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IMPROVING TEACHERS' EXPECTATION TOWARD LOW ACHIEVEMENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

In the learning process at the classroom, the teachers' teaching practice contributes significantly to the students' academic achievement. One of the aspects of teaching practice, teachers' positive expectation towards students, has been proved to play important roles in improving students' academic performance. However, in fact, many students especially low achieving students believed that they were not treated accordingly.

This study was conducted with the following purposes: (1) to improve the teachers' positive expectations towards their students, especially low academic achieving students, and (2) to prosper the positive perception of students regarding their relationships with their teachers, classroom climate, and their academic ability.

This study was designed as an action research. Although the results could only be observed in improving the classroom climate, and not yet on the understanding learning materials and improving thinking skills, but implementation of the program on a longer-term and more intensive feedback session could bring more valuable results regarding teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: teaching practice, learning process, positive expectations

1. INTRODUCTION

In the learning process in school, mental involvement and students success to follow the learning process is not only determined by their intelligences. Psychological aspects are also play important role to support learning process. Feeling comfortable, happy, less anxious, be recognized, and other positive feelings can be a driving force for the occurrence of motivation to learn (Jalongo, 2007).

However, in reality quite a lot of students do not get a learning situation which is accompanied by the occurrence of those positive feelings. Some students feel the atmosphere of learning as something unpleasant, suppress and do not support the emergence of competence feeling or positive self-efficacy. This situation will develop not only a negative perception about learning amongst students, but also affects their learning outcome.

The occurrence of negative feelings amongst students toward learning can also be started from the teachers' behavior during the lessons. Some students are often subjected to low expectations by teachers, especially those who show less achievement academically.

Based on the results of the UNICEF study in Central Java, South Sulawesi, and North Sumatra in 2006, shows that violence against children mostly (80%) performed by the teacher (Daily Java Post, 2007). Acts of violence committed in the form of physical and non physical violence such as verbal intimidation or giving an excessive workload. Non physical acts of violence are generally difficult to recognize and teacher often argued that they do so for the good of the child. For example, criticize the student in front of classmates will impact on the psychological condition of her/him.

From the preliminary study for three months at four primary schools in Surabaya, the result shows that 494 students in those schools value their learning ability is range from good enough to poor. This shows the number of students who considered themselves to have less skill in learning. From observation data, it revealed that during learning process teacher delivered low expectations to certain students. It showed either through verbal communication and non verbal from teachers and from teachers' lack of effort in helping students who have difficulty in learning. In one classroom, the teacher puts the students who assessed as low achievers in certain group and all students are aware of these distinctions. Students who are placed on rows of benches 'children who are less' is also frequently get negative and ridicule comments from other students. In addition, less supportive and less motivated comments are often delivered by teachers such as: "Stupid ... but still talk too much" or "How can you get good grades simple question like this you can't answer". These actions make students less confident of their abilities and reduce the willingness to try. The low achievement students are less vulnerable to unfavorable treatment by the teacher.

I believe that positive experiences received by a person in interaction with others, especially those significant to her/him, it will help to shape a positive self-concept. How students feel about their teachers treat them will shape how they value their abilities.

Based on that preliminary study, this research aims to: 1) to improve the teachers' positive expectations towards their students, especially low academic achieving students, and (2) to prosper the positive perception of students regarding their relationships with their teachers, classroom climate, and their academic ability.

2. THEORIES

2.1. Teachers' Roles

Students' attitude and behavior of learning in the classroom is influenced by internal and external factors. At first, when students are young, external factors such as teachers, friends, parents and classroom physical environment are more strongly affected student learning. To foster good attitudes and behaviors of learning, at first still largely determined by external factors such as the role of teacher or parent. Teaching practice is the main factor that directly affect student learning. In the process of learning, should have reflected two main efforts: *improving students' thinking skills* and *build self-esteem of students through an attitude of respect and positive relationships with students*. The relation between teachers and students will run fine if marked by characteristics such as mutual trust, a feeling of comfort and mutual respect (Wilmes, 2008).

