

Working with at Risk Children: A Model for Transformative Learning

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Abstract: This article presents a model for transformative learning. The model was conceptualized from a sustainable experiential learning of a student-teacher group from a private university in Surabaya and literatures on transformative learning theory and teaching the at risk children group. This paper exemplifies how the model was used to guide the selected student teachers to experience transformative learning as well as to initiate it to the community. This is a descriptive report based on a sixmonth observation and journals of practical work of the student teacher group. This study was observing how the model developed effectively. The researchers found that this model benefited both the adult learners and the at risk community. For the student teacher group, this process was not only equipped them to develop related knowledge and practical skill but also a sensitivity to continue serving the at risk communities in various levels. Meanwhile for the community, this model has helped them to see various alternatives in pursuing meaningful life inspired by the work of the student teacher group.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, teachers' quality considered low. Compared to the 14 developing countries in the world, the teacher's quality in Indonesia is in the 14th place (Yunus, 2017). Many professionals in education field recognize the need for competency that allow educators to establish their vision on teaching exceeding other skills. There should be a repertoire to facilitate student teachers develop their vision on teaching through the whole learning process. Without experiencing transformation in their view, they will not able to depict the vision of teaching and sense the difference between learning and not learning. Thus, in the Indonesia context, transformative learning program is important to inspire, to test, and to prepare a student teachers for their teaching career as a calling.

Learning becomes transformative when the learner does not only acquires a skill or knowledge, but also experiences a profound effect on one's notion of self and relationship with society (Qi and Veblen, 2016) One of the society groups which will be the most influential community for student teachers to learn is at risk children group.

Marginalized children in Indonesia have invited the world attention recently. The child poverty study

conducted by The 2012 Bappenas-SMERU-UNICEF indicated that around 44.3 million children are affected by poverty, living on less than two dollars per day (The Indonesian Story, 2011). It is believed that the issue is rooted in educational problem. The government has taken step toward the educational problem of marginalized children by focusing most on the partnership program with other countries or non profit organization on children education. In their current work, The Unicef Basic Education and Gender Equality (BEGE) is also focusing the program on supporting the marginalized children group in various levels of education (Thematic Report, 2011). In Indonesia, the problem of at risk children is worse in urban setting. Unicef stated that marginalized children in urban setting is less well than in rural counterparts.

The researchers was attracted by the impact urban marginalized children experience after the closure of 'red area distric' called Gang Dolly – the largest prostitution area in Indonesia. Children of this group have experienced several traumas. The main trauma was caused by the conflict raised in the closure. The children were there and saw the conflict between the pro and the con parties. It was followed by the abandonment raised by the absent of the parents who need to find another job for their life.

Moreover, these children also experienced psychological trauma by seeing the prostitution type of business from the early age (Winamo, 2014). The Cahaya Mentari Center for Crisis in Dolly stated that from 2006-2014 there were 397 cases of child abuse in Gang Dolly. Eighty one cases happened in the family, 45 others were physical abuse. Some of Indonesian national newspaper wrote that children were forced to work on the street as well as beggars. Other cases were human trafficking and child pornography. Early children were also involved in smoking, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse.

This manuscript explored an approach to student teacher education that engaged students in potentially transformative learning experiences in the context of a college classroom. The course was designed to engage students in a transformational learning process through extensive and intensive interactions with at risk children group in the ex 'red area' in Surabaya called 'Gang Dolly'. Using qualitative approach, changes in student dispositions towards at risk children, as well as student perceptions of their own self were examined..

2 LITERATURE STUDI

2.1 The Social Emancipatory Approach

As formerly proposed by (Celleja, 2014) which benefit themselves, society, and their creator. Later, Cranton regenerated Mezirow's notion and defined transformative learning as "process by which people examine problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Cranton, 2016). Thus, the fruit of transformative learning is individual development which leads one into deeper relationship with any subject or object she or he interacts with.

As the theory developed, Taylor has established several conceptions of transformative learning: psychocritical, psychoanalytical, psychodevelopmental, social emancipatory, neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary perspectives of transformative learning (Taylor, 2008). Among the various approaches, the critical differences are in the purpose of transformation and the underline on either individual or social change. This study was based on the social emancipatory approach, which rooted in the work of Paulo Freire. The goal of this approach is social

transformation which leads the oppressed community develops its critical consciousness. The author used this approach for describing the data, which joted down from social activities.

