Integrating Service-Learning into the English as a Foreign Language Class

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This paper is based on an explorative action research to find out how to integrate service-learning into the Written English IV class of the English Department and its possible impacts. It reveals the step by step procedure in implementing the service-learning, the activities carried out, and the challenges faced. The impacts viewed from the students' sharing, the lecturer's observation, and particularly the students' written reflection, indicated that participating in the service-learning brought some positive impacts on the students. Service-learning is, thus, worth-considering in different contexts of EFL settings.

Key words: Service-Learning, Written English, EFL class

Introduction

There has been an increasing awareness on the need for the integration of soft skills or character building into the classroom practice, despite the assumption that "campus emphasizes more on teaching than education" as expressed by the Indonesian former Head of Supreme Constitution, Mahfud MD, that it has been incapable of implementing morality, integrity, and credibility." (Surya, March 14, 2014, p. 24). Seminars, workshops, and training are executed to help develop students not only intellectually, but also mentally, spiritually and ethically. These, however, cannot be expected to yield optimal results without the attempt to lead students to experience by themselves, which is in line with experiential learning, through which students get involved in "direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it" (Keeton and Tate cited in Brown, 2001). If the students are supposed to be caring, as part of the motto of Petra Christian University, for example, they should get in context directly with the people they want to care for, and really do something for their benefit, which in turn will benefit the participants. In this way, education attends to the development of whole human beings.

One alternative to educate students as whole human beings is engaging students in community service that students are directly involved in serving others, particularly those who are in need of help that they have a chance to get along with people from different backgrounds as a group to work together to solve problems in achieving their goals. In this way students also learn to develop their interpersonal skills in getting along with their peers and in empathizing with those they serve. This kind of community service is especially fruitful when it is integrated in the syllabus design for the course work they are

taking, as service-learning integrated in the syllabus of the subject. This view has been shared by "educators around the world citing various reasons for developing and supporting programs of service-learning (Berry and Chrisholm, 1999, p.9). In addition, service work is considered "not only advantage the community but also its participants" (Hart, Matsuba and Atkins in Nucci and Narvaez, 2008, p. 484). This paper is based on an explorative action research to find out how to integrate community service into the syllabus of Written English 4 of the English Department as a service-learning, and to reveal the possible impacts on the participants. It reveals the step by step pocedure, from the planning to the implimentation, the challenges, the solutions, and the evaluation viewed from my observation and the students' sharing and written reflection, focusing on what the students have learned by participating in the Service Learning.

Service-learning is not a simple term to define. Furco (2003), even "claimed that there are over 200 different definitions of service-learning in use" (cited in Hart, Matsuba and Atkins, p. 486 in Nucci and Narvaez, Eds, 2008). However, it would be agreed that "service-learning involves both service to the community and learning tied to academic curriculum" (Billig and Waterman, eds., viii, 2008), which is in line with Berry and Chisholm's (1992, p.2) explanation referring to service learning as "the practice of joining formal education with volunteer community service". This means in teaching a subject with service-learning, community service and learning is integrated in the Basic Course Outline. In the English Department, for students who have considerable experience

and mastery in learning English as a foreign language, one possible service that they can do is to provide service in learning English for the basic level.

The theoretical root of service-learning can be traced to John Dewey's "progressive education" that "service can and should be introduced in the course of education as a means of instruction", although the term service-learning was not exactly stated by Dewey. (Rocheleau, 2004, p. 4 in Speck and Hoppe, eds). He argued that "knowledge is always an attempt to respond to one's situation in the world; it is a tool for getting around in the world" (Dewey, 1957, 1960 cited in Rocheleau, 2004, p. 4 in Speck and Hoppe, eds). Dewey's famous arguement (1963) was that education was "for, by and for experience", which suggests that "students' capacity to understand their world should be increased, that students learn by experience and that students should be prepared to deal with their future situations" (cited in Rocheleau, 2004, p. 4 in Speck and Hoppe, eds). This is closely related to Experiential learning, developed from "the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget", that emphasizes "the central role that experience plays in the learning process" (Knolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis, 1999, p 2). In the same way service-learning provides the participants the experience to interact with the community while serving the people involved, which in turn, benefits them in some ways. Hart, Matsuba and Atkins in their article on *The Moral and Civic Effects of Learning to Serve* (in Nucci and Narvaez, Eds., 2008, p.484) particularly put forth some empirical research findings on service-learning "related to moral and civic and behaviors" with "the

consensus" that "community service supports moral and character development". It was further pointed out the "effectiveness of service-learning" was found in "reduction of negative behaviors", "impacts on moral development", and civic engagement" (Hart, Matsuba and Atkins in Nucci and Narvaez, Eds., 2008, pp.487-489).