The goal of teacher in teaching should ideally not only deliver the material in the curriculum, but also act as a motivator for students. Teacher has responsibility to recognize and meet the needs of students. Along with Abraham Maslow's view, that the

needs in the lower levels must be met in order to raise self-actualization needs. In this case, all students have a need to be appreciated by others (Cao, 2005).

Beliefs that teachers have is very important thing in the learning process. Effective teachers, not only have positive qualities in the skills and knowledge, but also in aspects of personality (beliefs, traits etc.) (Brown, 2007). Effective teachers are determined by their knowledge and skills, and also by factors such as disposition of teacher attitudes, values, beliefs and preconceptions that have been owned. These factors influenced the way teachers run their profession.

2.2 Teachers' Expectations and Its Impacts for Students

Different expectations from teachers to students will bring different treatment toward students that associated with: the type of question that teacher gives, giving time to answer, grouping students, and reward for students (Arends, 2004). . For example, students who are considered able to be likely given the more challenging questions and demanding a higher level of thinking than students who are considered less capable. Hughes, Gleason, Duan Zhang (2005) in their study also found that teachers' evaluations of students' academic abilities related to the quality of teacher relationships with students. The quality of teacher and student relationship is influenced by students' backgrounds such as: ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. This is similar to the findings of Rist (2000) in some schools in St. Louis, United States, that from his observations of one class of kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 elementary schools showed that teachers do grouping students based on physical appearance, language skills, the behavior of students who later was associated with academic ability. This led to differences from teachers in handling students.

Research about the impact of teacher expectations towards students was initiated by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968, which found that student performance will better if teachers communicate high expectations (Kierein, 2000; Rist, 2000). Besides the effects on learning achievement and academic performance, providing positive expectations also affect the psychological aspect of the student. Several studies have found correlation between teacher expectations with student self-concept. Self-concept begins to develop at the beginning of an individual's life and its development is influenced by significant persons in individual's life which is parents and teachers (Mook, 2000). Teachers' beliefs and expectations of the students will also affect the interaction of teachers with students. Teachers who provide affective support will develop positive relationships with students (Davis, 2006). In his research, Wheatley (2005) also found that the creation of positive relationships between teachers - students as well as a fun learning experience is also influenced by the presence of positive expectations of teachers to students.

The influence of teachers' expectations toward students can be viewed from the perspective of transactional. The better the academic achievement of students will lead to more positive expectations from the teachers, which will showed by providing more challenging instruction, more responsive and warm approach, which eventually will further improve student achievement (Hughes, Gleason, Zhang, 2005).

In their research in 1968, Rosenthal and Jacobson also found a positive relationship between teacher expectations, the treatment that differentiate and self-fulfilling prophecy students. Self-fulfilling prophecy will come forward to be a Pygmalion effect, which means a person or group of persons acting in line with expectations from others.

Based on the results of the UNICEF study in Central Java, South Sulawesi, and North Sumatra in 2006, shows that violence against children mostly (80%) performed by the teacher (Daily Java Post, 2007). Acts of violence committed in the form of physical and non physical violence such as verbal intimidation or giving an excessive workload. Non physical acts of violence are generally difficult to recognize and teacher often argued that they do so for the good of the child. For example, criticize the student in front of classmates will impact on the psychological condition of her/him.

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3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study uses small groups - collaborative action research, which is researcher works together with a number of teachers. *Collaborative action research* on the general consist of three to ten people, which is characterized by the meeting periodically, the opportunity to solve problems together and discuss actions to be taken (McNiff, 2004). Action plan is designed based on the concept of TESA, which applied by teachers in several cycles of action.

3.2. Research Participants

Participants of this research are five teachers who teach fourth and fifth grade and 33 low achievement students from two primary schools in Surabaya. The number of teachers who involved in this study is not in large numbers, because it requires the active involvement of each teacher in the long term period. The involvement of teachers is based on a willingness to make changes in the way of teaching, the approval and support of school principals and allowing researcher to present at the regular observation in the classroom.

