

## **A CRITICAL REVIEW ABOUT BRINGING HISTORY TO STUDENT'S LIFE BY SHAPING 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SOCIAL SKILLS IN INDONESIA ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES [PART ONE]**

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### **Abstract**

This article is a critical review of the deconstruction of historical learning on social studies in elementary schools with the big aim of improving students' social skills. This critical review is based on a book "Deconstructing History" (Munslow, 1997) on the deconstruction of historical learning. The deconstruction is based on postmodernism paradigm by converting conventional learning into unusual learning method. Meanwhile, deconstruction in the learning of history can be done by establishing a rational mindset of modernism that emphasizes the great narratives and great figures in National history (Supriatna, 2012). This deconstruction of historical learning is needed to make a space for local history and local issues which more relevant to students' interests. This kind of historical learning can be presented using various approaches by making students as the active learners as well as the actors of history in his day. Through the deconstruction of historical learning indirectly provides space for the use of unusual new learning methods. One of them is using the "First Person Historical Presentation" method to bring history to student's life (Morris, 2009) and the use the term of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment. This new kind of social studies learning paradigm in elementary school will also provide an opportunity to develop life skills which are relevant to students' lives. Bringing history into the students' lives and involving their feelings into the history will make learning history more meaningful. Students will experience and discover a fun learning experience so that it can create a historical consciousness of themselves and their environment. This kind of learning will support the development of more complex social skills by involving the creation of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment (Kass, Burke, & Blevis, 2009).

**Keywords:** Bringing History to Student's Life, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environment, Social Skills

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Because of humans are social beings that are interdependent each other, so in human interaction requires special skills called with “social skills” (Singleton, 1983). Education as one means to actualize social skills can be reached through various subjects at every level of formal education. In Indonesia, the formation of these skills has a special place in “Social Studies” learning process, especially Social Study in primary schools as the first institution to instill basic values in children. Social skills will be trained if the Social Studies learning process also provides opportunities to practice a variety of social skills. Therefore, Social Studies learning should be designed in such a way that learning becomes meaningful and provides opportunities for students to develop their social skills.

History as one of the aspects of learning in social studies in primary schools can provide considerable opportunities in building social skills. It's just that deconstruction is needed to put this historical lesson more critical and meaningful in the formation of students' social skills. Deconstruction efforts of critical history learning that make students play an active role as the actors of history in their era need to develop critical views in advance about historical learning practices that depart from the perennials, modernism, and behaviorism curriculum (Supriatna, 2012). Here I wanna tell an alternative way how to design a deconstructive history learning process by using a Ronald Vaughan Morris designed (2009), “First Person Historical Presentation” method to bring history in students' life. Therefore, they can play an active role based on history and take a meaningful social skills' example that can be found while they are learning history, can be practiced in their daily life then.

Meanwhile learning approach's factor is not only one that can support in improving social skills through social studies learning in elementary schools. There are various other factors to form a Social studies learning paradigm that can support the achievement of social studies goals and optimal social skills in the 21st century, among which is the creation of 21st-century learning environment. Theoretically, the creation of a 21st-century learning environment can support social skills learning on learning elementary social studies and other complex social skills (Kass, Burke, & Bleviss, 2009). This is because the characteristics of the 21st-century learning environment that tends to emphasize the creation of learning environments that encourage positive social interaction through students' collaborative learning.

## **2. A LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Bringing history to students' life**

Through learning history, students can learn content and skills by taking on roles, interpreting characters, making decisions in a simulated environment, and then evaluating the effect of their actions (Morris, 2009; Catterall, 2007; Downey & Levstik, 1991; Edinger, 2005; Fines & Verrier, 1974; Goalen & Hendy, 1993; Kelin, 2002; Morris & Welch, 2000; Tanner, 2001; Wilson, 2002). Through the process of dramatizing everyday experiences and notable events from their community's past, students learn how history confronts each generation with interesting experiences and challenges. Students then begin to see how history applies to their lives. Based on the role of history that can be used in discovering more values dan social skills for students, Morris (2009) gives his ideas about how to teach history in order to effectively help students to find the values and social skills while they are learning social studies in elementary schools. According to Morris (2009), the way that can be used to bring the history into students' life is a method that's named “First Person Historical Presentation”.

