

Contextual Learning and Life Skills Education

By Drs. Farhan, M.Pd



THE education system in Indonesia has not been very successful in producing creative, innovative, and productive graduates. The main reason for this is that teach-

ing and learning activities in schools tend to be theoretical and focused on the transfer of knowledge rather than on the development of skills such as the ability to cooperate, critical thinking, creative thinking and having high motivation in working. It is these skills, called Life Skills, which are needed and most useful for students to lead positive and productive lives.

Integrating life skills into classrooms teaching and learning activities, depends on teachers' understanding and ability to use the right learning strategies. One key strategy, which can be used is called contextual learning. Contextual learning relates classroom learning to real life situations and students' immediate environment and experience. Contextual learning can support the development of critical thinking, transfer of knowledge, data analysis and problem solving. When completing my studies at Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, to obtain

my Master's degree, I completed research on the implementation of contextual learning including, which included a case study at MTsN Kudus.

A Case Study at MTsN Kudus

Contextual learning which integrated life skills education has been successfully adopted and used by teachers at MTsN Kudus. The result of this was a clear improvement in students' interpersonal skills, academic skills and pre vocational skills. There were some significant changes in the classroom which led to these positive results in students performance. They were:

- Classrooms activities had become more fun and challenging. Students felt encouraged to participate in the learning process more actively
- In their lessons teachers used a variety of learning resources and tools
- Teachers used better classroom management. Students worked individually and/or in groups. This enabled them to interact and discuss things with their classmates
- The lessons were not monotonous and students could understand the materials given by the teachers more easily
- Teachers also often asked questions which challenged students to think critically and the material the students learnt was related to their environment.

Conclusion

The results of the research shows that contextual learning is the right approach which can be used in developing life skills because it has the potential to create meaningful learning in the classroom which is relevant to the real world situation. Through this research I can conclude that the integration of life skills education in the classroom learning can be achieved effectively through using a contextual teaching and learning approach.

To end this article, I would like to share some points regarding contextual learning and life skills. If these points are followed, I believe that contextual learning will be well implemented and lead to positive results.

First, it is essential to give understanding to teachers on the importance of life skills development. The knowledge and skills obtained by teachers should be implemented in the learning activities in the classroom.

Secondly, teachers need to develop contextual learning using various learning resources and tools.

Finally, the authorities in education i.e. Kepala Dinas (Heads of Office), School Supervisors, and Principals, need to give supports and provide facilities to teachers in developing and implementing contextual learning.

Selection of District Facilitators

To ensure both short and long term program success, the DBE3 training program is supported in its district level implementation by a group of District Facilitators. In order to select the most capable facilitators and to develop a sense of local government ownership of the facilitators, selection has been taking place jointly with local government.



The Head of the Dinas Pendidikan Office in Sidrap, Drs. Syahrudin, M.Ed, interviewing one of the candidates for district facilitator.

Garut, West Java: On March 9, 2009, at SMPN 1 Garut, DBE3 West Java conducted the selection process for District Facilitators. There were 50 candidates, most of whom are teachers at SMP/MTs in Garut District. In this selection the panelists, from the District Education Office, MORAs and DBE3 assessed the academic and communication skills of the candidates, through interviews and presentations. Out of 50 candidates, 15 were selected to be District Facilitators for five subjects; Science, Social Science, Mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia and English.

Sidrap, South Sulawesi: Held on March 19-20 at Dinas Pendidikan Office in Sidrap the selection process of District Facilitators involved 24 candidates, which were short listed from 46 applicants. These candidates were interviewed by a panel consisting of officials from Dinas Pendidikan and MoRA, the DBE3 Provincial Coordinator and District Officer. Out of 24, 12 were selected and invited to attend the training of district facilitators in Pare-Pare between March 30-April 1. These 12 new District Facilitators will be added to the three existing District Facilitators who conducted training previously using the English modules prepared by DBE3.

Irhamni, M.Ag, a DBE3 District Trainer

North Aceh

PAK Irhamni joined the DBE3-EMOI project in North Aceh as a District Trainer in January 2008. Through his involvement with the project, he has had many experiences which have inspired him to work hard towards improving the quality of education in North Aceh. In his opinion, the life skills education training from DBE3 is very effective in motivating and making



Irhamni, M.Ag, facilitating a workshop in Aceh Utara

teachers more enthusiastic in teaching.

“When implementing life skills education in classrooms, I can feel that students respond positively. They enjoy my subject and miss me whenever I’m absent.

They always ask me to teach using active learning method, where they can make presentations, have discussions and do role plays. From my observation they now are more confident in expressing their thoughts, they respect each other more, are able to work in groups and have improved their personal skills. I have told my colleagues about life skills education and I really hope that they will implement it the same way as I do. Now I’m improving the quality of education in my school. Later on, I’m going to do it in the whole North Aceh,” said the Religion teacher for 2nd and 3rd graders in **SMAN 3 Putra Bangsa, Lhoksukon**, North Aceh.

Besides working in his school, Pak Irmanhim who was born on May 29, 1977, in Pantan Labu, NAD, is also active in writing articles, especially on education. He feels that after joining DBE3, he is more confident as a facilitator and is often invited by the Education Office to train teachers in other places.

