

Helping School to Overcome at Risk Students: Some Experiences

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Abstract: Educational assessment is important for teachers to know their own students and not only depend on the results solely from other experts. The experiences of the author in dealing with the students diagnosed as having disabilities or special needs --- will be described in order to emphasize the important of the educational assessments as a part of the whole processes in determining the problems of the students in the school. This is a preliminary research about the at risk students. This was a survey research. Observation was used to collect data. There were 4 subjects selected in this preliminary research. The objectives of this paper are to describe some experiences of the author about at-risk students in elementary level, and also to give some lessons learned from the schools.

1 INTRODUCTION

Students right now are called as the digital generation and they exhibit different behaviours. When they still young, they are surrounded by many things but through gadgets. They can play football or tennis, but not real physical football or tennis but through video game. When they communicate and have many friends, it does not mean that they have met them face to face. So, they may be lack in social interaction manner because they mostly work through gadget and communicate through gadget. This situation shows that teachers must improve their skills when facing different generations (Clarke, 2012; Singer Trakhman, Alexander and Silverman, 2018)

Students are individuals that come from different background. They deserved to be equally treated. Many statements supported the equality, but in the level of implementation in schools, some teachers may not know how to do that. And this is not about they do not want to do. They may be fluent talk about that matter but they may be lack what we call the procedural knowledge (Eggen and Kauchak, 2010) that focus on how to do the right things for the students. So how to help this teachers to make them capable help their own students --- is an important step.

If individual differences are not considered in planning and implementing teaching and learning, students in the classroom may feel uneasy to stay in. And if these students keep getting difficulties in catching up with the classroom rules or activities,

then they will show problems. And in the end they may not feel safe to be in the classroom. The condition of the classroom will be perceived negative and this may affect the learning and the behaviour of the students. Students who do not know how to do with the academic activities will try to do something else. Because Human being is an active organism, if they cannot learn, then they will do other things called off-task behaviour (Green *et al.*, 2012; Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2013; Steel and Klingsieck, 2016).

Students with off-task behaviours, actually need help, but for some teachers, they may be perceived as trouble makers. Moreover, the students might be perceived as rebellion against authority, and this in turn, make certain teachers punished those students. This punishment does not solve the problem but creating more negative climate about the classroom and the students may develop aggressive behaviours (Alberto and Troutman, 2012; Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2013).

In the condition where the students felt the classroom not safe anymore, they may get difficulties to develop themselves. And if they stay at the school, they may end up with the label as Students with Special Needs. With the label, some teachers might perceive the problems of the students were not theirs anymore, but special education teachers. This condition leaves the children untreated and put them in risk condition. And this condition make them become at-risk children (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Marbouti, Diefes-Dux and Madhavan, 2016; Chaves-Sousa *et al.*, 2017).

At-risk children need help. By creating positive learning environment or positive climate for all students, actually not only help typical students but also atypical students such as at risk students. So, the climate is important and it refers to the task of the classroom teachers. Studies showed that positive climate will lead the students to focus on learning activities in the classroom and at the same time students produce good behaviour and affect their achievement (Wang, Haertel and Walberg, 1993; Shinn, Walker and Stoner, 2002; Hardin, 2004). So, how the teachers prepare the classroom activities and how they implement are more important.

In Indonesian school contexts, especially in elementary level, mostly other experts decided the problems of the students. In this context, some school teachers may accept what the results given from those experts without assessing further about the condition of the students. These kinds of practices in schools may underestimate the important of educational assessments needed to be done by the teachers. Teachers who do not know exactly the condition of the students and the level of instruction of the students --- may endanger the behavior and learning of the students. These students will be at-risk because their needs may not be met. And when others could identify the problems of these students and recognize their needs --- then their program will be such a treatment for these students. And later on, these students will be able to develop their potential. But if no proper assessment and treatment, then these at-risk students may end up becoming students with disabilities.

