Learning about ICT and implementing it in English language classroom: an autoethnography study

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Abstract: This paper discusses an autoethnography study on an English language teacher (Linda) experiences in trying to implement what she learned on the use of ICT in her professional context during 2005 - 2009. This personal narrative is a therapeutic way to explore her past experiences on practicing what she has learnt regarding the use of ICT in the classroom. What material base that constitutes these practices is explored in this paper. The paper begins by outlining the purpose of writing this autoethnography, followed by the teacher's personal accounts related to the formation of her belief in the potential of ICT, her professional learning journey and her efforts in integrating ICT-based pedagogy in her professional context are highlighted. This paper concludes with a discussion of the meaning behind these experiences by drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as the framework of analysis.

Keywords: *autoethnography, ICT-related professional learning, ICT integration, field, habitus, capital*

. . . writing a personal narrative is perhaps worth a try because the prize is very great: that of some degree of transcendence of difference, of reaffirmation of common humanity (Pat Caplan, 1997: 17).

1 INTRODUCTION

Reality for Linda is social since the way she act is influenced by a web of social relations with the other actors in my social group. She is a member of a social group that has its own culture that she often does not question it because she sees it as simply how the world is, something that she takes for granted. Autoethnography allows researchers to draw on personal experiences as research data. It provides a tool to connect the personal to the cultural (Grbich, 2007) because the self is socially constructed. Personal stories necessarily involve and depend upon others. It is thus possible to learn about the general from the particular (Walford, 2004, p. 412). The purpose of making this connection is to create valuable knowledge that reveals taken-for-granted assumptions that have occupied one's self and her or his practices.

The significance of looking at Linda's personal experience from a critical perspective will aid in reflecting upon her pedagogical practices concerning the use of ICT. ICT integration efforts in educational context involve theory of change. In practice, change is in fact a complex

endeavour. This study is her personal attempt to better understand this complex process of ICT integration within her professional context.

2   HOW IT ALL STARTED

The problems with English language learning and teaching in Indonesian context (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Exley, 2004; Lengkanawati, 2004; Lie, 2007; Marcellino, 2008) do happen in Linda's professional context. She has been teaching in a university in Yogyakarta since 2005. This university was originated from a teacher training institution. It aims to produce qualified teachers who can respond to the challenges of the future.

The English language and education department (ELED) in this university has around 250 new students' intake every year. Students need to take topics on Linguistics, language skills, teaching methodologies, general education, teaching practicum, and write undergraduate thesis in order to earn Bachelor of Education degree which entitles them to teach English language in primary and secondary/middle schools.   ELED has a heavily packed curriculum which requires students to take ten topics each semester. There are fifty academic staff in ELED and each of them has to teach twelve to fifteen classes per week.

In the last few years, the dean has required all of the departments within the Faculty to have only twenty-five students in each class. However, some classes can have more than forty students' due to the addition of those students who do not pass certain topics in the previous semester. Text-book and teacher-centered activities are still common practices in Linda's department.

In general, Linda and her colleagues are not quite happy with their students' English language communicative ability. Only a handful of students are willing to have a go in expressing themselves during classes. Many students fail in some topics and have to retake those topics. Linda observes their performance during peer-teaching topic and teaching practicum, as well as there are concerns from classroom teachers who made comments about her students' speaking skill during teaching practicum. Many of her students also take longer than four years to graduate because they are struggling with writing their undergraduate thesis both in terms of language and content.

Linda remembers having lots of fun listening to actors' conversations in television series and movies, repeating expressions that were 'cool' while matching them with the subtitles. She sang the lyrics of her favorite songs in the radio or cassette player years ago before online technologies were highly developed. Back to the time when ICQ was a hit (around 1996), She chatted with people from some parts of the world about family, food, education, about culture. Through these activities, she learnt a lot about English pronunciation and expressions and managed to have good marks for her English tests in her secondary school years and obtained her B.Ed degree in English language and education without much difficulty regarding the use of English language. She even managed to earn some pocket money by working part-time at a boutique hotel where 90% of its guests were foreigners as a guest relation officer because she could speak English well.

When Linda was assigned to teach Pronunciation classes and Phonetics and Phonology classes, online dictionaries were still not as advanced as today where people can hear how the word is pronounced in addition to its definition. At that time, she often visited the International Phonetics Association website to collect teaching materials and her own personal learning purposes. She realized that she is not a native speaker of English, with this website she could hear how each phonetic symbol was pronounced by clicking it and watching short clips of the movement of the articulation places in the mouth. She does believe that ICT has the potentials to enhance English language learning.

