heath once said that “literature has no rival in its power to create natural repetition, reflection on language and how it works, and attention to audience response on the part of learners”. Teachers can use prose as a pivot in literature-based curriculum, around which curriculum revolves. In this article there will be five praiseworthy elements of prose as a pivot of participatory ELT that are going to be discussed; (1) prose is authentic, (2) prose can provide memorable contexts for the language, (3) prose illustrates appropriate language for specific situations, (4) prose links students to other cultures and subcultures, (5) prose presents topics for critical analysis, discussion, writing, and encourages performance.*

**Key words:** *prose, participatory ELT, pivot, literature-based curriculum*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Literature is classified into four categories or genres; prose fiction, poetry, drama, and non fiction prose. Usually the first three are classed as imaginative literature. In this chapter the discussion will be emphasized on prose fiction and its elements. The genres of imaginative literature have much in common, but they also have distinguishing characteristics. Prose fiction, or narrative fiction, includes myths, parables, romances, novels, and short stories. Originally fiction meant anything made up, crafted or shaped. But today the

word refers to prose stories based in the imaginations of authors. The essence of fiction is narration, the relating or recounting of a sequence of events or actions. Fictional works usually focus on one or few major characters who change and grow (in their ability to make decisions, awareness, and insight, attitude toward others, sensitivity and moral capacity) as a result of how they deal with other characters and how they attempt to solve their problems. Although fiction, like all imaginative literature, may introduce true historical details, it is not real historical history. Its main purpose is to interest,

stimulate, instruct, and divert, not to create a precise historical record. When the purpose is to create precise historical record it will be categorized into non fictional prose.

The writer starts this point of discussion from opinion of Shirley Brice Heath once said that *literature has no rival in its power to create natural repetition, reflection on language and how it works, and attention to audience response on the part of learners.* (Amato, 2003: 70). This opinion surely needs a deep exploration in order to prove and dig the roles that can be taken by literature in ELT. As widely known, literature has three genres; prose, poetry and drama. In this article, the writer focuses only on one genre of literature it is prose. Prose itself will be portrayed from its praiseworthy as pivot for achieving participatory ELT.

## **B. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Literature and Prose**

There are various definitions given by experts in bordering the scope of literature. But at least those definitions can meet in one key point that defines literature is one of fine art, it is the aesthetic worth, or aesthetic combined with general intellectual excellence. Prose/fiction, poetry and drama are considered based on their aesthetic expression. Books dealing with other subjects such as history, politics etc are considered for their reputation of intellectual combined with information worth. On this point, lets see literature in wider worldview; it means literature is not only just as a literary work, but it is something that closely related to our lives. In more detail, its relationship can be explained as follow:

- a. Literature and life: life is the subject matter of literature; life provides the raw material on which literature imposes an artistic form.
- b. Literature and morality: A writer and literature influence the lives and characters of his readers, and therefore literature should try to be a good influence (Puritanism) another

said that "art is for art" literature is wine.

- c. Literature and society: Literature is intimately related to society, literature is a part of the entire culture of people. Society influences literature in many ways.
- d. Literature and the writer's personality: Literature does not grow by spontaneous, but it is the product of the writer who wrote it out of his/her life. There is always a man behind the book.
- e. Literature in ELT (will be discussed in point 3)

Besides its relation to life of human, literature also plays some functions which is closely related to people; the main function of literature is to entertain the readers or in other words to give them the pleasure, a value of literary work based on the sense of readers. Another expert said that the chief function of literature is to "move" The aim of the writer is not to please, but to teach and to ask the reader to move, to do something The important function of literature also to heighten the awareness of the readers to certain aspect of life. Beside these, there are three subsidiary functions of literature: propaganda-release-escape. Through propaganda literary work a writer transforms all of attitudes toward life Release literature is that in which the dominant motive of the writer is simply the assuagement of starved need. Literature also provides "escape" from the grim of life, and many people read it to escape from boredom.

Some other expert classified literature into three categories or genres; prose, poetry, drama, and non fiction prose. Usually the first three are classed as imaginative literature. In this chapter the discussion will be emphasized on prose and its function as the pivot of ELT. Prose, or narrative fiction, includes myths, parables, romances, novels, and short stories. Originally fiction meant anything made up, crafted or shaped. But today the word refers to prose stories based

in the imaginations of authors. The essence of fiction is narration, the relating or recounting of a sequence of events or actions. Fictional works usually focus on one or few major characters who change and grow (in their ability to make decisions, awareness, and insight, attitude toward others, sensitivity and moral capacity) as a result of how they deal with other characters and how they attempt to solve their problems. Although fiction, like all imaginative literature, may introduce true historical details, it is not real historical history. Its main purpose is to interest, stimulate, instruct, and divert, not to create a precise historical record. When the purpose is to create precise historical record it will be categorized into non fictional prose. There are some aspects of prose that student should understand dealing with discussing prose, they are the meaning of plot, character, point of view, theme and figurative languages. But, in using prose as the pivot in ELT those elements will not be the main focus of discussion, otherwise are going to be used as media to achieve participatory ELT.

