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Critical look at situation analysis of Jack. C. Richards: A post-modernist view

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Abstract

Jack C. Richards in his book entitled the \textit{curriculum development in language teaching} (2001), touches upon the situational analysis in the curriculum design and development. Macalister, & Nation (2010) further discuss environmental analysis, but it seems that their analysis is whether too general or vague. What this paper is looking for is a criticism of Richards’ general view on situation analysis and his overlooking of the critical aspect of post-modern pedagogy. Moreover, this paper is going to insert the post-modernists’ views on situational analysis and make an improvement over Richards’ (2001) proposal on situational analysis. The post-modernist situational analysis will focus beyond method approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) as well as the provision of mobile assisted language learning (MALL), or computer assisted language learning (CALL) and distance learning in education, without which the new millennium in TEFL makes less sense.

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\textit{Keywords:} situational analysis; curriculum; postmodernist views

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the impacts of some situational factors toward the curriculum development based on chapter four of Richards’s book “\textit{Curriculum Development in Language Teaching}” (2000). Curriculum is changing in line with the challenging of contemporary era. Curriculum as a set of education which should be prepared by considering some factors that influence the curriculum itself. Factors mentioned by Richards are societal, project, institutional, teacher, learner, and implementation ones. By referring to related references, this article provides comprehensible outlook on the issues of situational factors related to curriculum. We briefly summarize the factors

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by Richards and then exert the post-method situation analysis and factors affecting the curriculum from a post-method perspective.

2. Review of the literature

The first part of the literature review deals with the Jack C. Richards situational analysis. Then the second part tackles the issue of post-modernistic views on curriculum design in the classroom. The first factor affecting a curriculum mentioned by Richards is the societal one. Since English becomes international language, English learning has been part of education curriculum in every country in the world. English in some countries has status as second language and some as foreign language. Such status makes those countries treat English learning differently in terms of the curriculum. Some of societal factors that affect curriculum development include the policies of language teaching which exist in the society created by the curriculum developers, the underlying reasons for the project and those who support it, the language teaching experience and traditions, the society’s views, the teachers’ views, the employers’ and business community’s views, the available human resources (teachers’ ability), natural resources and media.

The second factor by Richards is the project ones. A curriculum development process is also affected by some factors related to the project itself including the human resources, natural resources, and financial resources that affect the planning implementing the curriculum. Related to decisions, the developer should pay attention in determining the setting aims and objective of the curriculum, the content and the strategies in implementing the curriculum (Miller and Seller, 1985:12).

Postmodern schooling is a means of connecting students and teachers, space and time, meaning and context, the knower and the known, humanities and sciences, and especially past, present, and future (Slattery, 2006, p. 293). Slattery in his book on Post-modern curriculum has deliberately touches upon many cases of the post modern world of possibilities in curriculum design. Slattery talks about the postmodern ELT curriculum and syllabus in terms of the following cases. Some more factors are mentioned here which really need attention by scholars and curriculum developers. The post-method curriculum should redirect schooling to the development of autobiographical, aesthetic, and intuitive experience, and the socio-cultural and socio-political relations emerging from an understanding of the individual in relation to knowledge, other learners, the world, and ultimately the self the forgotten cases in Richards’s factors. It should also be noted that such determination in post-modern curriculum is easy-said than done.

Breen (1999) discussing the postmodern ELT curriculum and syllabus, reiterates that the curriculum designer needs to have a wide view of the pedagogy of the language classroom which necessitates questioning absolutes, welcoming ambiguity, accepting uncertainties, participating in different and new discourses, exploring other identities, studying local and other cultures, creating and negotiating and finally surfing technological sources.

It is also important to interrogate “historical, cultural, and linguistic assumptions” into education (Russell, 2003, p. 95). Biases and assumptions and our interpretation regarding the curriculum are important in developing the curriculum. Our immediate vision is limited by our own historical conditioning and the belief set we have on notions (Graham, 1991). Hooks believe that we need to see ourselves clearly as we really are that “clarity is a source of our strength” (Hooks, 2002, p. 139). We are influenced by race, gender and class positioning (Hurren, 2003; Campbell &Gregor, 2002). Campbell and Gregor (2002) state that, we interact with the world in which we inhabit and know about (p. 23). Slattery states that the Muslim students in the US asked for a one day holiday for the Month of Ramadan celebration. Alongside all the view and characteristics Cary (2006) raises the issue of abnormal variables pointing to some of the exceptionalities in a classroom context and believes that they too are required to be in a post-modernist curriculum. These variables include bodies of those people related to education being considered deviant, or outside the norm. Another topic not favoured by the native speakers is the hegemonic role of English.

McLaren (1998) states that hegemony refers to the maintenance of the domination; It is an image in which the values and beliefs of the dominant class appear so correct that to reject them would be unnatural, a violation of common sense. The same objection is raised against Richards. No one asks about the hegemony of English itself.
Further to Habermas, the prejudice and hegemony are linked together. So as curriculum development in the postmodern era deconstructs prejudice and hegemony by challenging the dominance of logical positivism in the study of history and other fields where some are regarded as saints or infallible norms. In post modern view of curriculum beside the talents, interests and autobiographical reflections the students voice needs to be heard (Habemas, 1970). Moreover related to the bias and assumptions is again the history and culture issue. Bahmueller (1991) states that, the schools are full of curriculum materials that promote critical thinking. Studying these materials reveals that history and culture play paramount role in shaping such thinking. These curriculum materials are nothing but critical exercises, because they contain predetermined answers, narrow methodologies, and/or political agendas designed to assimilate students into the hegemonic socio-cultural worldview. No one can exclude the religion from the history or culture of a society. However, it has been suggested that curriculum development in the postmodern era must include such autobiographical testimonies of many people from all religions, spiritualities, and cultures to help us understand — not convert or condemn — the rich diversity of our community (Slattery, 2006). Richards in his situation analysis has no mention of religion. I think the religion role has great consequences when being talked about as many people are biased in their religion. All in all, I think we need to make our school system aware.