3 THE LEARNING JOURNEY

University wide, academic staffs are encouraged to use ICT. The rector, in some of his speeches, has raised attention on the university's plan to become a research-based and paperless university and urged the use of ICT throughout university life. Professional developments are provided by the university to help faculty members use ICT for teaching purposes. Linda took two courses, one was about using video for teaching and the other was about using the university's e-learning platform. She knows how to make video and how to upload files and use other features in the university's e-learning platform then. However, she was not sure she knows how to use them well in her classroom. In her speaking class, she asked her students to work in groups of four, write a story board, and video-tape them performing the scenario. She gave her assessment based on the video clips that they submitted to her on disc, and on flash drives. Sending those clips via email was not a good idea at that

time (2005) since it took too long to upload the file. So, she had to face the risk of her laptop being infected with virus. She did install an anti-virus program, but it was a free version which had limited capabilities in virus protection. She also uploaded some of her topic materials in the university e-learning platform.

In 2006 to 2007, she had an opportunity to pursue further knowledge in the use of ICT in education in an Australian university. In addition to written essays, many of the assignments required the students to create an artefact (ie. design-brief and Logo) that could be used in students' professional context. When she was preparing for the design-brief, she thought about the problems that her students often experience in her Pronunciation classes. She searched for academic articles about learning and teaching speaking and pronunciation in the Internet. She also had to consider the ICT resources that were available in ELED. The next step was to design lesson plans that showed an integration of the Internet and Powerpoint in enhancing my students' learning experiences in Pronunciation class. She planned for activities that put her students to work in groups of three. She provided them with a list of websites on English as a foreign language. Two meetings were designed to show them how to use the Internet and access the websites as well as how to create Powerpoint slides. Then, they needed to choose six sounds that were the most problematic for them which they could consult these with the websites. Creating Powerpoint slides would follow. In the slides, they should include the reasons why they selected those sounds, find English words that contain each of the sound and three short paragraphs with sentences that contained the use of some or all of the six sounds in

the words. They also needed to insert the recording of themselves pronouncing the words and reading each paragraph out loud in the Powerpoint slides. Two meetings were set aside for each group to present their slides in front of the class. After each group's presentation, the whole class would be divided in groups of four or five to practice the pronunciation of the six sounds with each of the presenter became the leader of the practice (as they had become 'the expert' of the pronunciation of the sounds).

4 THE IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

After completing her Master degree study, Linda returned to her teaching position at ELED in August 2007. She soon found herself in hectic schedules of teaching many classes, supervising teaching practicum, writing publications, and some community engagement work. All these did not prevent her from trying to use ICT in her classrooms.

Linda's faculty has two language laboratories and one internet connected computer laboratory with twenty-five desktops that have to be shared by six departments including ELED. The computer laboratory has been used only for listening classes because of that reason. Our classes are not equipped with a computer but there is an LCD projector in each class, an internet outlet, and Wi-Fi connection. All academic staff has their own personal laptop and it is becoming more common to see students working with their laptops in the halls outside class hours.

Linda went to see the administrative staff who was responsible for scheduling the computer laboratory to ask whether he could find slots for all of her language skills classes (not only listening) to use the lab. When this was not possible at all, she went to see another person in charge at the university level to ask for permission to use the university's computer room.

Linda tried to implement the design-brief that she wrote as one of the assignments during her study. She asked her students to collaboratively process the information they get from the Internet and create an artefact (ie. Powerpoint slides) as a product of their learning processes. In Listening class, she asked students to check a list of podcasts for English language learning. In the beginning of the semester, they had practiced together on activities that need to be done before, while, and after the listening. As the class progress through the semester, students worked in pairs and chose their listening text from the podcasts' collection. After they finished with the before, while and after listening, they shared with the class the main message of the text, their opinion regarding the topic, and words or expressions, and cultural aspects that were new to them.

Things did not always run smoothly though. Power failure, slow internet connection, and desktops not working properly were their common obstacles. Linda was also overwhelmed with the amount of additional work and time that she had to devote for preparing the lessons, as well as the chaotic atmosphere that happened during classes with students asking loads of questions. When there was no power or desperate internet connection, she asked her students to work with pen and paper to brain storm and mind map

ideas, and to write a section that need to be presented on the blog or the Powerpoint slides. However, these alternatives could not be done in the Listening class. She allowed her students to bring their own devices in order to address the problem of lack of equipment in ELED.

Teaching language skills classes is a must for each faculty member. In addition, they have their own specialized subjects. Linda's are English Instructional Technology (EIT) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Methodology. EIT is the only topic where educational technology is introduced to her students. As a junior faculty member, she needs to conform to the syllabus designed by a senior lecturer, a professor. Students are required to write a lesson plan and develop instructional media for evaluation of the learning outcomes. There is hardly any room to introduce students to the use of ICT in English language classrooms. With so many materials she needs to cover as dictated by the syllabus, she gave in to the lecture mode of delivering the topic.