## **2. Participatory ELT**

The trend of teaching and ELT is keep changing time to time. Experts always try to make innovation of applications of teaching English as second language. Changes and innovations are needed in order to find a better pedagogic system and to be more professional in ELT. Sometimes, new ways of looking do not get appreciation by many people, at least at the first, they like more conventional things, and it happened in ELT as well. Recently, there are some discussions about Participatory English Language Teaching (PELT), whenever teacher and students are able to share power and come together in dialogue and mutual respect. This pedagogic system is considerable to reach the two components of English language pedagogy; cognitive abilities, and proficiency in English language.

Participatory teaching, like other kinds of communicative teaching, considers language

learning a social and cultural process, not something that happens to individuals in isolation. But it moves beyond to incorporate not only issues important to student's lives, but the way in which teachers and students relate to one another, the way in which teachers performs their roles, and the way in which the whole classroom environment contributes to transformational processes and meets student's needs. At its best, it can free students from society's negative labels, and it can empower them to assert more control over their own academic, social, political, and economic identities. (Amato, 2003. p. 71)

Pennycook (1999) calls participatory teaching the *pedagogy of engagement*. He stresses exclusivity and discussion of relevant issues. However, he reminds us that he is not talking about the *tired* social issues on which many classrooms focus. The issues need to have a *transformative* dimension that goes beyond the apolitical critical thinking familiar to all of us. For example they must be issue of investment and desire. Moreover, Pennycook argues that the pedagogy of engagement can not be reduced to simply another method or approach of to teaching. It involves a fundamental change in our attitude toward the teaching act itself.

Traditionally, interaction in the classroom has framed to three cycles; they are Initiation / Response / Feedback (IRF) paradigm. The teacher asks a question (the initiation), the student give the answer (the response), the teacher, more often than not, evaluates the answers (the feedback). Sometimes this method also can be called interactive teaching. It can be something like this:

Teacher : what is this? Do you remember? (points to a picture of a Lion)

Student (s): A Lion

Teacher : Yes, Very good...Do you know where does it live commonly?

Students (s): In the jungle

Teacher : Correct...What does it eat?.....

Student (s) : .....

Something different may occur in participatory ELT. Teachers in participatory classrooms are vitally interested in what students understand and what they are learning, they work to transform the discourse in all aspects of instruction, not only stop in initiation-response-and feedback. They encourage students to:

- Initiate topics and questions that are relevant to their own learning
- Move to other topics of interest or concern
- Investigate independently or with peers and / or the teacher
- Reflect on what they are learning

Two ways of communication must happen in participatory ELT simultaneously. Dialogues in which students have a personal stake and about which teacher and students have a mutual interest probably come close to what critical pedagogies intended. The knowledge that develops grows out of what the teacher and students can bring to the table. Both parties are highly motivated and enriched by the experience. One question or piece of knowledge followed by many others possible questions and answers.

### **3. *The Praiseworthy of Prose for Participatory ELT***

This research is framed by an idea that every good pedagogic system must be supported by good sources; human resources and material resources. We also must be honest there is no guarantee all pedagogic system can meet all competences required. The same thing also happen teaching materials, not all of teaching materials are supportable for all pedagogic system. This article will reveal how far prose can be a good teaching material or taken as a pivot in participatory ELT. The point of statement above will be deeply revealed in 5 praiseworthiness of prose and its relation with participatory ELT;

#### ***A. Prose is authentic.***

Prose can be the pivot for participatory ELT on its goodness of authenticity. Actually the basic and misleading assumption is that prose/fiction is an antonym of reality. If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other-fiction is a means of telling us something about reality. If it is not reality, this is not because it lacks the attributes of reality, but because it tells us something about reality and the conveyer can not be identical to what is conveyed.