The study was conducted at the primary school level, with consideration that younger students are still vulnerable to the effects of teachers' views toward them. In addition, at primary school level, children begin to form attitudes toward learning that will influence their adaptation to school. Less enjoyable experiences associated with learning and school will decrease interest and motivation to learn later on.

3.3. Data Collection

The collection of data will use questionnaire and observation technique. In addition, individual interviews will be used to capture information about students perceptions of their interactions with teachers as well as views of their learning abilities. Interviews to gain information from students will be conducted as a group interview consider the psychological comfort of the student to express his views, because it will be easier for students to express their opinions together with his friends.

Learning process that takes place in the classroom will be observed to obtain information about interactions and activities that occur between teachers and target students, in this case are low achievers. Observations conducted in *anecdotal records*, noting in detail the interaction of verbal and non verbal that occurs between teachers and students.

3.4. Data Analysis

The stages in the cycle of action research will be monitored to obtain information that will be presented descriptively. The description of the process of each phase in each cycle would be useful to describe the effort that can be done, the results can be achieved and problems encountered, which can be a learning process for others. Common narrative form used in action research, which contains representations and explanations of what happens during the process (Gall, Gall, Borg, 2003).

This study used a qualitative and quantitative analysis (McNiff, 2004; Yaffe, 2003). The qualitative data is observation towards teachers, the results of interviews with students, reflective / personal records (*diaries*) of teachers, researchers and monitoring records of processes that occur in each cycle. Interpretive analysis will be used for such data. Data and information obtained is seen as a *text* or a collection of symbols that reflect the specific meaning (Berg, 2004; Gall, Gall, Borg, 2003). The quantitative data is obtained

from measurements using a questionnaire about students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers before and after intervention. Quantitative data will be analyzed by using T-test with SPSS program.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the action is divided into two stages: 1) phases that are aimed to foster a positive relation between students and teachers which is prepare students in the affective aspects of learning and 2) phase which aims to make improvement on students' thinking abilities. From the observation data in the classroom, teacher reflection and teacher daily journal can be obtained conclusion of the implementation of phase 1 as follows:

1. Teachers increasingly aware of the importance of giving attention to the low achievement students, just like they do to other students. These shows in teachers' behaviors such as: giving the opportunity to answer a question, provide academic and non academic comments that are positive, come closer to the students as well as to establish communication as often as possible. Every teacher seeking to deliver these treatments equally to target students every day, as recorded from teacher observation and daily journals.

2. There are an increasing number of students who willing to answer questions, ask questions and get closer to the teacher to simply ask or speak. According to teachers, some students are indeed very quiet and closed. Researcher encourages teachers to keep trying to establish communication with those students.

3. Based on the daily journals of teachers, there is a change from the perceived constraints in implementing the actions in the classroom. At the beginning of implementation, teachers perceived more constraints on the characteristics of students that are difficult to understand the material and showed less positive attitudes in learning that can be either passive in the classroom or display disruptive behavior in class. It shows that teachers see more external factors as a constraint. In the next process, teachers began to recognize the constraints from themselves that influence the lack of effective implementation of the actions. This shows the growing willingness to self-correct of the teachers. The teachers saw internal constraints such as lack of effort to get close to the students, have not found a way to start relationships as well as the persistence of a negative perceptions toward a particular student that can make the implementation of actions yet to show success on a particular student.

Most of the teachers also reported that there are many low achievement students still remain have difficulties to answer or do their works. Besides of the constraints, with the passage of the process of implementation, the teachers also reported some achievements. If at the beginning of the week, almost all teachers have not seen a positive change then in the ongoing process they report a change in some students' enthusiasm, teacher relationships with students become more relaxed and not rigid, some students begin dared to express their difficulties and teachers saw that students feel happy because they feel needed and cared for.

Based on observation and teacher journals, the conclusions obtained from the application of the action on stage 2 are:

1. The teachers have tried to ask questions that encourage higher thinking skills by comparing, finding a difference of one thing with another and see the similarities of some things. These demands also make the teachers more creative in delivering the material, for example some teachers use props and give examples of cases and materials linked to daily lives.