We must educate ourselves and our students about issues of hopelessness, poverty, gender and sexual bias, dislocation and exploitation of workers, environmental racism, corporate scandal, violence, and ecological devastation that plague the entire global community and contribute to the decay of the social milieu of schools. Besides we need to explore conscious and unconscious emotions such as fear, visceral loathing, and disgust (Edgerton, 2001, p. 3). Attached to awareness issue on every angle of the society is the race and gender topic.

This issue in turn roots in the democratic education which deals with creating a democratic educational vision that provides hope for all teachers and students and is central to critical theory. Some of the specific questions and concerns that are raised in the process of developing this vision include the following: How do students acquire knowledge in schools? Is knowledge reproduced in schools to support the status quo systems of inequity? How can the learners be involved equally in curriculum as democratic citizens? It has been cautioned that the realities of a global crisis, changes in political arena and social alternations necessitate reforms in the curriculum and education (Asmah, 1992).

2.1. Criticism on postmodernism

Although this paper was intended as a criticism on the shortcomings of Richards’s situation analysis, it presents the criticism even on the post-modern analysis. Many criticisms have been leveled at postmodernism which can be applied equally to the work of Foucault and postmodern perspectives on the hidden curriculum. Critical theorists, especially of a Marxist persuasion, point to the lack of an adequate analysis of power in postmodern accounts. The postmodern view that power is pluralistic and can be used by anybody, at any time and in any place, takes no account of increasing state intervention in the educational system in the late 1980s (Callinicos, 1989). Many feminists have been suspicious of postmodern writing, seeing it as a way in which disenchanted male academics can reassert themselves by presenting old ideas in new forms (Polan, 1988). Finally, the purpose of postmodernism has been questioned by critical theorists who can see no ultimate objective in post-modern accounts. Apart from a playful deconstruction and emphasis of the aesthetic mode of presentation (Featherstone, 1988), it has been argued that most postmodern accounts are ultimately vacuous, and therefore implicitly supportive of social and political inaction, complacency and unhappiness (Skeggs, 1991).

3. Method

In this section the subjects as well as the procedure are briefly discussed. It needs to be mentioned that this paper still needs much detailed study on designing a well-formatted situational analysis based on post-modernistic views on curriculum with regard to all the in-depth information.

3.1. Subjects and procedure

The subjects of the study are 57 Ph.d and master students of Azad and Payam Nour Universities of Tehran studying TEFL, 27 male and 30 female, 45% of them were university professors, and the others were school or private language teachers. They were between 25 to 40 years old. They were asked to comment on the following list
of postmodern criteria in curriculum design. They were required to put a percentage next to each case according to the perceived importance in Iranian context.

Table 1. The post-modern situation analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biases and assumptions</th>
<th>Historical</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>linguistic</th>
<th>% percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal variables</td>
<td>Pregnant teens</td>
<td>drop-outs</td>
<td>children of color</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>gay and lesbian</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>female juvenile offenders</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>charter schools</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>alien academics</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>hopelessness,</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>poverty,</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>environmental racism,</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>violence,</td>
<td>ecological devastation</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status quo systems of inequity</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learners involved in democratic curriculum</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Race and gender</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results and discussion

As the summary of the teachers perception reveals, the subjects look at the situational analysis from a local view. Abnormal variables have no place in their perspective while historical, democratic, knowledge received importance to them. They all acknowledged the role of awareness but confessed that based on the societies’ norms this awareness-raising may lead to the inclination of the society to abnormalities since the grounds may not be ready. For example although they accepted that we may encounter pregnant teens, it may cause further taboos in the schools. This framework is not a prescriptive one. It can help people become aware of the many factors existing and help them decide on which factors to focus upon. The important issue is the situational analysis of the curriculum? The findings showed that most subjects decide on the current aspects of the curriculum denying its future effects. Besides, the perceptions of the subjects from different geographical locations differed enormously.

5. Conclusion

In summary, curriculum development in the postmodern era respects and celebrates the uniqueness of each individual person, text, event, culture, and educative moment, but all within the context of an interdependent cosmological view. All occasions are important and dynamic parts of the fabric of the whole. By ignoring race, gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity as integral to education, modern curriculum development models have actually contributed to the frustration, anger, and violence that threaten to destroy civilization. In many situations, the societal rules for our interactions with one another are unspoken.

Besides, both teacher and student may be biased towards each other. This can certainly interfere with learning. Moral issues of this nature need special attention. Character education should be part of the written
curriculum. Learning about other cultures may help in learning to respect each other. Team work can probably help members of different cultures to become better acquainted.

Moreover, postmodern curriculum research also promotes other important elements of schooling, including the search for wisdom through theological experiences, the creation of cooperative and ecologically sustainable learning environments, and the commitment to reverent, democratic, and just community models of schooling. Schooling should not serve the interests of economic competition and corporate greed. Nowadays the role of critical thinking in curriculum design has been the focus for language course designers (Leicester, 2010). The issue of curriculum has gone to situations of the modern area developed based on critical theory and the study of different forms of knowledge. Another important element of critical theory is the study of forms of knowledge.

References