Literature is generally regarded as fictitious writing, and indeed, the very term fiction implies that the words on the printed page are not meant to denote any given reality in empirical world, but are to represent something which is not given. For this reason, fiction and reality have always been classified as pure opposites, and so a good deal of confusion arises one seeks the reality of literature (Iser, 1987 : 53)

#### ***B. Prose can provide memorable contexts for the language.***

Prose using plotline and characters engages students emotionally as well as cognitively. As they become involved with the characters, they often become so absorbed that they, at least momentarily, lose the barriers generally associated with learning another language.

#### ***C. Prose illustrates appropriate language for specific situations.***

Through prose, students can learn what is acceptable and what is not in given situations. They learn the skills involved in turn-taking and what vocabulary and structures to use to get certain things accomplished in the new language.

#### ***D. Prose links students to other cultures and subcultures***

By reading *The Merchant of Venice*, for example students learn about the Jewish culture and its competition with

Christian. Literature can help students appreciate other people and their experiences. And when the prose comes from the students' first culture, it helps bridge a gap between the familiar and the new. Prose also can be a source of pride for students; they see their own values and traditions reflected in what they read. Not only has that, but literature often presented universal themes, conflicts, and experiences that can bring people together in harmony and mutual respect. There is a wise word said "Learning a language without knowing the culture is making fool ourselves". Through prose it is expected that student will comprehend the cultures.

*E. Prose presents topics for critical analysis, discussion, writing, and encourages*

*Performance*

Artistic creativity like literary work is not a fruit ready to be plucked, in order to enjoy it we have to continue a process which the artist himself did not complete. The adequate comprehension of an important work thus not only demands maturity, concentration, sensibility, a feeling for quality, and critical ability, but also presupposes an ability to complete and not merely reconstruct the artistic achievement. (Hauser, 1985: 441)

It encourages students to draw inferences, interpret, and explore personal, and social issues. The issues might include the racism found in *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd.

Let's compare the five components above with basic principles of participatory language teaching. It is clear that most of following basic principles of participatory ELT can be covered by prose as the pivot. 6 basic principles mentioned by Richard Amato are:

1. The starting point is the experience of the participants; their needs and concerns should be central to curriculum content.
2. Everyone teaches, everyone learns.

3. Classroom processes are dialogical and collaborative.
4. Individual experience is linked to social analysis.
5. The acquisition of skills and information is contextualized.
6. The contents go back to the social context.

Richard-Amato and Hansen 1995 also suggested three lessons activities for literature-based curriculum, they are: pre reading, reading and post reading. For pre reading activities, teacher guides student to conduct some activities; asking specific and open discussion question. For example, teachers' instruction could be like this: *Think about your own situation. Have you recently arrived on a distant shore? Try to imagine what it might be like to leave your home and live far away. What problems do people probably face in such situation?* Etc.

Teacher also may use graphic organizers, for example it is about teaching "positive habits". Consider five positive habits below and then develop a list of short stories that can be used by students to dig those ideas. For experience of students it is better to use both classical and popular short stories. Short stories are more preferable than novels because of limited time.

Positive habits	Classic text	Popular text
Honest		
Motivated		
Helpful		
Empathy		
Pious		

The next activities are called explicitly presenting key words, using prediction strategies and writing in journals. After reading and post reading activities, teacher may conduct discussion dealing with list of positive habits that have been listed. Students individually and in group need to contribute ideas.

All activities in participatory language teaching usually evolves from simple (often teacher fronted) interaction at beginning levels to full participation in complex classroom communities at intermediate to advanced levels. Something that teachers should remember is in order to apply participatory language teaching, teachers must not give up all traditional practices to establish participatory environment. Many simple practices like grammar instruction, repetition, spelling and so on still can be used, depending upon the proficiency levels that are going to be gained. Besides that, each participants, teacher and students consider the other to be an important source of knowledge and skills. Finally, Elsa Auerbach (2000) argues "Ideal participatory classrooms probably do not actually exist; they are always in the process of becoming". Something that teacher should realize is teachers do have power and will always have power, no matter how much they try to give it away.

### C. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

There are many alternatives and choices of pedagogic system and methods in achieving professionalism in ELT. Sometimes one method and approach can not meet all needs of language competence and language skill, just like a remedy that can not work for all kinds of health problems. For Participatory English Language Teaching PELT, prose is a good choice to be the pivot of it. Through this, teacher and students are able to share power and come together in dialogue and mutual respect. It is considerable to reach the two components of English language pedagogy; cognitive abilities, and proficiency in English language

This research still need more related researches in order to find more data, effective ways, and method of application of participatory ELT. All weaknesses of this article are expected going to be completed and revised by next researches who are interested in this problem.

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