And with inclusion movement since 2000s, all children with special needs may attend the regular schools. And since then, in certain schools the author found some experiences that will be shared through this article related to how the students so called at risk treated at those schools. The author only focuses on certain students who had been labelled and treated as students with Special needs, but later on through quick educational assessments and mini interventions, the students show no disabilities. This indicated the students just had problems in their growth and development because the environment previously did not support their needs correctly. So, the objectives of this paper are to describe some experiences of the author about at-risk students in elementary level, and also to give some lessons learned from the schools.

2 METHOD

A preliminary survey research was conducted. Data were collected by using observation. Observation were based on the experiences of the author in schools. There were 4 at-risk subjects selected to be reported in this preliminary research. They were from different so called inclusive schools. The author through sharing the experiences wants to emphasize the important of educational assessments such as curriculum based-assessment.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the objectives of this paper, the author will describe the results on (1) some experiences of the author about at-risk students in elementary level, and also to give some lessons learned from the schools.

3.1 Some Experiences

3.1.1 The Students from Regency Winning Inclusive Award

This regency had an inclusive school as a model described as the best inclusive primary school. When the author was invited to observe and interact with the school, teachers were so easily talking about their students with special needs in their classrooms. One of the classrooms was first grade where the author was told that there were 5 students who identified having disabilities. They were sitting on the back rows as a group. Because the limited time the author had, the study just focused on the supported documents about the special needs of those students, and then randomly took one student to be assessed through probes, in order to know how to help him. The author asked the student where his seat and offered help to read the items in the worksheet because the student was reported as having intellectual disability and could not read. But after each item was read, the student could chose the correct answer without repeating the question. And he did answer correctly all five items the author read. He also can identify the answer through options a – b – c – d.

After 5 consecutive items were answered correctly, the author changed the strategy to know more about his reading ability. After checking certain familiar words with simple syllables patterns, such as CV, CVC --- then move to more complex patterns such as CCV, CCVC etc. Through this short time interaction, the author found that the student can read the alphabets, and words with simple syllable patterns, but not the complex syllable patterns. So, the

author then focused on teaching the complex ones and in less than 30 minutes the student was amazed by his own ability in reading.

The results showed that the collected data such as IQ Test Score and the background of the student were not enough. And this practices put those students as at-risk. The school must also do educational assessment to get the big picture of the student and build the program based on the assessment.

3.1.2 One First Grader Diagnosed as ASD

In one school with international standard, the counsellor and psychologist escorted the author to see the first grade where one of its students was diagnosed as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The student seat faced the wall of the back part the classroom, so he would not be distract by his classmates and other stimuli. But when the author approached the student and tried to check the ASD behaviours, it was found that the student might not have the ASD, and the author arranged with classroom teachers how to accommodate the needs of this student and the rest of the class. The author also asked the counsellor and psychologist for working together with the teacher. After one month, this student showed progressed as a normal or typical student.

Again in this case, the school was lack of the information gathered through educational assessment. They were not familiar with educational assessment, their program for the student just based on non-educational assessments. This condition was negative for the development of the student. With the label of ASD, he was categorized as at-risk student. And if no appropriate assessment and treatment were given, he could develop to be a student with disability.

3.1.3 One Fourth Grader Diagnosed as ASD, ADHD, and Took Medication for Controlling His Behaviour

In one school, there was a new student following his parents moved to another place. He was in the fourth grade where one of his teacher is the former student of the author. This teacher directly contacted the author for discussing the student's problems. And through consultation with the author regarding this student, she (the teacher) did small steps to further identify what actually the student could do. In one week, we found he was not as the label, but his parents did not believe. But the teacher, through consultation, continued working for helping the student, and in two weeks later, the student parents

started to see the different and said "how much I have to pay you" to the teacher. During these weeks he had started to communicate fluently with the teacher, and now with the whole classroom. And today, the student, fifth grader, can speak well and present his assignment in front of the class by using laptop and projector. And no more tantrum or refused to do the assignment, or avoid contact with others.

