Creating Positive Learning Environment in Primary School/Islamic Primary School Based on Integrative-Thematic Approach in Inclusion Class

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ABSTRACT

Learning environment becomes one of todays learning tools which has important role in reaching goals of learning program. The goals of national education in Indonesia is to create good generation who are smart and morally good. In this paper, *learning environment* includes *physical and non-physical learning environment*. The aim of this paper is to describe which learning environment is suitable for implementing the integrative-thematic approach in inclusion class in Primary School/Islamic Primary School. For this reason, there will be a discussion about the theories of learning, they are behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Each of these theories of learning has been responded in the creations of different learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Various attempts have been done by the Indonesian government due to help young people become smart and good. It has been realized that smart and good are different. The term of smart has something to do with intellect, while the term of good has something to do with moral. The basic education program in Indonesia is twelve years long learning program, six years in Primary School (SD)/ Islamic Primary School (MI), three years in Secondary School, and the last three years in Senior High School. This program is for every child, including children with and without disabilities. In 2013 the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture started a pilot project of the implementation of 2013 curriculum in some elected schools. The 2013 curriculum is designed to provide the widest opportunity for students to develop attitudes, skills, and knowledge required in developing some competencies as mentioned in the Graduate Standard Competencies.

The competencies include students' capabilities to behave, to use knowledge and skills to do some tasks at school, community and environment in which the students interact. The Indonesian government intends to create the generation with those competencies. The generation in question is all children without exception, whether students with or without special needs. The Indonesian government has also stated that this generation should not arise as result of the selection of nature; it should be as result of the learning programs at every level of school education with a curriculum unit as the referring. One of the government's desire was manifested by implementing the method of delivery learning in the 2013 curriculum by way of (1) an integrative thematic for the primary school level reached during the 6-year period learning, (2) Contextual Integrated for the Junior High School level reached during the 3-year period

learning, and (3) Development of Specialisation for Senior High School level reached during the 3-year period learning.

Based on the description, there is one thing that needs to be formulated. That the way of learning at the primary school level is done through integrative thematic approach of learning, and that education is intended for all children, whether the students with or without special needs, so as to say that the learning environment in primary level in Indonesia should be created in such a way that all children can learn everything from school in an intact way and the learning culture must aiming at respecting each school community. The following is a discussion about the creation of positive learning environment with integrative thematic as the learning approach for an inclusive class.

Learning Environment

Learning environment refers to the variation of the physical arrangement of the class, context, and school culture in which students learn. As described in an article (2013:1) that since students may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to classroom, which has more limited and traditional connotations—a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example.

The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning—as an example, by conducting classes in relevant natural ecosystems, grouping desks in specific ways, decorating the walls with learning materials, or utilizing audio, visual, and digital technologies. And because the qualities and characteristics of a learning environment are determined by a wide variety of factors, school policies, governance structures, and other features may also be considered elements of a “learning environment.”

Educators may also argue that learning environments have both a direct and indirect influence on student learning, including their engagement in what is being taught, their motivation to learn, and their sense of well-being, belonging, and personal safety. For example, learning environments filled with sunlight and stimulating educational materials would likely be considered more conducive to learning than drab spaces without windows or decoration, as would schools with fewer incidences of misbehavior, disorder, bullying, and illegal activity. How adults interact with students and how students interact with one another may also be considered aspects of a learning environment, and phrases such as “positive learning environment” or “negative learning environment” are commonly used in reference to the social and emotional dimensions of a school or class.

Integrative Thematic Approach of Learning

The implementation of the 2013 curriculum in primary school level in Indonesia is implemented using an integrative thematic approach. As stated by The Indonesian Ministry Of Education and Culture (2013:137) that the integrative thematic approach is a learning approach that integrates some competencies of some subjects into some binder themes.

The integration is done in two ways, which are the integration of attitudes, skills and knowledge in the learning process and the integration of the basic related concepts. The theme knits basic meaning of various concepts so

that students do not learn the basic concepts partially. Learning, thus, gives full meaning to the learners as reflected in the variety of available themes.

In integrative thematic learning, the chosen theme is regard to nature and human life. In grade I, II, and III, both of which give substantial meaning to the subjects of Pancasila and Citizenship Education, Indonesian Language, Maths, Art-Culture and craft, as well as Physical Education, Sport and Health. This is where the basic competencies of Natural Sciences and Social Sciences organized into other subjects have an important role as a binder and developer of Basic Competence of other subjects. Psychologically, the primary students have not been able to think abstractly to understand content of subjects that are learned separately. The view of developmental psychology and Gestalt provides a solid foundation for the integration of basic competencies that are organized into thematic learning (The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013:137). From the perspective of transdisciplinarity then separating curriculum content rigorously does not provide benefits for the ability to think further.