“Although DBE3 North Aceh only trains teachers in 25 target schools, I also use DBE3 modules in non target schools. In a way, I am replicating the programs. But we need government

support to do more. In the meantime, all District Trainers and I agreed to establish a local NGO to support DBE3 programs and help teachers strengthen their skills. We will approach the government, asking them to support us in conducting training. We can introduce methodology from the DBE3 modules to them. In this way, we will continue the program when DBE3 phases out,” said Pak Irhamni.

Besides dedicating himself to education Pak Irhamni runs a small business at home. He designs mugs with pictures. He said that he gets orders from other nearby towns .

“I think I have introduced and developed life skills in my family,” said Pak Irhamni jokingly.

“A human being is like a diesel engine. It will stop when it’s broken.” That is his motto which he implements in his daily life. He never stops working to improve the quality of education in North Aceh. He dreams of a better Aceh whose people will be leaders in Indonesia. He is optimistic that this will happen if everyone in Aceh works hand in hand to improve the quality of education.

North Sumatra

DBE3 District Trainer Wins 3rd Place in National Physics Competition

PEOPLE call her Zainab. Her full name is Zainab Nirwani, S.Pd. She was born in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra on June 26, 1971 and won third place in the *Lomba Mengajar Fisika Tingkat Nasional* (National Competition on Teaching Physics) in 2008.

She also was the first in the same competition in the Province of North Sumatra in the same year. Her achievement in this competition was the result of her involvement in DBE3 training. She has implemented all the knowledge she obtained from the training in her class. Ever since joining DBE3 as a District Trainer in 2006 in Tebing Tinggi, she has become more self confident in teaching and mixing with others.

“The active learning approach which integrates life skills with BTL, LSE, and ICT modules has made me change my teaching strategies. With these three modules I put my students at the center of learning process. I integrate life skills in my lesson and use ICT.

The social skills I obtained from training have made me more comfortable in getting along with people. This also helped me when I had to give my presentation at the competition. This is a key factor which helped me succeed at the national level and provincial level.”

Besides working as a Science (IPA) teacher at **SMP Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi**, North Sumatra, Ibu Zainab is also active in PGRI (Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia – the Indonesia Teachers Association). She is the chairperson of the Biology Teachers’ Working Group (MGMP) in Kota Tebing Tinggi. Ibu Zainab also actively promotes the learning models developed by DBE3 through sharing the training modules with teachers in the MGMP she attends.



Zainab Nirwani

Training for Facilitators in North Sumatra

THE training of District Facilitators, which took place in Medan from March 24-27, 2009 was opened by the Deputy Governor of the province, Bapak Gatot Pujo Nugroho, ST. There were fifteen participants from each extension district, ten lecturers from the State University of Medan, as well as five trainers from the North Sumatera LPMP (Quality Assurance Institute). The districts represented were Binjai, Dairi, Tanjung Balai, Tapanuli Selatan dan Tapanuli Utara. Participants were trained by a team of consultants and the training included practical teaching in schools in Binjai district, where the participants did 'team teaching', helping each other to teach a class.



Ibu Melva Silitonga, a lecturer at the State University of Medan helping a group of grade 8 students from SMP Tunas Pelita, Binjai complete a science experiment during the practical team teaching.



Diah asked a question and corrected the explanation of one of the groups. This is really important. Students need to be given the chance to ask questions and give feedback to other students.

Two students from SMPN 6 Binjai comparing their work in an English lesson during the practical teaching.



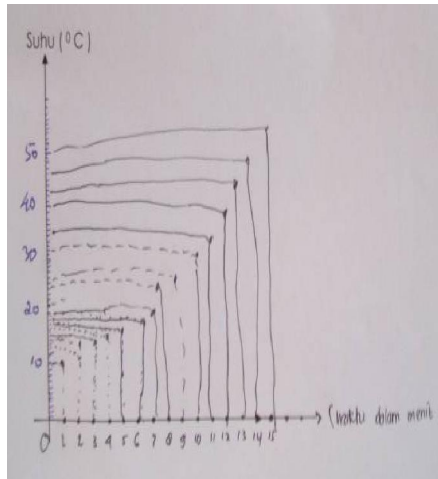
Do students in your class learn like this? If not, why not try out some of the activities shown on this page?



A student from SMP Tunas Pelita Binjai making a diagram to illustrate eclipses of the sun and moon. After they had written their explanations in their own words, some of the students explained their diagrams in front of the class.



Participative training – the teachers discussed issues like 'how to ask children questions which challenge them to think?', 'what school principals and supervisors can do to support change in their schools?' and 'how to turn teachers' working group meetings that are useful for teachers?'



Children conducted an experiment where they heated water with a candle and noted down the time and the temperature of the water. They used the data they collected to make a graph (see next page). The students wrote a report on the experiment themselves. This is important. Students have to be able to explain things in their own words, not just memorize what the teacher tells them!



Two students at **MTsN Binjai** are showing their writing about the water cycle.



The role of the teacher during a lesson like this is more of a facilitator. Ibu Lia Windari, a teacher at **MTsN Binjai** is sitting helping the students.

Student Centered Learning

Traditional teaching and learning is centered on what teachers do in the classroom. The models of teaching being promoted by DBE3 focus on **what the students are doing**.

Look at the photographs on this page to see what we mean!

After the practical teaching social studies district facilitators sat with teachers at **MTsN Binjai** to discuss their lessons and how to make them even better.

