

Content and Context: A Children's Book to Support Learning in the 2013 Curriculum

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Abstract—When literacy becomes one of the major attentions of our elementary education, many children's books are published and distributed to schools. One question is, whether those books are well selected to support the success of the school literacy movement program as well as the curriculum. Ideally, both of those goals are met; however, no report so far has convinced about this issue. Through a D&D project, some children's books have been written which include curriculum contents and local culture in them. The purpose of the project was to provide children's books which can fulfill the above two goals at once. One of the books entitled *Ngelawang* is presented.

Keywords— *children's book, curriculum, literacy*

I. INTRODUCTION

To successfully implement literacy movement in our Indonesian elementary education is to provide good children's books for the students to read. Reading books are a pivotal part in literacy development, especially in early reading [1]. A number of efforts have been done for this purpose and more and more books are shelved in the school's library of the students' reach.

Ideally, the children's books can also support the implementation of the 2013 curriculum for elementary school. As widely known, the curriculum is thematic in nature. The target competencies are put in thematic frameworks which reflect real life. This approach to curriculum design and implementation appears as themes, in which each of the themes contains four subthemes. Every subtheme is accompanied by a teacher's guide and a students' book.

A deep observation on the students' books (provided by the central government) indicated that many contents and skills are presented in expository style, for instance, an explanation of the topic how a solar eclipse happens. Exposition is a verbalized presentation of ideas [2]. Considering that elementary students' cognitive development is concrete operational, then, descriptive narrative presentation is more appropriate for them. If the topic is presented in a more suitable way, the learning can be more meaningful. In line with this, it is emphasized that stories for children provide a framework for thinking, which allows children to shape experiences into a whole they can understand [3]. Stories allow them to mentally map

experiences and see pictures in their heads. Stories with pictures help promoting children's reading development [4].

For the above reasons, a children book (a story book) is needed to be a complement of the students' book. When the time a topic is studied, a storybook containing the topic will be used hand in hand with the students' book. Another reason to create a thematic children's book is contextual in nature. Learning can take place meaningfully if it is related to the students' daily life. The students' books do not go that far (the reason might be because the books are used throughout Indonesia, so general Indonesian context is mostly used). Therefore, local contexts which meet the curriculum needs are also important to be considered.

The importance of context in learning has been widely addressed. The book *Contextual Teaching and Learning* has been referred to as the major influence on the conceptualization of the importance of context in learning [5]. Deeply rooted to constructivism, contextual teaching and learning as a learning approach emphasizes on the use of several modes, both static and dynamic - inside and outside children - which can provide useful contexts for learning. Diversity and variety which are found in life are said to be good context that will stimulate meaningful learning.

Realizing that no effort yet found to facilitate content and context in the children's books now available in school libraries and in bookstores, then this effort to provide such kind of children's books is extremely worth to support quality instruction in our elementary schools.

The children's book entitled *Ngelawang* is written to complement the sub theme *Kinds of Occupation* appearing on grade four.

II. METHOD

D&D method was used to develop the story *Ngelawang*. There were some steps followed in this project, namely: 1) analysis of contents of the sub theme *Kinds of Occupation*, 2) analysis of corresponding local culture which can facilitate the presentation of contents, 3) drafting the story, 4) expert validation in terms of contents in the story, 5) Story validation by writers and illustrators, 6) Finalization of the story. Data were collected through content analysis and interview with local culture experts. These ways, content and context of the story were obtained. Data were analyzed

qualitatively. Result of the curriculum analysis is put on a table of specification, shown in Table 1:

TABLE I. CURRICULUM CONTENTS OF THE SUB THEME KINDS OF OCCUPATION

No.	Curriculum Contents	Aspects	Indicators Found
1.	Character	Spiritual attitude	Obedience to worship
			Grateful attitude
			Pray before and after doing something
		Tolerance to devotees of other religion	
		Social attitude	Respectful
		Confident	
2.	Content knowledge	Indonesian language	Characteristics of a character
		Social Studies	Economic activities
		Math	Area and Perimeter
		Civics Education	Meaning of the first Sila
		Science	Natural resource conservation
3.	Local culture	Worshipping	Worshipping, making offering
		Greeting	<i>Om Swastyastu</i>
		Playing	<i>Ngelawang</i>
		Thanking	<i>Matur suksma, Suksma mewali</i>
		Location	Temple, community ballroom
		Occupation	<i>Pecalang</i> (traditional security team)