Learning environment in Primary School/Islamic Primary School Today

It becomes increasingly important to discuss the creation of appropriate learning environment in relation to the implementation of the 2013 curriculum that used integrative thematic as a learning approach in Primary School/Islamic Primary School. Before discussing what the learning environment as appropriate one, the following is a portrait of the learning environment created in the primary level schools in Indonesia. Events are used as an example the case in this paper are perceptible, but the real name of the actors is not mentioned.

Learning environment created in the majority of today in Primary School/Islamic Primary School in most regions in Indonesia still follow the conventional pattern although there are some schools that have seemed to respond to the implementation of the curriculum in a better response than conventional pattern. This is maybe because of different interpretations that arise from the schools and the parents over the implementation of the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia.

Todays Learning Environment in the Conventional Classroom

Learning environment that is created between the school and the students have an influence on the relationship that is created among the students. Peer relationship that arises can not be separated from the process of labeling students based on the acquisition of rank. Based on field observations noted that a second grade primary school student has been cheating because of her Mathematics score is lower than her classmate whose rank is one level below her. Having interviewed about what she was doing, the student replied:

“She is my rival, so she is my enemy. I acquired the first rank and she acquired the second rank in the class. But yesterday I got 94 and she got 96 in math test scores. She made two wrong answers and I made four wrong answers. I corrected her answer sheet and I wrote that she made 9 wrong answers, because when I was going to write a number 2, I thought that number 2 can be changed into the number 9 with a slight change in writing.”

Based on the carefully enough interviews, there are a lot of the information that is summarized from the case. There are certainly things that really are not expected to occur within a 2-grader Primary School, which are

dishonesty, hostility, and anxiety. The unexpected values seem to be having relation with student's self-esteem. Supposedly students who are proficient in academic also understand how to respond to his/her error when they made mistakes in answering questions and do not need to commit fraud that is used as a confirmation that one should always rank the highest score in the class.

The above case is an example of the unexpected relationship among peers that happen because there is a correlation with the pattern of ranking in the class. No doubt that teachers always give a verbal message to the students to always be kind to their peers. Teachers also have certainly cite examples of actions that demonstrate good attitudes to their peers. But apparently, all such efforts are not enough for a student, even though the one that is considered smart (as in the ranks of the class), to apply it in their lives.

When a student got home, she/he often gets rave reviews from parents with greeting "Hi, how was your score? " Such greeting also gives a psychological effect which is not good for students. At school she/he becames one of the students who is confined in a learning environment that is saturated, when she/he got home she/he got the atmosphere reminded her/him of the boredom in school, then it will make the students more and more tired with this kind of routine. If such situation takes place in a long period of time, all day, for months, even years, then instead of producing a generation capable of using his knowledge in his life, even generations living under pressure that will be generated.

Learning environment created in response to learning theory

Learning environment is an atmosphere created for learning. Akinsanmi (2008:1) says "Learning environment are designed to suite or support particular learning theories-and there are many theories that explain the learning process." (2008:1). Akinsanmi also stated that researchers often base their theories on physiological, psychological and sociological changes that take place when learning occurs and often exclude the physical/material conditions that surround the learning process.

Learning is the acquisition of skills, knowledge, values, wisdom, and understanding. There are several learning theories that explain how the emergence of the learning process. This paper falls under three broad schools of thought—behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism.

Behaviorisme

The end of the 19th and 20th centuries behaviorist experts stated that learning is closely related to the behavior. The brain of a new-born baby considerates as a blank slate– tabular rasa – who learns proper behavior and improper through positive and negative reinforcement (Squires and McDougall, 1994 in Ankinsanmi, 2008:1). B.F. Skinner (1904 – 1990) is one of the pioneers who contribute in the learning theory of behaviorism. The behaviorists believed that learning is evidenced by a change in the action through a process of exploration that shows individually on external stimuli that appears until the desired response. The expected response is reinforced with reward, while the unexpected response is not given the reinforcement. The theory of behaviorism is based on experiments conducted on animals. As Harzem (Akinsanmi, 2008: 1) said that this theory focus by looking at behavioral changes and not much see

the considerations in the cognitive and affective learning process because it is not observable in that experiment.