Trying to save time finding slots in her computer laboratory, in a staff meeting she came up with a suggestion for ELED to equip each classroom with a set of desktops that was connected to the internet rather than spending the department budget for hosting another local or national seminar this year. One of the senior colleagues who happened to be an associate professor responded with sarcasm, *"Well yea, what about the security issue? Our building is not safe from thieves"*. And everyone in the room was just laughing. That was it. End of question. No room for discussing alternative ways to address this security problem.

In September 2009, Linda received a two-week short course scholarship to learn about the competency-based learning in Ede, The Netherlands. One of the activities was a trip to a teacher training institution in a town nearby Ede. She learned about the ePortfolio that the student teachers there had to compile during the process of their teaching practicum. Back home in a staff meeting, she shared this idea of implementing ePortfolio for her students' assessment during teaching practicum since it could capture more complete process of the students learning. In addition to merely reporting and documenting everything that they had done, ePortfolio allowed students to reflect on their experiences (Arap, 2007; Finger & Jamieson-Proctor, 2009). Once again, she finds herself 'sidelined and silenced' when another senior colleague snapped at her by pointing to Linda, her tendency to be 'westernized' and technology-deterministic. There was no chance to explore the conditions of possibility for implementing this idea on ePortfolio. Her other colleagues were silent as well. She knew that the majority of the faculty members was not against ICT integration since they had used ICT every day to support their personal work, but they are not active for more effective ICT integration to enhance their students' learning either.

Her new assignments as an assessor and instructor at the national teacher certification program as well as an appointment to join the Directorate of Junior High School Quality Assurance's national team of teacher instructors in addition to her responsibilities in ELED did not dishearten her motivation in using ICT in her classes. She could see that her

students were more engaged in their learning and she enjoyed listening to their comments on the fun they had during her English language skills classes. It was her colleagues' resentment and indifferences that had placed doubts in her. It takes a village to raise a child. Could she raise this child just by herself?

5 A PATH TO THE UNDERSTANDING

Research (Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996; Felix, 2003; Kern, Ware, Warschauer, 2008) shows that ICT facilitates authentic cultural context and collaborative and meaningful human interactions. It promotes student autonomy, creates equal classroom participation, and provides opportunities for reflection. ICT can also increase motivation for language practice and encourage greater involvement of students who rarely participated in oral discussions. In short, ICT can enhance the development of students' language skills, writing ability and speaking ability.

For ICT to positively influence student learning, there should be changes in classroom practices. Teachers' ability to design learning environments with authentic learning tasks that utilize ICT as a tool where students are engaged in collaborative activities to solve real-world problems that address individual student's learning needs and interest are essential to successful ICT integration (Felix, 2003). Extensive teacher training in ICT-based pedagogy is essential to assist teachers to bring about changes in their use of ICT in the classroom (Jung & Latchem, 2011).

Linda's in-house training on video-making and eLearning platform simply emphasized the technological aspect of ICT integration. This type of trainings fails to address the facts that the participants of the programs teach different levels and different subjects (Harris, Mishra, Koehler, 2009). These programs also do not take into account the variation among different disciplines (Koehler & Mishra, 2008) and each participant's unique classroom situation (Harris, Mishra, Koehler, 2009). Linda learned how to use the technology hardware and software, but it was not adequate to change her classroom practices. she still did the old ways with the new technology (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001).

Successful ICT integration in the classroom needs to be connected with curriculum and classroom context, facilitates deep learning, and uses constructivist teaching approach (Conole, 2008). Teachers' ICT-related professional learning experiences need to be based on a framework that is developed to enhance teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). TPACK involves "an understanding of how to represent concepts with technologies, pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help students learn; knowledge of students' prior knowledge and theories of epistemology; and knowledge of how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge and to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones" (Mishra & Koehler, 2008, p. 10).

Teachers' professional learning experiences that use learning-by-design approach is believed to enhance teachers' TPACK (Koehler & Mishra, 2005). The

principles of social constructivism or constructionism, problem-based learning, and community of practice are also reflected in this approach. The participants actively construct their knowledge on a particular topic with the help of their peers by creating artefacts (such as online courses, digital video, podcasts) to be used in their own classroom and meet their teaching goals. It focuses teachers' attention on a problem they might encounter in their practice; then they work collaboratively with other participants to investigate the ways in which technology can be used to address the problem. Design projects lead to sustained inquiry and revision of ideas (Koehler and Mishra, 2005). Learning in this kind of environment happens informally and within the immediate context of the participants which results in deeper understanding of the topic. The length of the program is extended than the traditional one-shot type of training, the activities to solve the 'real-world' problems are learner centered, interdisciplinary, and 'ill-structured' where there can be more than one solution to the problem (Koehler & Mishra, 2005). This kind of learning environment required a pedagogical shift on the role of the learners and the teacher/instructor. The learners have to be like an 'apprentice' who investigate the problem and find solutions with the help of their peers (who might have more or less knowledge on the topic under investigation) in the actual context of practice. The teachers/instructors assist learners to understand the content, provide them with feedback, mentoring and coaching, and manage the learning context and setting. They no longer become the main source of information who transmit their knowledge to their students.