Teachers can use “First Person Historical Presentation” to communicate interpret, create, and show the perspective of a history to students. Moreover, Morris (2009) explains about the “First-Person Historical Presentations” are great ways to help students deal with controversial issues because the students get opportunities to examine issues from the past. The issue needs to have a meaning to the students; that is, the issue needs to be an issue the students have confronted, will confront, or have a concern about at this time. The issue has a meaning to society in that it represents the view of a majority or minority of the people. There is considerable interest in the issue, and it impacts the well-being of a group of people.

According to Morris (2009), there are several criteria to use this method in teaching history as a part of social studies in primary schools. Elementary school social studies teachers conduct first-person historical presentations in their classrooms by dressing in period clothing or using props to establish their character. When they do this while teaching social studies, classroom teachers explore social history, which emphasizes the life of the common people; in first-person historical presentations teachers take on a role as a figure from the past. Elementary school teachers conduct first- person historical portrayals as a novel way to teach social studies to their students. By looking at common people

through studying social history, students find out about working people rather than the wealthy, powerful, or famous. By focusing on common people, students can learn about women, minorities, and people who have lost their voice in history.

Moreover, Morris (2009) said that early in the process of constructing your character, you will wish to consider whether you wish to speak to someone who is famous or if you want to select a less well-known character. You may start with an idea, such as the idea of how you could teach about an entrepreneur. Think about what you will do with your hands, how you will move your body, and what your facial expressions will be. Think about what you will say, how you will use your voice, what will be the pace and inflection of your voice, and how you will project the dynamics of your voice. With this kind of planning and forethought, you will become very polished and proficient at giving first-person historical presentations. Use your gesture, give your deep feeling to bring students empathy and embed students feeling.

## **2.2. Shaping 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment**

P21 (2015) said that the term “learning environment” suggests place and space, a school, a classroom, a library. And indeed, much 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning takes place in physical locations like these. But in today’s interconnected and technology-driven world, a learning environment can be virtual, online, and remote; in other words, it does not have to be a place at all. Perhaps P21 (2015) said that a better way to think of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environments is as the support systems that organize the condition in which humans learn best-systems that accommodate the unique learning needs of every learner and support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning. Learning environments are the structures, tools, and communities that inspire students and educators to attain the knowledge and skills the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands of us all. Experts say 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning must take place in contexts that “promote interaction and a sense of community [that] enable formal and informal learning.” Thus, this paper will address the relationship of physical spaces and technological systems to learning, but more importantly, it will also consider how those resources support the positive *human relationships* that matter most to learning. And while technology, space, time, culture, and policy will be discussed separately, it is important to remember that their power is cumulative. Real learning effectiveness occurs when these systems are artfully integrated into a seamless whole in which each system reinforces the others. It is worth emphasizing, too, that these support systems are valuable not as ends, but as means to a greater goal-to helping children grow emotionally, socially, physically, and academically. Here I give the highlight that shaping a classroom setting that can support human relationship has the same meaning with making a learning environment that can support students to develop their social skills.

Then how to shape or create a 21st Century Learning Environment? First, we should know the components of Learning Environment. In my term, based on P21’ term of learning environment, so at least there are four components of learning environment that we should be manipulated, created or shaped, they are Classroom Climate including temperature, lighting, color, noise level and cleanliness; Classroom Space including the availability of space for teachers, space for students, circulation room, hall and emergency room such as exit door etc; Relationship in the Classroom which is the interaction that occurs between students and teachers, or students with students; and Classroom Materials/Setting/Furniture arrangement including layout arrangement or seating layout, arrangement of classroom equipment such as whiteboards, reading tables, carpets for group discussions, bulletins, or display of students’ work, etc. Then how to manipulate or shape all of those components to be a 21st-century learning environment? We have to adjust all of those components with all the indicators or 21st-century learning environment as follows (P21, 2015):

- Creating a practical learning environment, with a learning environment supported by human resources and physical resources that will support the results of 21st-century learning skills.
- Supporting professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices and integrate 21st-century skills in practice classes.
- Enables students to learn that are relevant in a real-world context in the 21st century (for example, through work-based projects or other workplace applications)
- Allows equitable access to a range of quality learning tools, technologies and other resources that can support other learning activities.
- The 21st-century learning environment should provide 21st-century building architecture and interior design to learn in groups, teams, as well as individual learning.
- Support of the learning environment should be expanded with community involvement and international involvement in learning activities, both face-to-face and online.