In short, the school needs to learn how to do specific educational assessments to know the condition and instructional level of the student in order to prevent the failure in instruction. So, the results from other non-educational experts can be combined with the school's educational assessment results. Seems that in Indonesian setting, this has to be promoted at the National Level.

3.1.4 One Student Finally Sent to the School for Autism

The young boy, 7 years old, was rejected from many schools because of the tantrum he always showed and had been diagnosed as ASD, ADHD and could not read. In short, all of the schools suggested previously he attended made referral to this school because they could not handle the problems of the students anymore. But the teachers of the school for Autism rejected to accept him. And the school administrator reported to the headmaster who always told the administrator to accept all students, especially those rejected. So, the headmaster met with all his teachers and let them realize that the potential to learn from various student is important, and promised them that in a few days the headmaster would join the class in order to know more how to help the student.

When the headmaster entered the classroom, the student was off task. After offering him, if he liked papers and pencils and crayons, he moved reluctantly to take a seat. He started to do something with the paper. He wrote words but so large and caused the paper teared. Next, I gave him some papers, and told him to write or do what he liked with them. Then 2 more papers were written with good hand writing. It revealed that the student had a potential to learn and fast, and also showed long concentration, and understand the instruction and ready to work together.

The next day, his teacher approached the headmaster that she wants to teach the student. And at the end of the school year, the student showed huge progress as a normal student. His parents then moved him to the regular school until now.

Sometimes, the teachers in special schools still could not see the potential of the students. They focused more on the problem of the students. From

this we need also to have a headmaster that also capable to do educational assessments.

3.2 The Lesson Learned

Based on the stories above, the author suspects that these are still going on in the field. These conditions indicate that the results from screening and diagnose done by experts outside the school contexts about the condition of the suspected students --- must be combined with the results done by the school experts such as teachers, counsellors or special education teachers, and school psychology. The decision about the condition of the student, for now, should come from various experts as a team from related disciplines, including teachers. This means that schools need to improve their involvement in making decision about the condition of their own students --- either at-risk or special needs' students.

The consequence if the data collected for giving label to the students is not enough, it may jeopardize the students' life. If the students' teachers are curious about their problems, they may be ended up with good results, but if not, those students will be at risk in their school lives and may end up as children with special needs (Phungsuk, Viriyavejakul and Ratanaolarn, 2017).

Also there are some teachers are not equipped with the skills and knowledge on classroom management, and this may create problems that later may risk the student's potential. Potential Ability is important to be understood by the teachers because what those students can do not reflect the total potential of the students but only the actual or performance ability (Berk, 2003; Eggen and Kauchak, 2010). Fail to recognize the potential ability of the students may create instructional problems that later could deteriorate achievement and behavior of the students. So, the knowledge about the potential ability of the students are important when working with students who having academic and social problems. Because what schools mostly talk are about the actual or performance ability.

All overcomers in these time mostly the new teachers with passion to keep seeking help for the students. So, how to upgrade the teachers knowledge is a crucial and should be done periodically. Teachers with enough knowledge and skills shall manage their classroom well and those teachers will show affection toward the students' struggling (Shinn, Walker and Stoner, 2002; Learning, 2005). This means that educational assessments done by the teachers also should be encouraged.

Pre-service and in-service training programs need to introduce about the curriculum-based measurement, and classroom management --- in order to support education for all, especially for inclusive classroom. Indonesia that consists of many islands, tribes, languages, and belief systems is important to be considered carefully when experts and teachers want to do assessments. The assessors need to be aware of the diversities in the background of the students when diagnosing or assessing the students.

4 CONCLUSIONS

From the results, the experiences with at-risk students showed that the schools were lack of skills and knowledge on how to do educational assessments. The lesson learned from the experiences that the schools may need to pursue knowledge and skills about educational assessments, classroom management and behaviour strategies. With all these skills and knowledge, schools can work properly to prevent students' failure.

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