

CHILD FRIENDLY CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: A THEMATIC CLASSROOM PROJECT AT MUHAMMADIYAH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL I SURAKARTA

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Abstract

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an internationally recognized agreement between nations which establishes a comprehensive set of goals for individual nations to achieve on behalf of their children. Indonesia ratified this convention on August 25th, 1990 with Indonesia Presidential Decree number 36/1990. Schools are ideal places for students to learn, to exercise, and to experience their rights. Child Friendly Schools are the ones that respect the childrens' rights. Based on concept of child friendly school we can design classroom practices which are child-centered and learning-friendly, a thematic classroom. Thematic classrooms designed in this project have led to bring about collaborative learning which could increase the amount of students' participation in the classrooms. They also provide comfortable environments in which students can learn and practice their own rights.

Keywords: Convention on the Rights of the Child, child friendly school, thematic classrooms

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia ratified UN Convention on Child Rights of November 1989 on August 25th, 1990 with Indonesia Presidential Decree number 36/1990. It then ratified the Law on Child Protection Number 23/2002 on October 22nd, 2002. Since then, child rights becomes a serious concern in Indonesia and the government has been very active in disseminating these ACTS for many years. The CRC defines a child as anyone below the age of eighteen and affirms the child as fully possessed of human rights. It contains 54 articles of children's rights that can be divided into three general categories, sometimes known as the 'three Ps' (Provision, Protection, and Participation). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an internationally recognized agreement between nations which establishes a comprehensive set of goals for individual nations to achieve on behalf of their children.

The first P (provision) deals with the access of food, health, and education; the

second P deals with the protection against maltreatment, neglect, and all forms of exploitation; and the third P deals with the right to act and be involved in decision making. Indonesian government has developed a lot of projects to promote the child right (Wickenberg et al., 2009: 17).

In everyday life, there are obstacles in the implementation of CRC due to social, cultural, political, and economic reasons. Another common reason which hinders CRC implementation is the lack of understanding of the law and the lack of knowledge of how to materialize the law into practice. Education on child rights in school system through civic education tends to portray children as passive objects, indoctrinating them with the obligation to obey the government, parents, and other adults. They learn more about their duties as children rather than their rights that should be fulfilled. They lack an understanding about their own rights. The dissemination of child rights in Indonesian schools focuses more on

cognitive domain rather than practical one. This can be seen in their being lazy to go to school or to study. School is not an interesting place for them. Ideally, school should play good roles in fulfilling children right. A school should become a conducive place for children to develop their competence, interest, talent, and creativity through their active participation in the classroom. To achieve this, the support from adults (in this case the teachers) and appropriate school environment as well as a conducive classroom setting are needed. In reality, however, schools in Indonesia are still coloured by the undesirable practices such as violence and abuse by teachers and school security, and bullying by other students. Teachers and school security often use corporal punishment and abusive language to discipline the students and school bullying is often performed by senior students to their junior mates.

Of the three components of child right mentioned above, this research project focuses on participation. This project tries to design a classroom which is conducive and friendly for learning, "Thematic Classrooms". The idea behind thematic classrooms is that keeping the students engaged is believed to be the most important step in creating a successful learning outcome. As in general, traditional classrooms merely consist of tables and chairs and white boards. The students' seatings are arranged in orderly rows which are appropriate only for teacher-centered teaching. The teacher has a center sole role in the classroom, moving freely around the classroom and can gain the attention of all the students. Such classroom type is least conducive to class exercises where students are to perform interactive activities. It is less learning friendly and less student-centered.

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves (Chickering and Gamson). Educators, researchers, and students are discovering the benefits and advantages of

cooperative, active, and engaged learning. Traditional classroom that support such a shift in teaching and learning have lagged behind. Cooperative learning offers compelling evidence on the benefits of collaborative learning. The traditional models of classroom learning tend to be more teacher-centered that fostered competition rather than cooperation. An important dimension of collaborative learning is that it seeks to develop classrooms that foster cooperation rather than competition in learning. And this can be catered in a thematic classroom.

In general, this research project is aimed at designing thematic classroom, a classroom environment that is designed thematically to promote students' participation in learning. The specific objectives of this reserch project is (1) to promote understanding of the CRC on both teachers and students; (2) to promote understanding on chield friendly learning environment; and (3) to design thematic classroom suitable for collaborative learning.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides an ideal approach for children to learn about their human rights. Because it specifies human rights especially relevant to children, everyone, but especially children, parents and adults who work with children, should be familiar with this important component of the international human rights framework. Compasito frames children's rights within the broader context of human rights as a whole and seeks to help children understand that along with all other members of the human family, they too are rights-holders.

