THE USE OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
SENIOR SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Globally the problem of social studies teaching is amazingly the same. The problem relates
with the low interest of students on the subject, boring, unreal, a lot of memorization, what is
learned isolated to the use of classroom activities and so on and so on (Hasan, 2007). It is
fair to say that the problems are not exclusive to social studies but it is undeniable that the
degree of the problem of social studies education encounter is much deeper than other
curriculum subjects.

There are at least four factors affecting the unfavourable position of senior secondary social
studies teaching. The four factors are government policy on education especially on
curriculum, persistent philosophical position of curriculum, the curriculum content
organization, and the implementation of social studies curriculum. These four factors
contribute to the position of secondary social studies curriculum in its own regards. The
policy position as something political does contribute significantly to the perception of
students, parents, and society on social studies teaching. Needless to say that the policy
position is very different from philosophical position but they are both clearly related with
policy aspects of curriculum development. The other two factors are basically technical
aspects of curriculum development though it cannot be denied that these two factors are
affected by the first two factors. However, the four factors accumulatively and empirically
are those that should be addressed carefully and rightfully once the social studies curriculum
should be better of.

On government policy factor it is very obvious that the government and education decision
making at the central government favours more curriculum subjects such as mathematics and
natural science to social studies. The bias of the policy makers towards mathematics and
natural science is obviously shown by the number of credit hours allocated for these two
curriculum subjects compared to social studies. Mathematics and natural science receive

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more budget than social studies curriculum, and also more teaching and learning equipment than social studies curriculum. A very big budget allocated on special preparation for students who would participate in mathematics or natural science olympiads. There is a very strong impression that the government only considered mathematics and natural science education as the major feature indicating the success of education and in turn the significant indicator of the quality of the nation.

The policy is contrary to the fact that social studies education has a very deep impact on the development of unity of the nation and it is also the fact that socially Indonesian is at the danger of national and social cohesion. A very good and strong educational program of social studies can contribute effectively and significantly to strengthen national and social feelings of the society for unity. It is also very obvious that when social studies education fails then the national unity is at stake. The existing problems in Indonesian society nowadays such as criminals, political and social disorder, and other conflicts are the contribution of social studies education. It is therefore, the policy on social studies education should be reformulated and placed social studies curriculum. No nation is at danger in terms of national unity only when social studies education outcome is low in quality.

Philosophy for social studies curriculum as well as other subject matter curriculum has been persistently based upon essentialism and perrenialism. Philosophy has a very pivotal in curriculum development as the philosophy dictates what kind and what to achieve. Tanner dan Tanner (1980) said that philosophy in curriculum "both a source and an influence for educational objectives and curriculum development (Tanner and Tanner, 1980:103). Schubert (1986:116) writes:

> Philosophy lies at the heart of educational endeavor. This is perhaps more evident in curriculum domain than in any other, for curriculum is a response to the question of how to live a good life. . . . John dewey (1916) supported this emphasis when he suggested that education is the testing ground of philosophy itself.

Realized the position of philosophy in curriculum development, in his book entitled "Developing Curriculum" Oliva (1997: 190) writes:

> The curriculum committee should be cognizant of the major principles of the leading schools of philosophy, particularly essentialism and progressivism. They should know where they stand as individuals and as a group in the philosophical spectrum. They may discover that they have adopted, as have perhaps a majority of educators, an ecclectic approach to philosophy, choosing the best from several philosophies.

For more than five decades, curriculum development in Indonesia has been dominated by the philosophy of essentialism and perrenialism. By esensialism the end of education and hence curriculum should be directed towards the "cultivation of the intellect , academic

excellence". Perrenialism has an equally similar direction as it directed towards the "cultivations of rational powers" dan "academic excellence". Intellectual power is what is called "logical-mathemathical intelligence" by Gardner (2006:32-33). It is "canonical intelligence" while "noncanonical intelligence" such as "musical intelligence", "spatial intelligence", "bodily-kinesthetic intelligence", naturalist intelligence", "personal intelligence" ("interpersonal intelligence" dan "intrapersonal intelligence") are excluded in the two previously mentioned philosophies. Education should develop human capacities and this means curriculum of social studies should concern with all kinds of the intelligence. This means that in order to contribute to the development human capacities, social studies curriculum should have a new orientation in the philosophy.