### **2.3. Social skills**

Social skills are an important part of the ability of human life. Without having social skills people cannot interact with others in their environment because social skills are needed in social life. Singleton (1983, 8) states that fundamentally people are social animals; their need to interact with each other is much more basic than merely personal gain. This basic need for social interaction is overlaid with other features arising from the structure of society particularly mutual dependence because of specialization of function. Each individual cultivates some specialized skills which he practices as his personal contribution to the collective activity of ordinary life-usually he calls the exercise of these functions his work. This is the background to the concept of a role which describes and summarizes what an individual is doing, how he is doing it and why he is doing it without resorting to any attempt to uncover the layers of complexity of individual drives and incentives. In the analysis of social skills, it is not essential to search for motives.

Moreover, Singleton (1983) stated that "The skill of the person is the product of his unique history as an individual. This social skill is a unique skill created by humans as it creates its own history of life. Skills are obtained by humans through learning in relationships when interacting with the environment, especially family, community and even taught through formal education within a certain time.

Social skills are the ability to communicate one individual with another individual such as; task-oriented behaviors: the ability to take responsibility, to work and work in groups, be creative in working, and strive for quality in work. In essence, social skills can be developed and manifested in interactional. This is reflected in the statement proposed by Anderson (2004: 451) that: "Social skills are developed and manifest in social interaction." Social interaction is a vehicle for the development of social skills of each individual.

Based on some experts' term above it can be concluded that social skills is the ability to establish relationships with other human beings either verbal or nonverbal communication involving the cognitive aspect to digest the value and think the reason for behaving, involving affection aspect to hone the feeling of the environment (emotional regulation) and psychomotor to behave practically. My conclusion is also based on the previous opinion from Matson (2009) which states: "Social skills are specific abilities that allow competent performance of social situations, including overt behavior, social cognition skills, and emotional regulation". The same thing also conveyed by Carlledge and Milburn (1992: 19) that: "Social skills are part of the psychomotor domain, which is related to the cognitive and affective domain". This opinion suggests that social skills as part of the psychomotor domain are related to the cognitive and affective domains. In this case, social skills are presented as a means to interact with others in the form of polite speech, listening, cooperation, and so on. The behavior is displayed based on knowledge and effectiveness on others.

Meanwhile, Caldarella and Merrel (1997); Matson (2009) states about the aspect or dimension of social skills consisting of 5 aspects or dimensions as follows:

- The peer relations dimension, involves positive peer behaviors, such as giving compliments, offering help, and inviting other to play.
- Self-Management skills dimension includes behaviors such as controlling temper, following rules and compromising.
- Academic skills dimension, are behaviors related to being productive in independent classroom settings, such as accomplishing tasks independently, completing individual seatwork, and listening to teacher direction.
- Compliance dimension involves behaviors related to complying with social rules, such as appropriately using free time and sharing.
- Assertion skills dimension includes behaviors such as initiating conversation, acknowledging compliments and making friends.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Most of learning history as a part of social studies in Indonesia elementary school, still be a conventional learning practice. This kind of learning history just presenting a fact, emphasize the knowledge both on the learning process and the assessment. Learning about skills and affection is not a big goal, meanwhile we now that both of them have an important role in daily human life. This conventional learning history is not given a space to develop social skills; therefore, need a paradigm shift from positivistic into post-positivistic learning. Paradigm shift here is deconstructing the history learning which is can give more space to develop social skills. As a pioneer of primary education, Froebel stated that the purpose of primary education is to

develop the latent spiritual essence of the child in a prepared environment (such as songs, stories, histories, games, art, and craft, etc (Ornstein, 2011). Therefore, it is really important to deconstruct elementary school learning by using a history as a medium to actualize a new paradigm shift in the learning process.