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 after nearly a decade of compromise and negotiation among member states and wide consultations with NGOs. Since then more countries have ratified the so called Children's Convention than any other human rights treaty and with fewer reservations,

which are formal exceptions taken to parts with which a state may not agree.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (also called the Children's Convention) defines a child as anyone below the age of eighteen and affirms the child as fully possessed of human rights. It contains 54 articles of children's rights that can be divided into three general categories, sometimes known as the 'three Ps': Protection (guaranteeing the safety of children and covering specific issues such as abuse, neglect, and exploitation); Provision, covering the special needs of children such as education and health care; and Participation, recognising the child's evolving capacity to make decisions and participate in society as he or she approaches maturity.

Child-Friendly School Framework

The underlying principle of Child-Friendly Schools framework is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Indonesia ratified it on August 25th, 1990 with Indonesia Presidential Decree number 36/1990. According to this human rights instrument, all girls and boys in the country are entitled to these rights: (1) The right to survival, which includes necessities for life: food, clothing, housing and medicine; (2) The right to development, meaning that a child is entitled to develop his/her potential to the fullest, which includes the right to be educated, to play, to rest, to engage in cultural activities, to have access to news and information; (3) The right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The CRC explicitly states that children should be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence. Children should not suffer inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and school discipline should be consistent with the child's human dignity; and (4) The right to participation, with freedom for expression in the community, in matters affecting the child's life, and in ways that prepare children to take on increasing roles and levels of responsibility as grow up. With regards to this CRC, the obligation of duty-bearers

(the adults) is to ensure that all children are cared for, protected and supported to be able to develop to the fullest. To the fullest means physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually with equality and integrity. The Child-Friendly schools brings together these fundamental rights in the following ways: (1) Child-Friendly Schools are child-centered; (2) They are inclusive; (3) They are gender-equitable and celebrate all cultural backgrounds and languages; (4) They are effective, that is, children are learning and being educated; (5) Child-Friendly Schools are protective, safe, healthy environments; and (6) they are characterized by democratic participation.

RESEARCH METHOD

The target groups of this project are the teachers of Muhammadiyah Junior High School (SMP) I Surakarta and the first graders of Muhammadiyah Junior High School (SMP) I Surakarta. Meanwhile, the stake holders of this project include School Principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School (SMP) I Surakarta; the teachers of Muhammadiyah Junior High School (SMP) I Surakarta and the administrative Staffs of Muhammadiyah Junior High School (SMP) I Surakarta.

The followings are the activities already done in order to reach the intended goals: (1) coordination with the target groups and stake holders, (2) workshop on child friendly school and classroom management, (3) designing the child friendly classroom. The first thing to do before implementing the project is holding coordination meeting with the target groups and stake holders. The project coordination meetings are for those directly involved in all aspects of this project. The goals of these meetings are to share and coordinate projects' plans and to discuss the implementational aspects of the project as a whole. These meetings have been held consecutively with Muhammadiyah Board, the executives of Muhammadiyah Junior High School I, the teaching and administrative staff, the students and student council, and with parents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Meeting with Muhammadiyah Board

Meeting with Muhammadiyah Board was conducted at “Balai Muhammadiyah” (The House of Muhammadiyah). All the executives of Muhammadiyah board together (director, vice director, secretary, treasurer, and head of Education department) with the principal and executives of Muhammadiyah Junior School of Surakarta I were present. The main agenda to discuss in the meeting were Child Right Convention, Child Friendly School and Classroom management, and the thematic Classrooms.

During the meeting most audience appeared to welcome the implementation of Child Friendly School and Classroom management at Muhammadiyah Junior School I Surakarta as the pilot project. For one thing, this model is in accordance with Islamic value. Another reason is that they were in agreement that this model would promote students’ academic achievement. In addition, this model would also facilitate the conducive relationship and genuine understanding between teachers and students as well as among students themselves. In the long run it is expected that child abuse and bullying which sometimes occur in the school will be eradicated. For these reasons, Muhammadiyah Board was very supportive and even provided the financial back up for the project.

Though most audience were supportive towards the program there were just few people who questioned and seemed to resist to the change. The resistance to change mainly came from religion teachers who were concerned with the Islamic belief system. This situation is very common reaction to the unknown promise of change to be better while the proof is not there since making a change requires a kind of jump of faith. After the long discussion they finally did understand of what the project was about and took pledge toward accepting the new model after Muhammadiyah Board and change agents guaranteed that there was no risk of any kind when implementing this new model. These teachers were at least got enlightenment when their rational mind was

engaged. They did understand the importance of the change to be better.