It is very unfortunate that the decision on the philosophy of curriculum is very much determined by the government although it is now the school has to complete the development of curriculum document. However, to improve the status and quality of social studies education cannot be done substantially without the changing of its philosophical basis. Especially when this paper is discussing about the use of project-based learning, it can't be hardly possible to implement the idea to social studies curriculum without the change of curriculum philosophy. This means that the school should be taking a big step in changing the philosophy orientation of social studies curriculum.

The other two factors the organization of curriculum content and the implementation are likely the aspects to be more academic and comparatively easier to do. The organization of the curriculum content is concerned with how the substantive, skills and values content are organized. The implementation is concerned with the way teachers of social studies put all the ideas of the curriculum into everyday learning experiences of the students. However, it is not the only reason the present paper forward these two factors as its major focus of the problems. The main reason is because these two factors are very important to shift social studies teaching from the one that known as "memory deposit of unrelated and boring facts" to something attractive and useful. Furthermore, they are the aspects that teachers of social studies should deal every day in their honourable task to educate young generation of the nation.

THE PROBLEM

Based upon the remarks on social studies elaborated in the introductory part, the question posed in this paper is how project-based learning can improve the teaching of social studies curriculum from the one that uninterested, boring, ordinary memory, exclusively to classroom use to the one

which is interested, imaginative, intelligent memory, critical thinking, and applicable to daily lives.

There two terms which should be elaborated because these two terms are technical terms in nature. The first one is ordinary and intelligent memory and the second one is critical thinking. On the two kinds of memory the present paper follows what is put forward by Gordon (2003:1-2) who wrote:

> While ordinary memory is where we keep specific facts, Intelligent Memory is where we keep connection and meaning. Ordinary memory is conscious and relatively slow-we are often aware of the effort involved in trying to remember a name or a date – but Intelligent Memory is quick, effortless, and usually unconscious. It's responsible for almost everything we do with our senses, our minds, and our muscles.

For the meaning of critical thinking, it is the view of Harris (2001) who wrote that critical thinking is "a habit of cautious evaluation, an analytic mindset aimed at discovering component parts of ideas and philosophies, eager to weigh the merits of arguments and reasons in order to become a good judge of them". By this definition, Harris constructs the concept of critical thinking with four attributes namely analysis, attention, awareness, and independent judgement. In every activity of critical thinking these four attributes present but the degree of each attribute differentiate amongst the level of critical thinking performance someone demonstrate. The higher level of attributes the more habit of critical thinking someone has.

WHAT IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING?

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is not something new. It is not new in the context of American education and it is not a new thing in the context of Indonesian education. Literature on education traced the idea of project-based learning back to 19th century or the at least at the beginning of the 20th century and therefore it is not surprising Boss et al. entitled their book Reinventing Project-Based Learning. It is a reinvention and the Kilpatrick mentioned as one of pioneer of this approach (Knoll, 1997; Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009). Grant (2002) decorated Dewey also as one of the pioneer at the beginning of the 20th century whose model of project learning influences deeply American education.

Grant (2000) mentions that PBL is based on constructivism and constructionism. He describes constructivism as a learning process where "individuals construct knowledge through interactions with their environment, and each individual's knowledge construction is different". Furthermore he said that constructionism "posits that individuals learn best when they are constructing an artefact that can be shared with others and reflected upon …" and more importantly " the artefacts must be personally meaningful, where individuals are most likely to

become engaged in learning". It might be good to differentiate the two terms but it seems that one is complementary to the other because no one can construct any meaning of something when this something has no meaning to her/him. Artefacts constitute an environment while an environment can be so limited as classroom environment.

As commonly happen in the field of education a term is defined in many different ways and meanings the term PBL is no exemption. Bransford and Stein (1993) conceptualized PBL as "a comprehensive instructional approach to engage students in sustained, cooperative investigation". By this definition it is obvious that the basic activities of the PBL is cooperative investigation. This means that there is no PBL if there is no cooperative investigation although it should be understood that investigation can cover many activities within the classroom context and outside school as well.

This notion is also shared by McGrath (2003) when she says that students "work in groups to solve challenging problems that are authentic, curriculum-based, and often interdisciplinary". The emphasis on curriculum-based is important as project-based learning is considered as instructional strategy. Knoll (1997:2) called it "the best and most appropriate methods of teaching. Many works and arguments of project-learning based are based upon this educational position, namely, project-based learning is an instructional design for curriculum implementation. Project sponsored by Apple Inc implemented at Mansfield Middle School in Storrs illustrates this understanding very well. Students work in a small group studying the way Chinese society treated female members. As it is the subject matter of history, students used primary and secondary resources to construct their knowledge. The students used computers with all its extended programs as it was financed by Apple Inc. A similar learning situation and conditions were also applied for a project-based learning called "Walk a Mile in Another Man's Shoes".

