

Improving teacher learning culture

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During the last five years many teachers have been certified. They got a certificate and their salary increased. With the certificate the teachers become “professionals” competent in their subject matter, teaching methodology and personal and social interaction with students, other teachers and parents. Do they really become more competent? Are they really professional?

The answer is yes, and no. Some teachers really do become more professional, but some others, not yet. Some even become less professional in teaching, in their relations with others, and their subject matter. One reason why some of teachers don’t develop is simply that they don’t study any more, after getting the certificate.

According to Henry Giroux, teachers are supposed to be intellectuals, not workers. As an intellectual, they have to study or learn every day. By lifelong learning they will improve their professionalism. By lifelong learning, teachers will become an example for their students.

There are numerous reasons why some teachers don’t study again. Some feel satisfied that they have been certified. They think that they don’t need to learn to any further extent because they have their certificates.

Many teachers teach the same class for several years. They feel that they understand the subject matter well, so they don’t need to keep up to date. For example, they have taught biology in the first class of high school for four years. They know everything about biology matters for the first class. They don’t need additional input for teaching. It is not necessary to study biology for the second and third class because they will not teach the second and the third class. They are not aware that as a professional educator, they have to understand all high-school biology at the very least. By knowing more of the subject matter, they are better able to guide and answer students’ questions.

Some pedagogs are not aware that, even though they deliver the same subject matter to the same class, students’ situations change every day. A professional educator adapts methodology according to their pupils’ needs and communicates with their students as individuals.

Teachers who don’t learn anymore, are stagnant and have no variation. Their mind is narrow and getting narrower, so they lack the capacity to be of assistance to students. Often they have no idea how to improve and challenge learners. They set a very poor example.

If teachers do not upgrade their skills and knowledge, then Indonesian education does not get an upgrade either. Our students have no chance in the global scrap for opportunities.

Some teachers have to be coaxed into improving themselves because they don’t have the initiative to do it themselves. It would be a big improvement if the certification program were to be reviewed after few years. If it were done every five years, teachers who had been certified would at least have to study every five years or so.

Beginning in July 2012, the government plans to evaluate all certified teachers. By this evaluation, it will become clear which educators are still qualified and which are not. Teachers, who are not qualified, have to attend seminars and workshops; to study and train according to their needs. The government should work with universities to provide such training.

Sharing knowledge and experiences in teaching-learning processes among teachers should be going on in every school. A teacher who attends a seminar should be given the opportunity — or the obligation — to share their new knowledge with other teachers. If teachers are going to learn they are going to need some resources for learning, such as new books, the Internet, labs and media. Schools have to supply resources in line with the teachers’ needs, interests and development.

The role of school principals cannot be underestimated in the evaluation of teachers. The head knows what their teachers do and they should do. But sometimes, many head teachers are afraid to evaluate their staff, especially when the teachers are unqualified and unprofessional. Principles must have the courage to evaluate their subordinates and ask teachers to engage in development programs.

By reevaluating certified teachers, by providing opportunities for in-service training, and by obliging them to share their new-found knowledge with other teachers, teachers’ learning culture will increase and spirit of self development grow.

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