Meeting with Executives, Teacher Representatives, and Administration Staff

This meeting was held at the meeting room of Muhammadiyah Junior High School I Surakarta. All the executives (principal, vice principals, treasurer), teacher representatives, and administration staff were present. The main agenda to discuss in the meeting were Child Right Convention and Child Friendly School and Classroom management. The result of the meeting was favorable. Most of school members were enthusiastic and ready to implement the project. The term Thematic Classroom was used to represent classroom design which is child friendly, a classroom design which promote students protection and participation.

It is very significant to design child-friendly classroom since it is the social and academic environment in which the students live. This is to ensure that every student has an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secured and psychologically enabling. The role of teachers is very significant here. Students are by nature are natural learners, but this capacity to learn can be undermined and sometimes destroyed. A student-friendly school and classroom management recognizes and encourages their capacity to grow and develop as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behaviours, classroom design which are focused on learning and the learner. Such a good learning environment can liberate students from stress, anxiety, and shy. Students are motivated and able to learn.

Workshop on CRC and Child Friendly Classroom Management

We conducted workshop on CRC and child right classroom and school management. The participants are all teaching staff of Muhammadiyah Junior High School I. The material includes CRC, Child Right Classroom and school Management. The main objective of this workshop was to facilitate teachers

understanding and application about child-friendly school and classroom management as to promote students' rights, especially participation in classroom and protection from child abuse and to promote the school culture of positive disciplining practices through the implementation of a non corporal punishment policy in schools.

The workshop focused on developing participants understanding on the concepts of child friendly school. A school which provides children with environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. On the one hand, the teacher and administration staff plays a very significant role in creating a child friendly school. On the other hand, children who are actually natural learners, can have their learning capacity undermined and sometimes destroyed. Thus, a child friendly school recognizes, encourages and supports children's growing capacities as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behaviours and curriculum content that are focused on learning and the learner. One of the many ways to cope with such condition is by designing thematic classroom to improve students' right of participation in the classroom.

The Design of Thematic Classroom

Thematic classroom has been implemented for the first graders. Classrooms are redesigned. In this concept, one classroom is used for one subject, for example, classroom for Biology, classroom for Mathematics, classroom for geography, etc. The result of this redesigned classroom is satisfying for both students as well as teachers. On the part of students, moving from one class to another class make them much happier; since moving is energizing. They also tend to be more focused to each subject since there is a sign or mark of movement from one subject to another. When they enter a classroom, their mind is also engaged with subject they want to study as if the classroom greet them "Hi guys, welcome to mathematics world or welcome to biology world". On the part of the

teachers, having their own classroom make them feel at home. They become more creative in decorating the room as to show the kind of world knowledge they want to show to their students. The teachers are also very happy as if they were the owner of their own room. They feel free to explore and to express themselves as creative teachers.

Thematic classroom management designed in this project has some characteristics as follows: (1) the classrooms are classified based on subject (e.g. mathematics classroom, English classroom, religion classroom, etc.); (2) students move from one classroom to another depending on the subject they take; and (3) the teacher stay in his/her classroom as if she/he the owner of the room. With these features attached, this thematic classroom has several advantages, namely: (1) both students and teachers can explore and express themselves freely; (2) they can use the room more effectively without being worried of disturbing other teachers teaching different subject; (3) students can hang their work on the wall for more exposure to the subject; (4) the classroom is comfortable and clean since the teacher is always there and the students will be kept from loitering this place (cleanliness is a major issue in Indonesia, including in this school).

A Thematic Classroom is very conducive for teaching learning process. It is an important element in the learning process. The teachers play a very significant role in promoting child friendly classroom. They must make effortful attempt to materialize child friendly classroom. As an example, they are supposed to provide different teaching aids, charts, pictures, and other relevant written elements on the walls of their classrooms. This can bring the students to the real world knowledge they are studying. In addition, teachers are supposed to promote peace and love to the children. An atmosphere of peace, tranquility, and friendship among students and between teachers and students are some of the hallmarks of a child-friendly classroom.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Reflecting on all the achievements of this small scale project, we hope not to stop this work here. We would like to further the initiatives by providing timely support, monitoring, and evaluation to the principal, the teachers, the students, and the administration staff for the successful implementation of the project. The core values of a thematic classroom that we promote are cooperative and active learning, respect and tolerance, caring and loving, creativity and productivity, positive discipline. We do realize that 4 months are not sufficient to bring about the total change, but some changes in the attitude of the teachers, the executives, the administration staff, as well as the students appear significant. They feel much happier with the new condition and are spirited to continue the project. We also intend to extend our project at other Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools in Surakarta. The thematic classroom project at Muhammadiyah Junior High School I Surakarta will be used as a framework and as a model for the next project

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