

Inspiring teachers

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Jakarta (Kompas: (29/08/07) There are two kinds of teachers: curriculum-oriented and inspiring teachers. The first ones are very compliant to the curriculum and they feel guilty if they are unable to transmit the content of the books which has been assigned to them. They teach habitual thinking. Curriculum-oriented teachers represent 99% of teachers I have ever met.

Meanwhile, the number of inspiring teachers are very limited, less than 1 percent. They are not teachers who follow the curriculum, but they teach students to be more creative (maximum thinking). They also teach students to think out of the box, to change them from the inside and bring them outside again to the community. If curriculum-oriented teachers managed to produce reliable managers; inspiring teachers produce rejuvenating leaders who dare to challenge various old traditions.

The world needs both of them, as we need both internal validity (kept by curriculum-oriented teachers) and external validity (managed by inspiring teachers) in seeking knowledge. Unfortunately, our schooling systems only recognize curriculum-oriented teachers. Even though the existence of inspiring teachers will determine how fast we would be able to get out of the crisis. The more we restrict them, it would be more difficult for us to get out of the darkness.

"Freedom Writers"

Rejuvenating works, new discoveries of spectacular scientific invention, commercial products, as well as social movement, will emerge in the community. However we have to admit that all of them come from school. The work of inspiring teachers who remain restless and believe that creativity is absolutely necessary. They are capable of repairing things that other people believe to be irreparable and they manage to connect the unconnected.

The story and the work of inspiring teachers could be seen in Erin Gruwell, a female teacher who was assigned to teach a "stupid" class, whose students were often involved in gang brawls. In contrast to another classroom which gathers honors students, having brilliant DNA and well-disciplined. The honors class needs curriculum-oriented teachers.

Erin Gruwell began with difficulties. Aside from being "stupid" and undisciplined, the students were disobedient, degrading each other, temperamental, and always create problems. They were holding guns and cocaine. Outside school they were threatening and killing one another.

This is a class of rejects. Curriculum-oriented teachers believe that these super-naughty students cannot go to the same school as the distinguished scholars. However Erin Gruwell was never losing hope, she made her own "curriculum" which does not contain hard skill; but life skill. She started with line games by drawing up a red line on the floor, she divided the class into two groups - right and left -. If a student answers "yes" they have to approach to the line. It began with some easy questions, like their favorite album, and gang membership, drug possession, and whether they have been jailed or do they have any friends killed in an inter-gang violence.

Line games have united these unruly students who suddenly found out that they are on the same boat. They are all anxious, living under threat, suspicious to other groups and have no future. They started to feel comfortable with their teacher and friends and agree to improve their relationships. After the peace deal reached, the inspiring teacher started to deliver some books, started with the Diary of Anne Frank, a victim of Nazi's ruthlessness. Students were then asked to write down their own life story. They are free to write anything. Their writings were then compiled under a title called "Freedom Writers." The students changed, their life is getting better and many of them have become pioneers of transformation in the community. The story of inspiring teachers and the transformation of the students have been documented in a film called Freedom Writers played by Hilary Swank.

Released from the ties

What Erin Gruwell was doing was not limited to basic education; it could also apply in higher education. However, recently our education world keeps isolating itself from the outside and produced graduates who have been imprisoned by the curriculum. The so-called role model lecturers are those who follow the curriculum, writing scientific writings in certain journals, even though the readers are very limited, and never forget filling down presence sheet. Listen to the protest voiced by Kazuo Murakami PhD, winner of Max Planck Award (1990) who wrote a book "God in our Gene: The Divine Message of The DNA" (2007). He has to move to the United States when he saw the domination of curriculum-oriented teachers in Japan build hierarchical rampart. Universities, he said, has become an ivory tower that do

not care about what happened outside.

Even though they are not very famous, inspiring teachers have a very important role, especially as the education budget is very limited and many graduates are still unable to work in the field related to their educational background. We cannot let our education only produce a curriculum-compliance generation, having good academic achievement, and have a good internal competency, but lacking of creativity in grabbing the opportunity and unaware of the external truth.

There are two problems we have to think about. First, curriculum-oriented lecturers only produce students' ability, only form several persons bearing their own interests. However, inspiring teachers managed to form thousands of people, because one person will inspire many others as they say "I want to be like him/her" or "I can do better than that." Second, educators' incapacity to respond to any external pressure and make them defensive and treat the curriculum like a sacred idol. Any attempt by inspiring teachers to refresh the curriculum is considered as a threat, or even an immoral deed.

I still remember well the experience of an inspiring teacher that I know. In 2005 he received an award from the Yayasan Pengembangan Kreativitas for his works in education. Then, the same awards were also given to Helmi Yahya, Jaya Suprana, Bang Yos, and Guruh Soekarno Putra. However, not many people knew that then he was just receiving a threat to be sacked because he violated the "curriculum." His fault is renewing the curriculum to allow students to be more active. Students were happy, but that doesn't mean other teachers were happy as well. They were irked with the non-curriculum classes and asked the teacher to be sacked. Next semester, the teacher was fired. His career was also jeopardized by those curriculum-oriented teachers who used a loupe to assess the "internal truth."

Jagdish N Sheth said, as long as the obsolete people denied the new reality, they could become arrogant, trapped in Exceptional Achievement in the past, want to maintain comfort, and build territorial limits. Internal behavior is an inert chain, called destructive habits. They use a microscope to exaggerate small things. It is the time to eliminate those inert ramparts by "humanizing" the curriculum and give more space for creative teachers.

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