2.2 Transformative Learning Model

On the basis of his reasearch regarding women who return to college after a long period, Mezirow proposed ten phases of transformative learning. However, on the practical level, those ten phases has to meet the context where participants lives. After the work of Mezirow, many authors tried to proposed various model of transformative learning according to the context. Hoggan and Cranton proposed a narrative model of transformative learning which use literature (Hoggan, Cranton, 2015). They believed that narrative literature provide a wide range of text for students to learn and experience transformation. The result of their study showed that using narrative literature, there would be promoting change, new perspectives and fosters critical reflections. In addition, the study presented the connection with personal experiences, emotional responses, and role models in the story.

Keen and Wood studied activating event for transformative learning in a very specific context, which was a prison for marginalized children (Keen and Woods, 2016). They interviewed 13 educators which involve in the events. The research study showed that educators' response to unplanned activating events, humor, and respect, and being a role model, and counselor have been significant factor to foster transformative learning in such classroom. In addition, Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton proposed that the model to facilitating transformative learning in the classroom are not heavily relying on instrumental learning and curriculum package but also by challenging students' meaning schemes and frame of reference (Keen and Woods, 2016).. Moreover, the students who live under oppression, poverty, or living in a prison institution need to be understood in regard of their whole live experience. Thus, they would sense an appropriate educational practice and actively resisting social and cultural forces, which limit them to learn.

The Singleton's study was one which close to this research study. Singleton called her model as Head, Heart, and Hands Model for Transformative Learning (Singleton, 2015). This model is a holistic approach in developing ecoliteracy. It showed the holistic nature of transformative experience and related the cognitive area (head), the affective area

(heart), and the psychomotor area (hands). This model proposed that a transformative learning should touch the three areas, which lead individual to experience a change in life. This study conducted in the context of environmental behavior.

Another contextual model presented through a research study was the STAR (McAllister, 2011). This model was implemented in the nursing education in Australia. The model used specific curriculum and the support from educators to foster the Sensitivity, Taking action, and Reflection toward the nursing education students. The estimation of transformative learning for nursing understudies lies in its capacity to stir them to issues of play that prompt and maintain wellbeing disparities and to expert bit in them basic reasoning and addressing of already held presumptions, convictions, qualities, and points of view, with the goal that they might be a piece of fundamental change.

2.3 Education for the At Risk Children

The risk lies with children who lives under poverty, in a 'red district' area, who may have meager home support structure, homeless, hungry, ill, or have to work (Tratchman, 1991). Those children are usually left behind at their school or even can not go to school. In 1991, Tratchman conducted a study regarding how child care take care of the children from the at risk group. The study showed that the children were experiencing abuse in the child care. Therefore, the study proposed a need to collaborate early childhood education into a child care program.

Coulton and Pandey studied a group of at risk children in urban area in Cleaveland, USA (Counlton and Pandey, 1992). They suggested that even though area with concentrated poverty differ in their history, demographic characteristics, and social conditions, it was true that children living in this type of area are suffer from health and developmental problem.

Nabors, et al studied that children in urban area who experience homelessness also suffer from mental health problem, which lead to school and health problems as well (Nabors, Weist, Woest, et.all, 2004). During a summer camp program, there was a mental and physical health prevention program for this group of children. The study showed that children from homeless family had participated in the counseling program more often than others from low-income family. It suggested that the mental health problem was very serious in the homeless kids community who at risk of school failure.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research was a descriptive study, with the data collected from adult learners from student teachers at Elementary Education Department, Petra Christian University, Surabaya. The case of teaching children in the ex prostitution area called "Gang Dolly" was used to illustrate the adult learning process with the embedded analysis of individual and collective learning units (Creswell, 1998; Yin 2009). The transformative learning class to work with children in the area seeks to mobilize the communities in providing early learning center. The data was collected in August of 2017; it involved document analysis, interviews, and observation (; Yin 2009). Sixteen student-teachers were asked to write a reflection journal regarding their experience in the program. Multiple sources allowed data triangulation thus increasing the credibility of the research (Bryman, 2012). The validity of the study was established through data triangulation and the chain of evidence confirmed by the 16 participants..