History as a part of social studies can be a wider alternative to provide more opportunities for students to develop their social skills naturally. Learning history should critically create a learning which can build students historical consciousness (Supriatna, 2016). Through history content students can effectively learn content, values and social skills by taking on roles, interpreting characters, making decisions in a simulated environment, and then evaluating the effect of their actions then they can make a relation between the content and their daily real life (Morris, 2009; Catterall, 2007; Downey & Levstik, 1991; Edinger, 2005; Fines & Verrier, 1974; Goalen & Hendy, 1993; Kelin, 2002; Morris & Welch, 2000; Tanner, 2001; Wilson, 2002). So, the students can learn, find then begin to see how values and social skills which are found in history events applied to their lives. Students think as if they are part of the history, they are the actors of history in his day, and they can find the same situation in their real life. And that is we called "bringing history to students' life".

Bringing history to students' life by using "First Person Historical Presentation" as a method which is designed by Morris is a way how to teach history which emphasizes the life of the common people; in first-person historical presentations teachers take on a role as a figure from the past by combining various ways while teaching social studies. When we explore social history by using "First Person Historical Presentation", we should deeply explore the character when we bring a history in the classroom, making us a model of historical life that is become an attention center with supporting tools that can strengthen the narratives; dressing up, dressing according to story content, using gestures to bring historical stories in the classroom; using hand gestures to provide pressure and perhaps we can give a meaningful touch; using facial expressions that must play a role to bring the story to life; set the production of voice to tell a history, control the tone, the rhythm, the emphasis or stressing on the sound so as to produce a dynamic sound when giving emphasis in the storytelling. The last one is to include a deep feeling, to bring empathy to the students so it can be able to take and involve the students' feelings into the story of history. By taking the history into students' life and by engaging deep feelings, the students will feel and have their own experiences in learning so that it creates a historical consciousness that allows students to extract the values and social skills of historical events. That's the way to implement and embed "First Person Historical Presentation" as a way to bringing history to student's life.

In the other ways, there are other factors which can influence in cultivating social skills to the students, and one of them is learning environment. According to Mc.Robbie, Roth & Lucus, 1997; Susan, 2005 (VELS Overview) stated that "The nature of the Classroom Learning Environment and psycho-social interactions can make a difference in how the students learn and achieve their goals" and the students need to develop the capacities to:

1. Manage themselves as **individuals** and in **relation** to others
2. **Understand** the world in **which they live** and
3. Act **effectively** in that world. (VELS Overview)".

Both of them indicate the importance of the learning environment because the learning environment can be a benchmark of achieving competence or learning objectives of each student. Especially the purpose of shaping the learning environment is aimed at the students need to develop 1) their ability as individual beings and also their ability to relate/interact with other creatures; 2) understand the world from its own point of view; 3) act more effectively. Therefore, according to Sidi (2005: 148), "Learning environment is very instrumental in creating a fun learning atmosphere". The environment can improve the learning activity, therefore the learning environment needs to be in proper order.

Theoretically, the creation of a 21st-century learning environment can support social skills learning on learning elementary social studies and other complex social skills (Kass, Burke, & Blevis, 2009; Hannah, 2013; Grubaugh & Houston, 1990; Gaurdino & Fullerton, 2010; Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004). It's based on learning environment should be supported to students' interaction with others.

Meanwhile, we know that in Indonesia the standard for many classrooms today is to have desks aligned in rows within the classroom. This system of arrangement seems to make students lose focus and creates a higher number of disruptions in the classroom. This structure does not encourage interaction between students and focuses more on the student as an individual completing their own work. Grubaugh & Houston (1990) stated that humans are social creatures that want attention, and if they aren't going to be able to get it

from their classmates then they will commonly act out to get attention from their teacher. One of the first areas that make a noticeable impact on student success is the physical environment of the classroom. This can pertain to a variety of details. It can be structure, resources, color. All of these can play a role in determining whether the classroom will be conducive to learning. Each may not have a large effect individually, however together they can work to strengthen a student's ability to learn.