The notion that PBL a teaching method is also acknowledged by Buck Institute of Education (BIE). This organization developed a project and one of the result is a handbook. In the handbook, PBL is defined as "a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks". Although it clearly mentioned in the definition that PBL provides opportunity for learning skills but BIE findings indicate that PBL "is not appropriate as a method for teaching basic skills such as reading or computation". It is the advantages of PBL when it is concerned with "higher-level cognitive development through students' engagement with complex, novel problem".

Howell (2003) also views PBL as an extended inquiry. He defines PBL as "a teacher-facilitated collaborative approach in which students acquire and apply knowledge and skills to define and solve realistic problems using a process of extended inquiry" (Howell, 2003:1). The realistic problem is a novel one but it should be at the level where the students can understand and able to apply what they know and able to solve the problem. A nationwide problem is not a suitable problem for the students' level of thinking though it is a novel one.

It is explicitly mentioned in those definitions the relationship between PBL and inquiry where PBL is considered as "an extended inquiry". Johnson and Lamb (2007) do not share this notion

when they defined PBL as "an approach to learning focusing on developing a product or creation. The project may or may not be "student-centered, problem-based, or inquiry-based". So, for these scholars the PBL can student-centered, inquiry-based and problem-based but these attributes are not critical attributes for PBL. For them, the most important feature of PBL is that student doing actively to produce or create something. Is the solution related to a problem or something new not a big question.

It is the position of the present paper that PBL cannot be separated from inquiry. In fact, it is hardly possible to develop learning process based upon PBL without any skills of inquiry. Before the students involved in PBL processes they should have learned skills of inquiry. However, it does not mean that they should have master the skills at the proficiency level before they experience PBL. Based upon the project supported by Apple Inc on social studies and history, it is also the obvious that PBL can be implemented at primary school level at grade IV and so on. At the earlier stage of the implementation of PBL, of course the direction and guidance from teachers are required but the more the students become skilful in using inquiry the less the direction and guidance from teachers required. As PBL is connected with the implementation of curriculum, it is in no stage at all that students should develop their PBL without any intervention from teachers.

Furthermore, PBL should concern with problem(s) in the real world not problem created hypothetically. The real world problem means the problem(s) students can see, observe, and relate with their everyday lives. It means that the problem might be related and in fact caused by event(s) in the past and covers so many dimensions of life. The problem is not necessary something that has become formal knowledge, researched by scholars and discussed in textbook. The problem might be something outside the concern of any discipline of social sciences but it can be studied by using concepts, theories, or principles which are already imbedded in the textbook. In no case at all that teachers and students should refrain from any problem which is not formal content of social sciences. In the case of history this means that students should be allowed to study historical events as well as formal and official history. In the case of geography, students should be open to learn any physical and social characteristics specified to their immediate environment without any implication that they don't need to study formal content of geography education. The same principle applies for the study of sociology, anthropology, government, politics, and economy. In other words, the learning of social studies by applying PBL will open a wider horizon as far as the content and learning process are concerned.

ADVANTAGES OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Buck Institute of Education (2009:3) reported that PBL has the following advantages:

- Overcome the dichotomy between knowledge and thinking, helping students to both "know" and "do".

- Support students in learning and practising skills in problem solving, communication, and self-management.
- Encourage the development of habits of mind associated with lifelong learning, civic responsibility, and personal or career success.
- Integrates curriculum areas, thematic instruction, and community issues
- Assesses performance on content and skills using criteria similar to those in the work world, thus encouraging accountability, goal setting, and improved performance.
- Creates positive communication and collaborative relationship among diverse groups of students.
- Meets the needs of learners with varying skill levels and learning styles.
- Engages and motivates bored or indifferent students.

Those advantages are not based upon academic thinking and arguments but on what reported by teachers who implemented the model. Furthermore, there are 11 out of 30 experiments financed by Apple Inc and reported at http://edcommunity.apple.com are concerned with middle school social studies teaching. They project also report advantages similar to those put forward by BIE. Therefore, the advantages of PBL is supported theoretically and empirically. More importantly, from what is reported the use of PBL is potential to improve the quality of social studies teaching from the existing conditions to the new and expected ones.