4 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Taylor stated that from the social emancipatory approach the participant of transformative learning program should experience social transformation (Taylor and Cranton, 2012). In this study, the researchers classified two groups which involving the program: 1. The student teacher group as the participants; 2. The parent community which was the target of the social transformation. From the data collection through journalling and observatory participant observation, the researchers witnessed that the process of social transformation began from the shift happened to the student teacher group which initiate change in the community.

Cranton proposed several questions to addressed whether one experience a transformative learning thorough a sustainable planned activity or not ((Cranton, 2016). Some of her indicators were the psychological development, view of social level, and respons to critical questions. These three indicators were addressed through an instruction given for the student teacher group in writing their journal while doing their field work in the 'red area'. First, the students were asked to describe their condition over six months before the field work. Second, they wrote a journal addressing their psychological development, their view of social levels, and responding some critical incident questions.

4.1 The Past Lead to Disorienting Dilemma

Mezirow suggested that transformative learning involved a critical reflection which will change one's view. It started with disorienting dilemma, which prompts basic reflection (Cranton, 2016). Then, it led to a viewpoint transformation, which the individual follows up on. Perplexing issues influenced grown-up students in a wide range of ways and effected the performance of the person. Since the short-time impacts on students were frequently unfavorable, numerous grown-ups were hesitant to promote their training because of the difficulties and stress included. In this study, the researchers created a moment for the student to think about themselves and the at risk children through a seminar session as the first phase of the transformative learning class. In this class, the professor presented various negative impact on children caused by the prostitution practice in the 'red area' called Gang Dolly. After a seminar session, the professor asked the student teacher group to visit the community. The next session was a moment to describe how they see themselves six months before the visit. Mejiuni on worldwide and community based transformative learning presumed that community-based transformative learning start with the individual and after that moves to social and community change (Taylor and Cranton, 2012).

The sixteen student teachers presented three categories of tone in describing their past six months condition. The first category fell into the negativ view of self. All the 16 respondents stated that they saw their 'past six months self' as negative individuals. Some stated that they were left behind because they came from remote areas of Indonesia. Some said that they were still struggling with their calling as student teachers; thus, they felt weired to be in the community. Half of the respondents stated that they were egocentric. They were only thinking about themselves. Some others admitted that they just wanted to achieve good grade so that they were not really care for others.

The second categories were only three participants with high self confidence who thought that they should had not been in this community. They thought that they deserve a better place to learn. These student teachers felt that they were better in various ways than others. They thought that their ideas were better because they had experiences in teaching. The group of students with this positive self image were from urban area. In addition, the third category were those who felt that being in the

community was a gift given to them. Thus, it revealed a need to give thanks and do something for the community. The respondents stated this view were those came from the remote area where their previous places were considered left behind.

These three categories of students teachers' view of their past showed that there were disorienting dilemna initiating the process of transformative learning as suggested by Mezirow (Cranton, 2016). This disorienting dilemna were not only negative but also an awarenes of over positive view of one's self. This leads the student teachers to experience the further phases of transformative learning.

Roberts showed that disorienting dilemma could have both positive and negative impact on the participants' performance (Roberts, 2006). In the study, for participants who felt struggle with their past and saw an enlightenment, they could go through the next phase of transformative learning. For those who thought they were good enough and needed no change, they would face difficulty in the next phase of the transformative learning process.

4.2 Psychological Development

Jung saw that the purpose of psychological development as being to differentiate ourselves from the collective of humanity (Cranton, 2016). Jung added that psychological development helped one to differenciate oneself from others. In the journals, student teachers were asked to describe what they learn about themselves regarding how they see their self concept, the skills, the finding of themselves, their perception of themselves, and their feeling toward the process of teaching the at risk children. Despite of seeing themselves from a psychological type (introversion vs extraversion), the responses for this indicator fall into two perspectives: 1. Relate themselves as God's creation; 2. Present themselves as mature individuals.

The first category was those who see themselves as unique creation of God. One respondent stated, "I realize that I was made by God unique with my goodness and my weakness." The others believed that they were created in God's image as Christians believe. Thus, they see themselves experience improvement because they grow in the image of God. Therefore, they would like to give their lives to work in the field God want them to be. The second category was those who see themselves as developed human being. They admitted that there were maturity grow in them so that they possess a new character, such as to be giving than given, think about priority, and understanding more about their vulnerability.