Service-Learning consists of several stages; some like Billig and Waterman suggest four stages: *planning, action, reflection, and celebration* (2008, p. viii), others follow five stages including "Investigation before Planning/Preparation, Action, Reflection, (abbreviated, IPARDE) followed by Demonstration" (Fisher, Online Institute). Whereas, The IPARDE Process in generation On adds one more stage, Evaluation stage after the Demonstration stage. Every stage is carried out under the guidance of the teacher, or in cooperation with the lecturer for the higher education students. Investigation is needed to "explore the community by asking questions, interviewing, collecting data, and identify a need". In the Planning/Preparation stage the students cooperate to "analyze the underlying problem and develop a plan for implementation". In the Action stage, the students "take action through direct service" following the planning, "using previously learned and newly acquired academic skills and knowledge". In the meantime, the students are supposed to "reflect before, during and after the service experience" to "think deeply" and "discuss thoughts and feelings" and "consider project improvement", to "receive feedback" and "evaluate the service learning process." Finally upon the completion of the program, Demonstration is to demonstrate "skills used and learned during service experience". This is the time for the participants to show what they have learned and also the chance for the students to see what they have contributed in the service, which can be considered a time for "Celebation" (Billig and Waterman, 2008, p. viii) for both sides, While the Evaluation stage as suggested in IPARDE process from generationOn is to "assess student learning and the service learning as a whole to identify successes and areas for improvement"

Methods

Doing an action research or "teacher research" (Root in Billig and Waterman, 2008, p. 155) concerning the integration of service learning into the academic syllabus involves both cyclical phases of action research–planning, action, observation, reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns, 2010, p.8) and six stages of service learning – Investigation, Planning, Action, Reflection, Demonstration, Evaluation (generation One) – as well as synchronizing the both processes.

It started with the Investigation stage to identify the community need possible to be the service focus, which was proceeded to the Planning stage in service-learning and Planning phase in Action Research. With the design of service agreed upon, the students implemented the action to serve, which was paralel to the Action Phase. The Reflection stage was to evaluate the service learning process which led to some modification in the activities for improvement. Meanwhile, as the

classroom lecturere and researcher, I observed the implementation of the Planning, the Action and Demonstration stage, as well as the students' reflection shared in the meetings. Upon the completion of the service, the students were led to evaluate their whole service learning, in the Evaluation stage, in their written reflection. The written reflection was analyzed, the result of which served as the input for the Reflection Phase of the Action Research for further improvement for the next phase or future research.

The subjects

The subjects were students of the Written English 4 of the English Department, who had obtained a onsiderable mastery of the English reading and writing skills. The service-learning was offered as an optional actvity for the students to get involved in serving primary school children who usually visited two of the four Community Reading Centers (*Taman Bacaan Masyarakat*) in the vicinity of the campus. Out of the fifteen students, there were five who volunteered to participate. The meetings with the group was thus held after the class meeting.

Procedure

It started from my reflection in teaching in the English Department, how to integrate service-learning in my subject of Written English 4 to help build the students' sense of caring and concern towards the community as suggested by the motto of the university as "a caring university". This was the starting point of the six stages of service-learning, which set me off for the Investigation stage and prepared for the first phase of Action research: Planning. The existing state of the Community Reading Centers in the vicinity of the university caught my attention. There were four Community Reading Centers in the vicinity of the campus with considerable facilities and reading materials; however, these reading centers had not been fully utilized as they were meant to be, which is "to cultivate reading interest in the community" as stated in the website (www.facebook.com/ pages/Taman-Bacaan-Siwalankerto). Children visiting the centers after school, as had been observed, were engaged in activities other than reading the books available there. It means that the Community Reading Centers had not functioned properly in accordance to the purpose of their establishment. There was, thus, the need to draw attention to the reading centers and promote their function as reading centers.

Since service-learning was not a compulsary program, it was offerred in the first meeting of my Written English 4 class as an optional enriching program, which resulted in five students, out of fifteen students, who willingly registered themselves. With this group of student voluteers, the following steps was carried out.

Planning.   The planning included the following steps: raising the students' social awareness, introducing service-learning, exploring what to do, finding out the target group, visiting and observing the target site, gathering information, and designing the kind of activities to serve the children.