Furthermore, Kraft (2000) reported that some of the advantages of PBL are:

- Allows a variety of learning styles
- "real" world oriented-learning has value beyond the demonstrated competence of the learner
- Encourages the use of higher order thinking skills and learning concepts as well as basic facts
- Assessment in congruent with instruction, i.e. performance-based
- Students are responsible for their own learning
- Learning utilizes real time data – investigating data and drawing conclusions
- Learning cuts across curricular areas – multidisciplinary in nature

Considering those all advantages it is soundly to suggest that PBL can overcome a lot of problems of social studies teaching. At least PBL can address very well all the common identified problems associated with social studies teaching. It is, then, it is worth academically and empirically to implement PBL for social studies teaching at least for the level of secondary education both junior and senior high school.

THE PROCEDURE OF TEACHING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

The procedure of teaching using PBL is not complicated. Teachers who used to implement inquiry approach will not have so much problems. However, for a new or novel and never have experienced in implementing inquiry approach, the following procedure can be used as a guiding one.

- Formulate problem(s)
- Develop alternative solutions to the problem
- Discuss what information needed for the solution
- Organize students to collect the needed information
- Develop scaffolding to discuss the collected information
- Discuss the collected information
- Discuss the values of the information including the basic principles used to solve the problem
- Write a report

It should be noted that activity for collecting information is not limited to the time allocated for classroom meeting. However, it does not mean that students can have all the time some limitation such as weeks or months should apply. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that teachers might select particular topic for particular group of students so they can have more time for the activities. The number of groups can be adjusted to the number of standards and topics.

Teachers can develop their own model agreed upon during the discussion with colleagues. However the planning should be done at the outset of a semester that PBL will be implemented. The availability of learning resources, the number of students and their entry behaviour can be factors to consider to develop a more suitable model.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE MODEL

There are two major phases in implementing PBL for social studies curriculum. The first phase is concerned with the preparation of schools, teachers, and student. The second phase is the planning of the PBL in social studies curriculum implementation. The second phase can only be done when the first stage is completed.

For the first phase, there should be a policy from the principal and social studies teachers to implement PBL at that particular school. The decision should cover the necessary learning resources and teaching equipment that will be used. The learning resources might be in the form of resources persons, institutions, printed materials, and so on. The teaching equipment might not necessary a new and expensive ones but there might be the one traditionally one by every school. The policy by the principal should also make a room for teachers of social studies to revise their syllabi or more practically their lesson plan (RPP).

In terms of teachers, school should be sure that teachers should have the followings:

- Knowledge and understanding of PBL
- Skills of teaching for motivating students and guiding them to do the learning
- Skills to assess students performance

- Cooperation with other teachers of social studies at the same school
- Skills to plan cooperatively with other teachers to develop PBL

Before PBL is implemented teacher should be sure that students should have developed curiosity, inquiry skills and problem solving skills. These three aspects are critical and therefore teachers should develop these qualities on part of students before implementing

Inquiry skills consists of formulating problems, collecting and selecting sources, collecting information, processing information, interpreting collected information, reporting and communicating the result.

The second phase is the implementation of PBL. At this phase there are three activities should be planned and conducted. The first activity is planning the implementation of PBL starting with the selection of standards and topics. This means that teachers of social studies should decide what Standards which are very much related to the existing problems in the immediate and national society and what topics are considered appropriate and adequate to support the mastery of the standard. The outcomes of this activity is PBL RPP.

The second activity is the process of the implementation of PBL Teachers and students work together to implement what have been developed in the planning stage. This is done according to the scenario set in the RPP and time allocated for the activities. The time should be limited only to the one allocated for classroom meeting but can be extended to the time for doing learning activities.

The third activity is the evaluation of the implementation of PBL. This can be done by teachers themselves not necessary by teachers of other subject matters. Internal evaluation in nature, the major purposes of the evaluation is to improve the quality of the impelementation.

CONCLUSIONS

From what has been discussed it is suggested that PBL should be the focus of social studies implementation. However, it is fully recognized that the model cannot be directly or instantly implemented without appropriate preparation. The preparation is mainly based upon the knowledge, skills, and attitude of teachers towards PBL. By this understanding, skills, and attitudes teachers can prepare students to have skills necessary to be used during the process of PBL.

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