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. About the Children's Book Ngelawang

The children's book entitled Ngelawang was the first book of Lima sekawan the Series. It was a picture book which tells about friendship of five elementary school students who were heterogonous in terms of religion and ethnic group. They were Gede Bagus (main character), Ipul, Maria, Koko, and Made Ayu. One day, the five kids went on playing together, that is Ngelawang. Ngelawang is a typical Balinese dancing game in which two children play the Barong (an imagery character). They danced and walked around the village followed by some children playing Balinese gamelan. Before Ngelawang, the five happened to meet some people and coincidences which made the story.

Aside of the story, the book is completed with some information regarding the property of the book. On the first page under the cover, there is a note for teachers and parents on how to use the book as a complement of the students' book. On the back page is the table of specification of the contents and contexts used in the story including the page where they can be found. The back cover contained a one-paragraph caption which 'sells' the book.

The note for teachers and parents is a guideline on how the book is used both as a literacy activity and also as a complement of the students' book. Especially as a complement, the story can be introduced as a whole or in parts. The point is that, content and context in the story are selected in such a way in which they match with the content being learned from the students' book.

The book contains 20 pages. Each page is split into two parts. The right part is the story and the left part is the corresponding colorful picture.

B. Content and context in the Children's Book Ngelawang

The table of specification as shown in Table 1 were then completed by parts of the story which portrayed such contents and contexts, as follows:

TABLE II. CONTENTS OF SUB THEME KINDS OF OCCUPATION AS PORTRAYED IN THE STORY NGELAWANG

Curriculum Contents	Aspects	Indicators Found	Parts of The Children's Book Which Contain the Contents	
Character	Spiritual attitude	Obedience to worship	After preparing <i>Saiban</i> , Gede proceed to worship in the house's shrine. (p. 3)	
		Grateful attitude	"We must be grateful that all parts of the coconut tree are useful" (p.6)	
		Pray before and after doing something	Father asked his wife and Gede to pray before they had the breakfast. (p. 5)	
		Tolerance to devotees of other religions	Although their religions are different, they play together and also <i>Ngelawang</i> together. (p. 7)	
	Social attitude	Respectful	Gede asked a permission from his mother to go <i>Ngelawang</i> (p. 7)	
		Confident	Gede directly asked Made's father how to grow coconut trees well. (p.14)	
	Content knowledge	Indonesian language	Characteristics of a character	Gede Bagus was a boy who was respectful and confident. (p. 1)
		Social Studies	Economic activities	Gede's father, a fisherman talked about the current fish prices in the market. (p. 2)
Math		Area and Perimeter	"To calculate the area of a square, we use the SxS formula". (p.9)	
Civics Education		Meaning of the first Sila	Gede had four friends who devoted to different religions. (p. 7)	
	Science	Natural resource conservation	".....growing plants are very good to conserve nature", said the teacher. (p. 6)	
Local culture	Worshipping	Worshipping, making offering	After preparing <i>Saiban</i> , Gede proceed to worship in the house's shrine. (p. 3) Its leaves can be used to prepare offerings. (p. 6)	
	Greeting	<i>Om Swastyastu</i>	" <i>Om Swastyastu</i> , Mom. Father brings some fish today', he said. (p. 2,12)	
	Play Activities	<i>Ngelawang</i>	The game they played was called <i>Ngelawang</i> (p. 1)	
	Thanking	<i>Matur suksma, Suksma mewali</i>	"Wow, it that true?, <i>Suksma ya</i> ". (p. 15)	

	Location	Temple, community ballroom	Gede brought the offering to the house's shrine (p. 4) Gede and his friends went to the village ballroom to prepare the barong. (p.16)
	Occupation	<i>Pecalang</i> (traditional security team)	The <i>Pecalang</i> went to the village ballroom to inspect the riot made by some naughty boys. (p.16).