2. It is observed that there is increase enthusiasm of the students when teachers use instructional strategies that is not like 'teacher explaining-students listening' only. Students become more enthusiastic and happy when teachers use visual aids, ask students to explore the objects in the classroom and listen to teachers talk about things they knew before asking questions.

3. Actions that are still difficult and very rarely to do by teachers are following up on questions that become a student-teacher dialogue that stimulate thinking. When it came up in the evaluation process, teachers assess this is not easily done by considering the ability of the students. Teachers also mentioned the weakness of some students in basic academic skills such as literacy and numeracy that make difficult to invites students to think analytically.

By using the t test, the result obtained with $t = -6.210$ $p = 0.000$ and show that there are significant differences between students' perceptions of teacher expectations before and after the action is given. The mean value of perception of students before action is 50.48 and after is 57.33. This means that the perception of students towards teachers is better or more positive after administration of the action.

To answer research questions related to differences in student perceptions of classroom climate before and after the action is given, results obtained is $t = -10.299$ with p -value = 0.000 and show that there are significant differences between students' perceptions of classroom climate before and after the action is given. The mean value of perceptions of students before the action is 26.81 and 34.09 after the action.

The actions that teachers communicate to the students are directed to establish closeness and respect to students as individuals. This is an important aspect because teachers who demonstrate a commitment to students, caring, and showing a willingness to help shown to be associated with positive academic performance and student behavior in schools. An important goal to be achieved by schools is to increase the growth of students who are psychologically healthy (Strahan & Layell, 2006). Students mix up between learning and feelings of pleasure they experience in class with a good relationship with teachers. Full support from teacher can increase the activity of learning in the classroom because teachers are able to create a safe learning environment, convenient for students to open up and listen.

From the data also revealed that the effort to increase students' understanding of the material and to improve the thinking skills of students looked very weak conveyed by the teachers. It could be argued that the effect of the application of actions is more seen on the relationships of teachers and students as well as feelings of self-respect in low achievement students. Actions that were applied also did not give effect on student assessment of their learning ability, because not all students assess any improvement in learning ability. It was found that only 8 students from 33 student participants who assess the learning capabilities better than ever before.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The results can be concluded as follows:

1. From the process in action research, teachers' actions that can be considered give a positive impact on student perceptions of their relationships with teachers and classroom climate are: providing the opportunity for all students to answer questions or perform the task in front, giving guidance when students have difficulty either in the form of showing clues or provide additional information to assist, the delivery of praise and positive comments to motivate, and to bond with students in the form of communication.
2. Student perceptions of teacher expectations are better after the implementation of actions designed. The low achievers see that teachers treat them positively by providing the opportunity to respond evenly, delivering praise and positive comments, help or guidance when experiencing difficulty so that students feel valued and are considered more capable.
3. Actions that are applied bring more changes in the affective aspects of students. Students feel more comfortable in their interactions with teachers and feel involved during the learning process takes place. Actions aimed to help students understand the subject matter and develop thinking skills were not making a difference in the observed results. This is due to weakness in the ability of teachers to recognize students' learning difficulties as well as to provide guidance. Teachers have weaknesses in asking questions that can develop students' thinking. Teachers also feel less confident in their ability to guide the process of dialogue or discussion with and among students.

5.2. Suggestion

1. Positive classroom climate will bring a positive influence for the occurrence of positive self-concept of the students. The creation of this situation should become the responsibility of the whole parties of a school.
2. The school is expected to provide opportunities for teachers to acquire the development of teaching skills such as questioning skills and classroom management. Teacher development program would be more effective if followed by a long-term support including mentoring for teachers. Teacher development programs should also be addressed to encourage teachers to develop the characteristics of the dominant-cooperative style in communicating with students which is characterized by the ability to set standards and maintain control of the class but also have empathy and willing to hear to the students.
3. Teachers can begin to develop their own classroom action research because teachers are also researchers who can analyze the process of learning in their classroom and make changes that support students' learning
4. It has been proved that the teacher development programs, whether held inside or outside of school, are effective to improve the quality of teachers in their profession. Institutions that responsible for teacher education can organize and offer programs so that teachers have opportunity to learn and develop themselves continuously

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