Domjan (2005: 2) says “The change in behaviour that is used to identify learning can be either an increase or a decrease in a particular response.” Example of learning outcomes is seen as an increase in response to a child who is learning to swim. Previously the child cannot swim, but after he learned to swim, the child learns to move his arm, his legs so that the child can swim. There appears to be additional coordination skills between hand and foot movements controlled by the child. Examples of learning in the form of a reduction in response is seen when a child learns not to do something, for example when there is a dentist who checks her teeth, the child must be quiet, not to make a move that could interfere with the doctor’s examination.

Learning also may not always appear in plain, as what Domjan said that learning can be behaviorally silent. For example, a child can learn about all things related to driving by looking at the way of mature people drive. The child learns the function of accelerator, brake, and steering control. However, the child is not able to show the results of the study until the child is old enough to obtain a driver’s license. For this reason, then Domjan (2005:5) states “learning involves a change in the potential for doing something.” This is similar to that expressed by Lefrançois (2000: 117) who stated “all relatively permanent changes in potential for behavior that result from experience but are not due to fatigue, maturation, drugs, injury, or disease.”

The Response that appears on the learning theory of behaviorism is the perception that projects that the responsibility of a teacher is emphasized to transfer knowledge to students, and students are positioned as passive participant. Knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the students seem to be something that is objective, factual, and absolute.

Environmental Response

Learning environments that are designed based on this school of thought are lecture based, teacher-focused, and structured, and use a system of reward and punishment to promote learning. Physical learning environments (schools) created to support this learning theory were typically fenced in single buildings with several stories. “Classroom wings were laid out like the Henry Ford’s assembly line: new learners (raw materials) were located at one end and moved through the classes until they emerged as graduates (finished products) at the other end “(Bennett and Le Compte, in Akinsanmi, 2008: 2). The class rooms were laid out in rows and columns and provided minimal room for flexibility. The teacher’s desk was the main point of focus (besides the blackboard) and had a vantage point that made students’ supervision easier.

Cognitivism

Another school of thought – Cognitivism, came to the forefront in the second half of the twentieth century when researchers found that behaviorism did not account for all types of learning (Gagne, 1984 in Akinsanmi, 2008: 2). Cognitivism rejects the behaviorist approach which excludes mental processes (e.g. thinking, memory, knowing and problem solving) in its explanation of how people learn, limiting learning to observable changes in behavior alone. Semple stated that (Akinsanmi, 2008:2) cognitivism focuses on the study of mental

processes and uses it to explain learning. This view compares the mind to a 'black box' – one that needs to be opened and explored. The black box, like a computer, receives information, processes it and then produces an output that may be stored in the mind or exhibited in behavior. Knowledge can be viewed as schema, that is, symbolic mental constructions that are organized or processed in the mind. Learning occurs when there is a change in the learner's schemata. As such, the learner is an active participant in the learning process, and his/her actions are a result of thought.

Environmental Response:
Learning environments created around this paradigm encourage curiosity, provide inquiry oriented projects and present knowledge in staged scaffolding. Similar to behaviorism, cognitivism presents knowledge as absolute and objective. Schools built on the philosophy of cognitivism were typically laid out like campuses and were not often fenced in. They were usually single or two-story buildings connected by various walkways, which provided opportunities for the students to interact with the outdoors periodically, supporting the explorative approach of the learning theory. The classroom buildings housed students according to their grades, usually with several classes of one grade occupying a floor or a building – a response to the enrolment explosion brought on by the baby-boomers. The classroom buildings were sequentially arranged and consisted of long corridors, flanked on both sides by classrooms. The internal layout of the classroom did not change much, however. The teacher's desk was still located at the head of the class and the students still sat in rows and faced the teaching wall.

Constructivism
Constructivism is the third broad category of learning theories. It rejects the behaviorist assumption that the mind is a blank slate and posits that learning is a process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. Boyle (Akinsanmi, 2008: 3) stated that it takes into consideration the learner's social, cultural and contextual conditions and theorizes that the learner constructs knowledge through experience and in accordance with his/her level of cognitive development. In other words, learners interpret new information through their contextual experiences and build on their existing knowledge from the conclusions reached during the assimilation of and reflection on new knowledge. The mechanism by which learners internalize new knowledge was first articulated by Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Semple said that (Akinsanmi, 2008:3) this paradigm views learning as an active process of making meanings from experience and unlike cognitivism, it emphasizes the individual nature of learning. This theory puts the responsibility of learning with the learner and emphasizes the role social interaction and reflection plays in the learning process.

Environmental Response:
Learning environments designed based on this theory are student-centered, collaborative, cooperative, and experiential. Teachers in this setting serve as facilitators rather than instructors. One of the more recent learning theories that grew out of constructivism is the brain-based learning theory. Caine stated that (Akinsanmi, 2008:3) it is established on current neuroscience research findings

about the physiology/functions of the brain and proposes that people learn better in a challenging, safe, comfortable, social and enriched environment.

