

CROSS CURRICULAR ENGLISH EDUCATION AND ITS POSSIBLE APPLICATION IN INDONESIAN CURRICULAR SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This article is about cross curricular English education viewed from its possible application in Indonesian curricular system. Cross curricular education can take place in the form of project work, thematic teaching and so on. In the Indonesian curricular system, cross curricular education manifests itself in bilingual education in which the medium of instruction is English. In junior and senior high schools this programs is better known as RSBI or SBI. Investigation in the field indicates that this program has been prematurely applied since some basic requirements of its application have not been met. Therefore, should this program be continued an investigation must be conducted to see which parts of the program should be modified, replaced, or even removed altogether.

Key Words: Curricular, education, RSBI, SBI, thematic, bilingual

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I attempt to present the notion of cross curricular teaching based on some materials available in the internet. The website articles to be reintroduced are among others the reports of Vogt, Zorro and Baracaldo, Deller and Price, Calabrese and Rampone, Mahisto, et al., and some unauthored reports of similar vein, such as 'Building Cross-Curricular Connections', 'From Cross-Curricular Planning to Tailoring for Learner Diversity' and 'Cross-Curricular Theme as Practically Useful to Exploit in an English Classroom with Nine-Year-Old Beginners'

To begin with, the notion of cross-curricular teaching will be defined. Then, the idea of cross-curricular thematic instruction will be highlighted. Cross-

curricular activities will be the next thing to be dealt with. Finally, a possible application of the idea of cross-curricular teaching in the Indonesian curricular system will be highlighted.

The discussion of the afore-mentioned notions of cross-curricular teaching will be elaborated in the following subsections.

THE NOTION OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TEACHING

According to [http://answers.com/Q/What is the definition for cross curricula_r](http://answers.com/Q/What_is_the_definition_for_cross_curricula_r), 'Cross curricular studies cut through traditional subject matter lines and explore relationships of subjects to one another'. Why do we have to engage ourselves in cross-curricular studies? Some of the reasons are the changing needs of

students as well as the complexity and diversity of curriculum planning. In relation with foreign language education, the role of a foreign language, i.e. English, is very important. In line with this, Vale and Feunteun (1995) assert, 'English is not an isolated educational issue. The child has needs in terms of learning'. They add that 'children need a lot of opportunity for review, recycling and consolidation of language, ideally through a variety of cross-curricular contexts (p. 66).

CROSS-CULTURAL IMPLEMENTATION IN THE FIELD

One of the realizations of cross-curricular education is by conducting cross-curricular projects (Roa et al., <http://apinilla-mvargas.doc>). This is a study conducted on elementary students, the aim of which is to analyze in what way children learn English through the implementation of cross-curricular projects. There are three research questions posed in this project:

(1) How do cross-curricular projects contribute to the process of English language learning in first graders? (2) How is children's learning expressed through the implementation of cross-curricular projects? (3) What kind of connections do children make between the content of curricula for elementary school and the projects developed in the EFL classes?

An elementary class was chosen to carry out the project. A natural process of learning involving all language skills together with a wide variety of guided and

free activities focusing on content rather than on language was taking place in the activity.

At the end of a one-year activity, the authors found out the answers to the previously mentioned questions:

- (1) 'cross-curricular projects is a way of learning English through content in which the target language is the vehicle of interaction and knowledge, not the subject of the study',
 - (2) 'children's learning is expressed by means of the transfer of activities done during the English class to daily lives; making connections across subjects; making inquiries to find cross-curricular relationships according to their experiences and using the language they know, like body language, drawings, written and spoken English and Spanish language',
 - (3) 'Children identified themselves as part of a community' and they 'talked about healthy habits and uses of water' which are topics that they had to study in their curricular.
- (2) Another example of cross-curricular activity done in the field is through cross-curricular thematic instruction (Vogt, in <http://eduplace.com/rdg/res/vogt.html>). The background of carrying out this activity is as follows:
- Teachers who use cross-curricular themes create active readers and writers by engaging students in authentic literacy tasks that emerge naturally from interesting and worthwhile topics and ideas. Authentic

tasks are defined as 'ones in which reading and writing serve a function for children ...' and which 'involve children in the immediate use of literacy for enjoyment and communication' (Hiebert, 1994, p. 391). They focus on student choice and ownership; extend beyond the classroom walls; involve a variety of reading and writing opportunities; promote discussion and collaboration; build upon students' interest, abilities, background, and language development (Hiebert, 1994; Paris et al., 1992). Cross-curricular themes integrate the language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and thinking) across a variety of content areas, such as science, social studies, art, and so forth (p. 1).