The essential step to prepare the students for a Service-Learning is to raise the students' social awareness and to introduce service-learning with its essential elements to be followed. They were led to see there were people outside the campus and outside their homes who were in need of help. As students of the English Department, who had got three

semesters' training in reading and writing in English, they could help increase reading motivation and improve skills in reading. By way of questioning, they were led to see what they could share and whom they could serve. Given the information that there were four Community Reading Centers in the vicinity of the campus where they were studying, they were engaged in the discussion about the existing state of the Reading Centers and what they could do to help. Through the discussion, it was agreed to choose two Reading Centers and specifically the primary school children visitors as the target for the students' service

The second step was for the students to visit the Reading Centers and approach the officers in charge to find out the facility and the children books available in the Reading Center and the activities the children usually did there. This was followed by the setting of the goals and the activities to be implemented. The goals agreed upon were to motivate reading interest and to introduce some basic English through various kinds of activities for the children: listening to story telling, learning English words, coloring pictures with English wods, games, to be given in ten meetings. The students were divided into two groups, each serving one Community Reading Center, with the first group having three students and the second group two. With this kind of preparation, they were ready to set off for their service action.

Action. The meetings with the children at each Center were carried out on Friday, at 12:30 pm – 01:30 pm. Following their plans, they carried out the activities in each meeting, starting from introduction to get to know one another, introducing names of things in English, animals in English, reading Indonesian poems and Indonesian folk tales. Even though there were plans to follow in each meeting, the students usually met to evaluate what they had done and discuss what to do in the following meeting. For example, they added some basic understanding how to live healthily when they felt it was needed. They also had to prepare the material before each meeting, particularly they had to make sure that they gave a proper model to the children in terms of pronunciation particularly.

Each group had a favorable experience in their first experience; however, subsequently they had to face challenges due to the lack of responses, inactive participation, and problem students who liked to tease those who really wanted to learn. They tried to find ways to overcome the problems by varying the activities, giving incentives to attract the children to learn. Students shared their experience and discussed to solve the challenges and to bring more children coming to the Reading Centers.

The challenges gave rise to the idea to hold an Indonesian folklore reading contest to attract the children's interest in Indonesian folklore and to promote the Community Reading Centers, which had not been utilized optimally. Instead of continuing with the original plan, after the fifth meeting, it was agreed to hold a folk tale reading contest. This activity involved the students acting as the committee besides tutoring the participants. They helped to organize the reading contest, one helped the registration, another one

became the host of the contest, and another was responsible in documenting the contest and designing certificates for the participants, another coordinated the children, and the fifth one teamed up with me and another lecturer as a judge.

This folktale reading contest was opened to all children in the vicinity besides the visitors to the four Community Reading Centers to draw more attention to the Reading Centers. It proved to work well and attracted quite a lot of children to the Center to get some coaching how to read aloud. Held in cooperation with one of the Community Reading Centers, the reading contest was also supported by The Archives and Library of Surabaya City Government, providing trophies for the winners.

Reflection. The students kept their journal writing as a reflection on their performance in serving the children. It consisted of the weekly reflection and the overall reflection written after the completion of the whole program. They wrote about their experience in the meetings, the activities they had with the children, the favorable as well as the unfavorable experience. They enjoyed the fun activities and were pleased when they were given positive responses, and were, thus encouraged to move on. On the other hand, there were times when they had to face challenges, when the children were difficult to manage, when they showed sign of boredom, and when there were few children coming, and when they had to cancel the meeting because the Reading Center was not open, due to the absence of the person in charge. Reflecting on these problems, they tried to find ways to vary the activities, to attract the children to come to the meeting. Despite all the challenges, they also wrote what they personally had learned and gained from serving the children.

Demonstration/Celebration. The contest as the closing was a kind of demonstration/ celebration together, where the children took part in the contest showed what they had learned in the meetings. This contest was opened not only for those who participated in the meetings held at two of the four Communities found in the district of the campus, but also those visitors to the two others including those who had never visited the Reading Centers. There were 63 children participating in the contest. One of the Reading Centers became the coordinator for registration and provided the site for the contest and helped coordinating the program on the D-day. This activity, which also attracted the parents accompanying their children in the contest, was also attended by the representative from The Archives and Library of Surabaya City Government. The contest location was crowded with children and their parents. Although it started late and the contest lasted more than six hours, they were patient waiting for the turn to come up stage, and for the announcement of the winners. At the end of the program, the students were tired but excited that the contest was accomplished; particularly one of the participants that they coached became the second winner.