Inclusive Class

The concept of class inclusion was initiated by education experts since the idea of education for all children was discussed. Inclusion classes are designed based on the phenomenon that children with special needs should also obtain treatment and education as that received by children without special needs (*education for all*). The concept of inclusion classroom learning refers to a class composed of children with special needs and children without special needs. This is done in order to create a more humane learning community, including the creation of expectations of mutual respect and self-esteem among the members of the class. Yvonne Becher and Zhang Li (2010: 13) stated "*inclusive education is only part of a wider understanding of inclusion".* Inclusion itself is seen:

"...as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity in the needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation, cultures, and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children." (UNESCO, 2009 dalam Sheldon Shaeffer, 2010:6)

Based on these statements, the inclusion is a treatment process referred to and response to the diversity of needs of all children. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children and among certain age and a certainty that it is the responsibility of a sustainable system to educate all children. Therefore an inclusion class is certainly very necessary for children with special needs. One of the implications of aligning treatment and education for all children is the teacher must understand and be able to treat students with special needs (not including in the case of special needs children with severe levels of disability), especially for children with special needs is truly a member of the class feels inclusively comfort .

Who are Children with Special Needs?

Children with disabilities are classified into eight categories by Santrock (2008:184), they are: *learning disability, mental retardation, sensory disorder, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactive disorders, physical disorders, speech and language disorders, and emotional and behavioral disorders*. All children who have such disorders are included in the category of children with special needs.

The Expected learning environment

The ideal learning environment for inclusive program containing students with or without special needs or should provide facilities that can facilitate the learning process of all students. As teachers and schools gradually move to more inclusive programming, it is also necessary for them to pay close attention to the physical space and design of the inclusive class. In fact, the physical arrangement of a classroom environment will largely determine if and how

inclusion will happen. Eredics (2013:1) said that creating an inclusive learning environment isn't just about changing attitudes, support systems and activities it is also about rearranging the physical space to accommodate the various needs that exceptional children have. Structuring the class highly expressed expectations of the school to the student learning outcomes. Thus the creation of classroom arrangement strongly reflects the way teachers organize learning to the student learning outcomes assessment.

There are some aspects that should be taken into consideration when assessing students. Freeman and Freeman (in Linse, 2008: 139) says "*When assessing students, it's important to remember that assessment should be measure of what students are able to do and what they know, rather than measures of what they are not able to do and do not know*." As Santrock (2008: 562) said that for children with special needs, the aspects that should be measured include important skills such as creativity, motivation, persistence, and social skills

The creation of learning environments aimed at inclusive classroom should consider several issues related to the condition of the needs of each student. Below are several suggestions teachers and schools can use to arrange the physical space of a classroom in order to facilitate inclusion based on Eredics' ideas (2013:2) :

1. The students' desks should be placed into groups (2-4 desks per group) so that all students have opportunities for cooperative learning, collaboration and discussion. As well, it is better to place the teacher's desk on the periphery of the classroom. Teachers in an inclusive class rarely sit down during their day and don't need their desk getting in the way.
2. It is better to provide centers. Centers appeal to various learning styles but they must also be accessible and open. As well, the materials and manipulatives at each center must be appropriate and stored where all students can reach them. Placing books on a high shelf is limiting for a smaller student or one who is in a wheelchair.
3. It is suggested to provide meeting spot. Teachers should create one area of the classroom where the students can come together to have discussions, develop social skills and participate in large group activities. This space must have enough room for ALL the students to gather.
4. It is suggested to decorate the classroom in proper way. An inclusive classroom needs to be decorated in a way that does not create distraction and sensory overload. Too many bright colors, posters, clutter and furniture can easily distract the most focused child.
5. Safety or emergency preparedness is a must for inclusive class. Teachers need to ensure adequate space for all students to move safely around the room. Teachers also need to clear bulky items, stabilize furniture, tape down wires and cables, and place signs/symbols around the room that point out exit/entry ways in case of emergency.

Here are four basic principles that teachers should take into consideration when arranging a classroom based on Evertson, Emmer, and Worsham (Santrock, 2008: 496-497):

1. Reduce all the things that make congestion in heavy traffic areas. Distraction and disruption can often occur in high-traffic areas.

These include group work areas, students' desk, teacher's desk, the pencil sharpener, bookshelves, computer stations, and storage location. Teachers should separate these areas from each other as much as possible and make sure they are easily accessible.