In terms of skills, all of the respondents admit that through the learning process they possessed new skill they never thought before. Those skills were communication and collaboration. Some students stated that it was a struggle for them to interact with children, moreover those who are not well educated. Through the experience in the field, they learn to know the children more than to manage their behavior. Knowing the children was more important than an effort to manage the children's behavior which often make the participant tired. Therefore, before they interacted with any kids from the community, they tried to remember the background of the children and tried to understand. This basic knowledge helped the participant to interact healthier than before.

The second skill they developed was collaboration skill. The transformative learning project instructed the student teacher groups to plan the lesson and design the learning process for the kids. Thus, they had to collaborate with other students to think and share their ideas. According to some students, this phase was not easy because not all students have the same thought. They needed to discuss, involve in conflicts, and solve the problem together. That was how the collaboration skill developed.

The data showed that there were two classification in describing the finding. First was those who realize that they were very vulnerable. Second, they found that they were on the stairs of development.

In the perception sub indicator, all the participants agreed that they were learners who love to do something practical than theoretical. They loved to be able to sense the problem and solve them. They enjoyed working in the field than sitting in the class. They were craving of new method of teaching using aids and introducing new challenge. They admitted that they like to talk than to think and write.

Regarding the feeling grew when they were in the field, all the participants stated that they love to be in the field because it taught them the meaningful life they posses more than the teaching practice itself. Few of the participants who admitted that their past was good enough and did not see any enlightenment in the first phase of the class program were experiencing disorienting dilemma in this phase. They felt that the background of the at risk community and the practical work with the at risk kids helped them to sense the vulnerability of human being. This phase was where a tension of emotion and rationality emerged in the transformative learning process (Taylor and Cranton, 2012). It drove

them to give thanks to what they have now. The student teacher group admitted that they see themselves from a new perspective, which was as God unique creation. Then, this perspective led them to develop their skill and knowlege to serve the at risk community.

4.3 The New View Led by Critical Incidents

In the view of social level indicator, the researchers asked the student teachers to mention what they see in the social environment which move their heart. All the participants highlighted the effect of social environment in the live of the children. They realized that such a community had develop a negative impact for the children, especially in their psychological aspect. A participant stated that what the parents of the community were doing influenced the unwell condition of the children today. Because the kids saw practice of prostitution all their lives, those activities considered natural norm for them. They never saw any other alternatives in their lives which help them to know that the prostitution practice was morally negative. Therefore, in the view of social level, the participants proposed that all the parents need to give the best education for the kids to substitute the 'dark' period the children have experienced in the past.

The shift of paradigm which followed by the attitude change and the development of knowledge were lead by several critical incidents. All participants experience incidents which motivated them to grow, such as when they were teaching the children. Another moment let them fall in a distance with the course which led them to have a moment to think and grow. They felt that when they were discussing the material they should deliver to the kids, they often neglected by the group. In addition, the theoretical perspective given in the class after the field work session has made them less interested.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study explored a model of transformative learning based on teaching experience in the at risk children community. The course was designed to engage students in a transformational learning process through extensive and intensive interactions with at risk children group in the ex 'red area' in Surabaya called 'Gang Dolly'. This study showed that the model of teaching at risk children in urban area impacted the transformation began from the

student teacher as individual, which then influence the community.

The few participants from urban area needed a longer time to involve in disorienting dilemma phase; while those from remote area were considered faster. The disorienting dilemma could be by hearing a story about the at risk children or by involving directly in the community.

The participants admitted that the critical incidents which helped them to reflect on what they believe in the past was the moment when they interacted with the children directly in the community. However, some stated that the moment when they had to argue with the group in preparing the work was the incident which led them to change their view of others. These moments lead the student teacher group to dig deeper into the life of the at risk children. They were making friend and talking to the family. They did personal counseling for the kids and sensed that this kid group had experienced psychological trauma of the prostitution practice. This drove the student teacher group to think that the at risk children group was matter. Thus, some of the participants committed to take part in continuing to serve this community. By this initiative, the parents of the at risk children group get helped and felt that they were precious. This view motivated them to involve in the continuous program arranged by the student teacher group..

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