Integration of a wide variety of real life phenomena will give solid foundation for future need. Therefore, subject matters offered in school should be integrated to cater for the real world needs of the children. The reason for this is:

Because our lives require us to integrate what we have learned in an interdisciplinary manner, teaching children through merged disciplines better prepare them for applying new knowledge and understanding. Additionally, when students view their learning as having personal relevance, they put more effort into their schoolwork and achievement (Willis, 1995).

Through cross-curricular thematic instruction, as Vogt (p. 2) claims, students will be facilitated in:

- acquiring, communicating, and investigating worthwhile knowledge in depth,
- integrating and enriching the language processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking,
- practicing reading different kinds of materials for varied purposes,
- using prior knowledge of the world and past experiences with language and text to create relationships among various sources of information,
- making choices, interacting, collaborating, and cooperating,
- applying what they learn in meaningful and 'real world' contexts,
- informally assessing their understanding and application of what they are learning,
- participating and learning, regardless of ability, level of language development, or background, and
- learning effectively in self-contained, multi-age, or departmental classrooms.

In the context of learning through cross-curricular activities as suggested by Roa et al. and Vogt in which the language of instruction is not the children's native language, but a foreign language, working out cross-curricular activities in a curriculum agenda may not run smoothly. They are bound to face no end of constraints and hindrances. Let's take the case of Indonesian curriculum as a point of discussion.

CROSS-CURRICULAR IDEAS IN INDONESIAN CURRICULAR SYSTEM

Nowadays, the idea of teaching through cross-curricular method has been mushrooming. This is done under the name of RSBI (Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional/Pilot of International Standard School) (Kompas, 2011) which is then, after some time, promoted to become SBI (Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional) or International Standard School. Though, not exactly the same as the activities conducted by Roa et al. and Vogt, in a more or less similar nature, SBI attempts to present limited content subjects with English as a medium of instruction. This has been massively promoted to the extent that a lot of schools propose and some claim that they are schools of international standard. At a closer investigation in the field, their claim is far from justifiable. As we can readily see, that SBI is just a name, a popular one. The aim of establishing SBI is often times not based on scientific, educational nor pedagogical foundation. To say the least, SBI is a popular label which attracts rich parents to send their children to a particular school. On the other hand, the school tries to benefit from this situation to raise funds, of course for the development of that particular school. This idea is not wrong if things required for establishing SBI has been adequately met. However, the case indicates otherwise.

It goes without saying that the essence of SBI is fine and it should be promoted so that our educational condition enables our

children to face the globalized future. However, to engage ourselves in this business, some necessary preliminary preparations must be undertaken. We have to conduct an analysis to see what constraints and difficulties if cross-curricular type of teaching is introduced. If we are honest with ourselves, there are some problems which have to be fixed first, among others:

- (1) the availability of teachers capable of handing cross-curricular classes,
- (2) the availability of textbooks for classroom teaching and learning,
- (3) the relevancy of the program with national learning assessment,
- (4) the readiness of students to learn content courses using English,
- (5) the financial support needed to run the program, etc.

These are among other things that we have to ponder and seek the answers. There are of course more problems in the field looming large. Let's elaborate the problems one by one.