2. Make sure that teacher can easily see all students. An important management task is to carefully monitor students. To do this, teacher will need to be able to see all students at all times. Teacher has to make sure that there is a clear line of sight between teacher's desk, instructional locations, students' desks, and all students' work areas. Teacher needs to stand in different parts of the room to check for blind spot.
3. Teacher need to make often-used teaching materials and student supplies easily accessible. This minimizes preparation and clean up time, as well as slowdowns and breaks in activity flow.
4. Teacher need to make sure that students can easily observe whole-class presentations. Teacher need to establish where she/he and students will be located when whole-class presentations take place. For these activities, students should not have to move their chairs or stretch their necks. To find out how well the students can see from their locations, teacher need to sit in the students' seats in different parts of the room.

Teacher need to think about how she/he will organize the classroom's physical space, she/he should ask herself/himself what type of instructional activity students will mainly be engaged in (whole-class, small-group, individual assignments, and so on). Considering the physical arrangements will be best support for that type of activity. Below are various types of physical classroom arrangement based on Santrock's ideas (2008: 497-498):

1. *Auditorium style*. A classroom arrangement style in which students sit facing the teacher.
2. *Face-to-face-style*. A classroom arrangement style in which students sit facing each other.
3. *Off-set style*. A classroom arrangement in which small numbers of students (usually three or four) sit at tables but do not sit directly across from one another.
4. *Seminar style*. A classroom arrangement style in which large number of students (ten or more) sit in circular, square, or U-shaped arrangements.
5. *Cluster style*. A classroom arrangement style in which small number of students (usually four to eight) work in small, closely bunched groups.

Teacher also needs to consider the arrangement of non-physical learning environment. Students need a positive environment for learning. Attitudes, teaching styles, and inclusive activities are also an important component of the inclusive class. Curriculum and delivery methods will also be considered to be highly acceptable to all children, whether whom with or without special needs. The assessment process for all students must be done in detail, involving assessment tools such as tests and non-test that are adjusted to each student's ability. Creating of physical and non-physical environment is aiming at reaching the learning goals of inclusion. This will impact on a sense of belonging, success, and self-esteem of all students of inclusive class.

Santrock (2008:500) stated that there are three aspects in creating a positive learning environment took into consideration, they are (1) general strategies, (2) creating, teaching, and maintaining rules and procedures, and (3) getting students to cooperate. The general strategies include:

1. *Authoritative classroom management style*. A management style that encourages students to be independent thinkers and doers but still provides effective monitoring. Authoritative teachers engaged students in considerable verbal give-and-take and show caring attitudes toward them. However they still set limits when necessary.
2. *Authoritarian classroom management style*. A management style that is restrictive and punitive, with the focus mainly on keeping order in the classroom rather than instruction or learning.
3. *Permissive classroom management.* A management style that allows students considerable autonomy but provides them with little support for developing learning skills or managing their behaviour.

To function smoothly, classrooms need clearly defined rules and procedures. Students need to know specifically how you want them to behave. Evertson, Emmer, and Worsham (Santrock, 2008: 501) said that rules focus on general or specific expectations about behaviour. An example of general rule is,"Respect other persons." An example of specific rule is, "Cell phones must always be turned off when you are in the classroom." Procedures, or routines, also communicate expectations about behaviour, but they usually are applied to a specific activity, and they are directed at accomplishing something rather than prohibiting some behaviour or defining a general standard. An example of procedure is a procedure of interrupting a whole-class discussion. Rules tend not to change because they address fundamental ways we deal with others, ourselves, and our work, such as having respect for others and their property, and keeping our hands and out feet to ourselves. On the other hand procedures may change because routine and activities in classrooms change.

Many effective classroom teachers clearly present their rules to students and give explanations and examples of them. Teachers who set reasonable rules, provide understandable rationales for them, and enforce them consistently usually find that majority of the class will abide by them.

There are three main strategies in getting students to cooperate. They are the developing of a positive relationship with students, the action of getting students to share and assume responsibility, and the rewarding appropriate behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of the tree theories of learning (behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism) and the discussion about the arrangements of physical and nonphysical learning environment for inclusion class in Primary School / Islamic Primary School in which integrative thematic approach is used, it can be concluded that:

1. Physically, the choosing of the classroom arrangement style should be suitable for the activities in the class. The arrangements of other equipment needed for learning process in the class should be easily accessible by all students and meet each students' need.
2. Non-physically, the general strategies, the creating, teaching, and maintaining rules and procedures, and the principle strategies of getting

students to cooperate should be prepare carefully to meet the students' needs and development.

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