Evaluation. The evaluation of the whole program of service learning was based on the students' sharing and the written reflection in relation to the goals of the service to enhance the children's reading interest and promote the Community Reading Centers. The original plan to carry out ten meetings could not be

fulfilled under the circumstances that it was modified to an Indonesian folktale reading contest after the fifth meeting. In general, however, the service-learning was directed to reach the goals, to enhance the children's reading interest, promoting the Community Reading Centers. In addition, the Indonesian folktale reading contest also promoted Indonesian folklore in the community.

By having the chance to serve the children in the Community Centers, they showed their wholehearted effort in helping the children, not only related to their reading motivation and ability but also related to their health and good manners. They were taught to "keep their environment clean" and to have good manners "how to talk to old people", and "how to share and respect others".

They learned a new lesson in building relationship with the children from different backgrounds that they might not have known before. They learned "to be patient", "to control their emotion" in "managing the children", to "vary their activities to stimulate the children's interest". They also learned that some improvements could have been done to make the reading contest run more smoothly. They needed to have "a better time management". Carrying out a reading contest needed a longer preparation. Despite the challenges and limitations, they were proud to have participated in the Service-Learning as written in their reflection:

"I don't feel regret to teach them eventhough it cut off my free time. They are unique children, funny and smart, they want to learn and learn. I am so proud to teach them in service-learning"

"I was happy because I ever became a part of them to teach and play together with those children"

"I was so grateful because I have ability and passion to share what I have to others"

"This Service-Learning should be continued and followed by the other students in Petra Christian University"

The interaction with the children also gave them a chance to look at their own lives and be more thankful for what they had as expressed in the Reflection: "I also got some knowledge to be thankful to God about my life that I have now, because so many people do not get a better life or a good life"

Reflection. The reflection was based on my observation of the whole process, the students' sharing and their written reflection analyzed in relation to the objectives of integrating service-learning to promote students' sense of caring towards the community specifically focusing on the Community Reading Centers. These resulted in the following conclusions related to the impacts of service learning:

1. The students participating in the service-learning had the first hand experience in serving others. Internally, there developed a kind of care and compassion towards the children they served by attending to their health and manners besides teaching them to read.

2. By accomplishing the service learning, the students had a sense of achiecement, which made them proud, which might enhance their self esteem.

3. By interacting with children coming from a backgroud different from

the students', they learned to be more thankful for their own lives.

4.   Externally, they learned to face challenges, to overcome difficulties and to solve the problem together as a team and with their lecturer.

5.   They also learned to adapt themselves with the environment as well as to cooperate with their team member and accept differences. When they felt that their original plan was not going smoothly they were willing to modify and carried out the folk-reading contest as suggested.

6.   They learned to socialize with other people from different background and different age groups in the Community Reading Centers, with the people in charge, with the parents accompanying their children and with the

children who were sometimes noisy and not easy to control.

7.   They managed to build a good cooperation with the people in the Community Reading Centers that they expressed looking forward to the forth coming activity held in cooperation with them.

Anticipating the problems that might arise due to the low interest and attendance of the participants, the service-learning could have been better planned. Some kind of interesting closing event, such as a contest by the end of the program, could have been promoted since the beginning of the meeting. These also serve as inputs to be considered for further implementation of service learning in the academic setting.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Stimulated by the recent comment on the classroom practice and in line with the "caring" motto of the university, a service-learning to enhance character building was integrated in the course work of Written English 4. The process of service-learning was synchronized with the phases of action research to reveal the implementation of service-learning, and the impacts on the students.

Despite the shortcomings, this first-hand experience for the students to participate in a service-learning has been a rewarding experience for further development. The service-learning benefited the students participating in the program. They learned to be caring towards the children and the Reading Centers. They learned to handle the children to make their activity interesting to

attract them, which was a good practice for those who wanted to build their career in teaching children. They learned to work in team work, to face people from different backgrounds, which made them view their own lives more positively. It also brought some positive impacts on the Community Reading Centers, drawing attention of the children and their parents in the community. The service-learning also created a good cooperation between the English Department and the Community Reading Centers, smoothing the way to further service-learning in the community.

As the reflection on the service-learning revealed, service-learning is worth-considering in other EFL settings. With better preparation, it might yield more positive impacts on the community particularly on the

student participants. It would be better if the whole class students are involved in serving the community. It is an alternative possibility to make service-learning compulsory for every student, as it was later implemented in the University.

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