When the class provides a comfortable place, providing space for students to interact, and working in groups, then it will encourage the creation of social skills. Based on the term of 21st-century class (P21, 2015) it has been very clearly stated that 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning must take place in contexts that "promote interaction and a sense of community [that] enable formal and informal learning." Thus, this paper will address the relationship of physical spaces and technological systems to learning, but more importantly, it will also consider how those resources support the positive *human relationships* that matter most to learning. And while technology, space, time, culture, and policy will be discussed separately, it is important to remember that their power is cumulative. Real learning effectiveness occurs when these systems are artfully integrated into a seamless whole in which each system reinforces the others. It is worth emphasizing, too, that these support systems are valuable not as ends, but as means to a greater goal-to helping children grow emotionally, socially, physically, and academically. Here I give the highlight that shaping a classroom setting that can support human relationship has the same meaning with making a learning environment that can support students to develop their social skills.

Gaurdino and Fullerton (2010) said that a teacher can organize their classroom where students can interact with others and stay focused on the content at the same time. If the student can meet their individual desires while staying engaged in the curriculum then there will less likely be disruptive behavior. One way to do this is to organize desks into groups. This allows for students to do individual work if they are required, or they can work with partners on specific assignments. If they are creating larger projects they can work as a whole table group to complete it, each with their own specific task.

Therefore shaping 21st century learning which can support cultivating students' social skills can be actualized by setting up up all the components of learning environment as explained in literature review and adjust with the indicators of 21st century learning environment by involving technologies and another supporting tools in creating good climate for students to interact each other and build social skills. Here I will give an example model how to shape a classroom layout of 21st-century learning environment who may be supported to develop students social skills by emphasize collaborative learning and work in group role:



Pic. of 21st Century Classroom Furniture Arrangement Model, Source: Hailmi (2015)

By shaping 21st century learning environment as a picture model above, for example by using seat layout or chair arrangement which is forming a group; the availability of work desk; meeting or learning rug; Bulletin/Display/Students' Art Work used as a medium for displaying group work; class pets or toys zone; those all can be used as a medium for interaction, such as giving compliments, offering help, inviting other to play; following rules; work in groups, lead groups, take initiative and making friends; give praise and queuing activities to submit some task (including behaviours that have stated as 5 aspect or dimension of social skills); and all of those things above are naturally can bring the students into a condition which they can learn how to apply the social skills.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This article highlights the importance of social skills education through social studies learning in elementary schools. History as a part of social studies can be a wider alternative to provide more opportunities for

students to naturally develop their social skills. This article addresses issues faced in improving social skills of elementary school students in Indonesia by deconstructing social studies learning to cultivate social skills. This deconstruction used “First Person Historical Presentation” method to bring history to student’s life, designed by Morris Vaughan (2009) and use the term of the 21st-century learning environment.

Through learning history, students can effectively learn content, values and social skills by taking on roles, interpreting characters, making decisions in a simulated environment, and then evaluating the effect of their actions on their daily real life. So, the students can learn, find then begin to see how values and social skills which are found in history applied to their lives. Students think as if they are part of the history, and they can find the same situation in their real life. This is we called “bringing history to students’ life”. By taking the history into students’ life and by engaging deep feelings, the students will feel and have their own experiences in learning so that it creates a historical consciousness that allows students to extract the values and social skills of historical events. That’s the way to implement and embed “First Person Historical Presentation” as a way to bringing history to student’s life.

The creation of a 21st-century learning environment can support social skills learning on learning elementary social studies and other complex social skills. Shaping a classroom setting that can support human relationship has the same meaning with making a learning environment that can support students to develop their social skills. Therefore, to support shaping 21st-century learning, there are some requirements are needed. First, set up and adjust all the components of learning environment with the indicators of the 21st-century learning environment. Third, involve technologies and another supporting tool. Fourth, create a good climate for students to naturally interact each other and build social skills. This critical review about bringing history to students’ life by shaping 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment is needed as a foundation to develop a research on improving students’ social skills in Indonesia elementary social studies.

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