Through a longer professional development in the form of postgraduate study where Linda was immersed in rich learning resource, learning-by-design classroom activities, academic conversation with fellow students, lecturers and professional mailing-lists, Linda discovered that her early application of ICT adopted a technocentric view toward technology (Oliver, 2011) and she learnt to develop a more holistic perspective of ICT integration in her English language classroom (Van Olphen, 2008). She did change her practices regarding the use of ICT in the classroom.

The sustainability of such change, however, is being questioned in Linda's case. To fully understand this, Pierre Bourdieu's field theory will assist in unpacking the power relation within her professional context and explain how the process of integration and disintegration can take place. As a theoretical construct, field theory consists of the elements of field, capital, and habitus (Bourdieu, 1983).

According to Bourdieu,

"A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies" (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 40-41).

The struggle within this field to own a legitimate mode of cultural production goes hand in hand with the struggle within the dominant class to defend their own position. Each agent in the field develops a disposition, a habitus. Habitus is "a concept that expresses, on the one hand, the way in which individuals 'become themselves' – develop attitudes and dispositions – and, on the other hand, the ways in which those individuals engage in practices" (Webb et al 2002, p. xii). The notion of habitus is perhaps best understood as Bourdieu's theory of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in which he extends the notion of capital from accumulation of wealth to cultural and social capitals. Cultural capital includes, for examples, long lasting dispositions of the mind and body, forms of cultural goods, and educational qualifications. Social capital consists of resources that give access to a network of institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Group memberships and credentials are some of the examples.

Linda's classroom ICT-based pedagogy practices are a result of her social interaction with the actors or players within her context as illustrated in Figure 1. How she reacts within this field is down to habitus which is a result of her personal history, preferences and disposition. She is lucky because her parents could support her with different types of technologies to help her learned English during her time as a student, which had led her to believe that ICT is potential in enhancing English language learning. The ICT-related trainings offered by her university increase her technological knowledge on ICT integration, while her ICT-learning experiences during her postgraduate study contribute to development of her

technological and pedagogical content knowledge which influence the change in her ICT-based pedagogical practices.
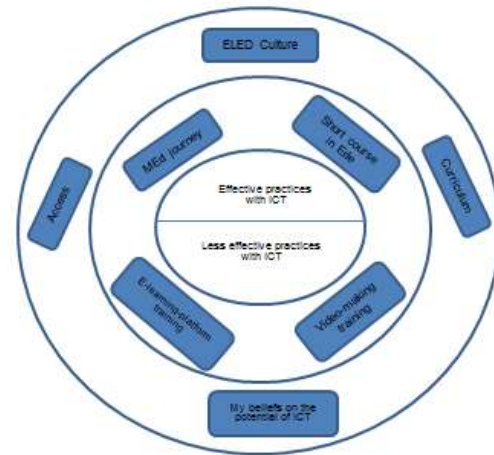

Figure 1. The field of my ICT-based pedagogical practice.

ELED operates on a particular structure which often presents her with barriers with implementing ICT in her classroom. Even though she could find alternative ways within the structure of ELED in order to integrate ICT, the other players within ELED appear to preserve the structure of relation of forces by using their power to impose their views. Because of their age, experience, and academic qualifications, the senior lecturers form a group which represented the voice of authority in staff meetings and played a critical role in setting the boundaries of any discussion. Henry and Tator (2005: 105–6) call this group the 'dominant elite'. These people did not consider Linda as the staff who had the authority, legitimation and trustworthiness to speak on any issue. They defined the approved discourse on any topic and delegitimized those who have different view or argument to resist change and justify preserving the institutionalized practice in the ELED system.

Linda was weakened by the conversations she had in the staff meetings. It is like she was prisoned by their logic

and authoritative voice. The silence of her other colleagues showed that her belief in ICT integration within ELED context was not affirmed and validated. This eroded the identity of investment she had tried to make to 'whole-department' ICT integration. She has not changed her beliefs about the values of effective ICT integration. She just felt tired of fighting against the brick wall and she needed to take a rest. Her decision to pursue further study to get her Doctorate degree came at just about the right time.

5   CONCLUSION

Linda has experienced both traditional and contemporary professional development on how to use ICT in her pedagogical practices. In addition, she also develops a positive attitude and belief towards ICT and the importance of related knowledge and skills. However, an institution and its members are never free- agents in their decision to take a certain action. In terms of technology integration, her implementation journey shows that the power relation within the culture of her instution plays a crucial role in influencing the sustainability of change regarding the use of ICT for learning and teaching purposes.

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