First, a lot of things can be retold with regard to teacher preparation. Instant programs of creating bilingual teachers are the current trend taking place at some school wishing to be labeled RSBI or even SBI. Facts in the field clearly demonstrated that the participants of English training for non-English teachers have been less than enthusiastic. More often than not, the participants are not regular attendants. For some reason or others, different faces appeared in each session. Anyway,

commitment to set SBI is not concretely supported by a key element to the program. Participation in the training process cannot be said to be encouraging nor adequate for bilingual teachers, who are supposed to deliver their content knowledge in English. At the end of the day, with their foreign language capability which is far from being enough, they are forced to act like English teachers with extra burden; the burden of transferring content knowledge in English to their students who in turn also have numerous problems of their own.

If there is strong commitment not only from the headmasters but also on the part of the elected bilingual teachers, cross-curricular program will be realistic. Of course training these teachers in English in a systematic manner is a must and prerequisite to setting up SBI program. This training should be conducted seriously and responsibly until a desired result is achieved prior to really running SBI program.

Second, not less important than the first problem is the provision of bilingual textbooks, designed for students whose command of English is disheartening. Who is then supposed to write the textbooks? Do these bilingual teachers have to do the job? Are they capable of doing so in terms of time, fund and linguistic knowledge? Is the government willing to provide fund? Problems of this kind should be premeditated by the authority prior to carrying out this ambitious program.

Third, besides textbooks, another problem appears. This has something to do with evaluation. How will the cross-curricular program be evaluated especially in comparison with the regular program? Another problem related to this is the questions whether the national school examination is commensurate with the material presented in bilingual program—with test items presented in English? If there is no consistency between the bilingual program with the test type, what the teachers and students have done in the SBI program will be questionable. This is a problem worth pondering.

Fourth, should the cross-curricular/bilingual program be carried out, are the students, the majority of whom do not master English either at listening, reading, speaking as well as writing level required to do everything in English during the bilingual classrooms? What kind of students who are liable to attend SBI classes is another thing posing another complex problem. Does every student in the SBI school has the right to attend the program? Is the student recruitment for this program based on merit or based on parents' wealth? Related to this, how many bilingual teachers are needed to run the program? Problems of this kind should be sorted out before a school is labeled SBI?

Fifth, another problem is about funding. Is the school capable of running the program without collecting money from parents? Money is a fundamental element for any program to be successfully carried

out. Preparation for non-curricular teachers, textbooks, teaching media, all cannot be separated from financial provision. So far, what has been practiced by certain schools in running a bilingual program has been collecting fund from parents. This is of course against the nine-year free education stipulated by the educational policy makers.

As a matter of fact, for the time being there are more problems outweighing the goodness of cross-curricular or bilingual program. These predicted problems are things outlined by Mehisto et al. (<http://eltj.oxfordjournal.org/content/63/3/275>, p1) asserting that 'At classroom level, however, CLIL teachers face a number of obstacles including a lack of training, a poorly defined methodology, and a scarcity of materials.' Problem number 1 seems to be the first thing to be fixed. Without a strong commitment of content teachers to improve their English language and the willingness to do more than just becoming teachers, the next problems are irrelevant to talk about. But when teachers are committed, other things can be sorted out in some way or other.

Recently, there have been numerous criticisms voiced by a number of knowledgeable experts against the practice of RSBI and SBI in Indonesia. At least, these criticisms have been issued in a well-known national newspaper, KOMPAS, for three successive days, 17, 18, and 19 March, 2011. All three articles are voicing disagreement and concern over the

carrying out of SBI program which are increasing in number, while the real practice in the field is deviating from the original concept of SBI foundation.

CONCLUSION

From what has been briefly discussed in the previous sections, two brief conclusions can be offered.

First, cross-curricular teaching is a kind of teaching content areas using language/a foreign language as the vehicle of instruction. Various programs can be conducted, such as by creating project work, cross-curricular thematic instruction, bilingual program etc.

Second, facts from the literature show that cross-curricular activities have gained various kinds of success. However, in Indonesia cross-curricular program commonly labeled bilingual program needs to be strengthened, adequately implemented, and rightly evaluated. If problems raised above are not dealt with, bilingual program is just 'building a castle in the sky', or at least it will not be as effective and fruitful as it is expected.

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