C. Quality of the Children's Book *Ngelawang*

Two experts in language, literature, and culture were asked to compare the content and context of the storybook based on some indicators. The indicators include: Visual element (illustration, story and Information of content element (content, character, character revelation, plot, logic, view point), and language element (readability, vocabulary, sentence structure). Put in scores, the overall mean obtained from the response of the two experts was 93.50, categorized as very good. For the first element, it was recognized that the pictures in the book portrayed well the corresponding content, and at the same time very attractive and colorful. This power of context (culture) in stories has been one of the highlights of story writing for Indonesian children recently [6]

The second element (information and content), was judged that the contents of the book matched with the sub theme Kinds of Occupation contents, and presented in recognition of an elementary school level of development. The last element (language) was categorized as very good because the language used appropriate with grade four students: sentences were not long, the vocabulary were grounded on the words used in the students' book so that the language fitted well with the students.

Finally, two teachers were asked to judge the content of the storybook based on the content of the sub theme Kinds of Occupation. Put in scores, the average response of the teachers was 217, which was in the category very good. In general, both teachers agreed that the content of the storybook matched with the content of the sub theme.

D. Discussion

The existence of a reading material like the children's book *Ngelawang* in the process of learning of elementary school students can be said as an innovation and at the same time a significant contribution to the literacy development program and the implementation of the 2013 curriculum. Having content and context put together in a story promote engagement in learning [7]. The use of stories related to curriculum contents has improved students' attitudes (honesty, patience, and obedience to pray) together with abilities in listening and reading [8]. It is evident that stories can be used as a character education tool [9]. The fact that even basic literacy (reading and writing) of our students is commonly very low, has been an alarm of whether our elementary education is ready to face the disruption era with the highlights on three important literacy namely big data, technology, and human literacy. The idea of putting together literacy and curriculum in a story like *Ngelawang* helps

promoting the learning of content and context. The learning and innovation skills now will defeat the emphasis on knowledge, i.e. students now learn not for acquiring knowledge as first place, but to develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and innovation which will help students to be ready with any rapid changes (disruption) that they will face in the future. This means that the context of learning is very important. Students will learn to solve their own problems of life.

A Story book like *Ngelawang* is chosen to support content and context in elementary level because the students' cognitive development requires they operate holistically as how they see the world. Presented in the narrative mode, a story brings children to activate their cognition which makes them imagine something stimulated by the story. A whole picture then emerges in their mind, bringing a lot of impression implanted in their memory. With this, when a new content is learned, the mind activates the memory. A transaction will occur between the memory and the new stimulus, then a connection will be established. If the stimulus largely match will the prior knowledge then the learning becomes much easier [10]. The transactional theory signifies that both the reader and the text play an important role in the formation of meaning. Automatically, the children will connect between content they are learning with the context found in their memory. Because context in the story *Ngelawang* is local culture, the connection becomes very contextual. This way, the learning will be meaningful. A meaningful learning is what will help our children pursuing their life; while meaningless learning will only burden them [11]. Meaningful learning can happen if content and context match. This what is offered by *Ngelawang*.

The dual functions of the storybook *Ngelawang* is also very helpful. As observed so far at school, books available for literacy activities are mostly not automatically matched with the curriculum contents, Therefore, little contribution of the literacy books to the classroom lessons using the students' book. This partial management by no means has hindered meaningful learning.

Finally, it is obvious that availability of children's books like *Ngelawang* is badly needed to furnish our school library; and also, deliberate efforts must be done by teachers to make more meaningful connections between the books read by students for literacy activities [12] with the students' books which present the curriculum contents.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The storybook *Ngelawang* as a reading material has been a significant contribution to the development of meaningful learning by putting content and context together in the story, and facilitating connection between literacy learning and content learning of the 2013 curriculum. *Ngelawang* is an example of a needed reading material which can fulfill dual functions above. The existence of story books like *Ngelawang* also implies to school management, especially in the management of school's book collection and classroom management by teachers. More story books like *Ngelawang* need to be written and published and then, effectively used to promote meaningful learning in elementary school classrooms.

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