

# Gendered Power Relations within Child Centred Discourse in an Indonesian Kindergarten

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*Welcome to our school,*

*In our school, we provide comfortable and fun environment as well as love and care. Insha Allah, children will be facilitated by us to develop their inner potential.*

*Our emphasis is on stimulating modality over literacy/ calistung (Indonesian literacy program). If parents want to have highly discipline school that aims to teach reading, writing as well as counting to their children, our school may not be the perfect choice.*

*In our environment, **children will not be forced to accomplish their tasks or performing identical activities as their peers. We appreciate each child's uniqueness and we believe each child is different from one another. In addition to these, our teachers always attempt to facilitate children's learning as much as possible, by taking into account their characteristics and developmental milestones.***

*We sincerely hope that by providing appropriate stimulation, enjoyable environment, holistic program, and taking into consideration children's stage of development, each child will develop their soul and physical fully. May Allah SWT guide and bless our actions. Amiin.*

*(Introduction in the school's book)*

# Introduction

- [Marsh \(2003, p. 456\)](#) defines child centred discourse as “a discourse that situates learning, meaning and motivation within individual children”.
- Within the child centred discourse, a child is constructed as an active individual who follows certain developmental stages that occur universally, irrespective of the child’s cultural and social background ([Piaget, 1971](#))
- Adults’ role in this discourse is viewed as a facilitator who should facilitate but not interfere in children’s development.

- Child centred pedagogy itself is characterized by at least five key ideas ([Burman, 2008](#)).
- a. in order to be able to learn, children must be socially, emotionally, as well as cognitively ready.
- b. education should be constructed in order to respond to children's need and interest.
- c. in order education to be effective, education needs to be designed in order to fulfil the needs of children. Failure to meet those needs will eventually lead to malfunctioning in individual's later development.
- d. learning for young children should be joyful and fun.
- e. learning should be based on children's personal experience

# Child-Centred Approach in Indonesia Kindergarten

- Previously, in new order era (1965-1998), kindergarten in Indonesia was run mostly by women organizations in cooperation with Indonesia Ministry of Education
- But with the fall down of new order government, kindergarten in Indonesia is mostly run by NGO (Newberry, 2010)
- NGO cooperates with Global Corporate Enterprises such as High Scope and BCCT (Beyond Circle and Centre Time).

# Critiques toward Child-Centred Discourse

- [Burman \(2008\)](#), [Cannella \(1997\)](#); [Mallory and New \(1994\)](#) have pointed out problems associated with child-centred discourse. They believe child-centred discourse benefit white, middle class children.
- [Marsh \(2003\)](#) argues, the white and middle class children level of development were using as a standard against all children in the world.
- Research conducted by [Henry \(1996\)](#) to five African-Caribbean Canadian female teachers, showed how the discourse of child centred has situated them as peripheral in their own teaching practices..

- The main criticism toward the theories and practices of child-centred discourse is on their doubt about whether child-centred frees or controls the children in a more sophisticated manner (MacNaughton, 2000)
- MacNaughton (2000) has also questioned the extent to which child-centred discourse is seen as gender neutral.

# Research Questions

- How is the child centred discourse practiced, negotiated and consented by the children and the teachers?
- How are the children constructed within the child-centred discourse in the school?
- How do the teachers situate themselves within the child-centred discourse in the school?
- How do the children and the teachers negotiate their power?
- To what extent the power relations between the children and the teachers are gendered?

# Methodology

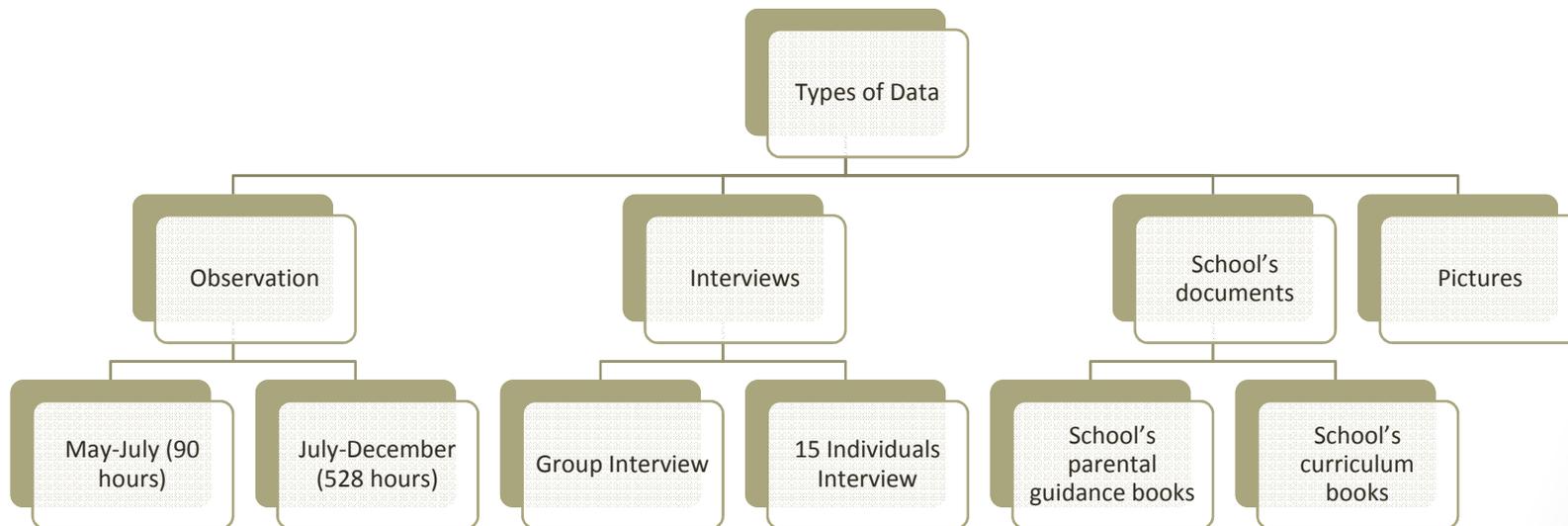
- An ethnography study, conducted from May-December 2010 in a pre school in Indonesia
- ‘...written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture’ (Van Maanen, 1998; p. 1).
- ‘particular method or set of methods’ where ‘all social researchers are participant observers’ (Hammersely and Atkinson, 1995, p.1).
- Hammersley (2006) also indicated that ethnography consists of several key features.

# Research site

- My research is conducted in one kindergarten in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.
- The school aims toward middle class children
- Situated in a relatively slum area
- The school has 2 classes of play groups (2-4 years old), 1 class of A level kindergarten (4-5 years old), and 1 class of B level kindergarten (5-6 years old)
- The school was divided into two sessions, morning session for play group and B level kindergarten (8 am- 10.30 am) and afternoon session (11 am to 1.30 pm)
- The school implements BCCT (Beyond Circle and Centre Time)
- The school does not have classroom, instead it was a two floors building where the first floor was a large hall divided into 6 centres i.e. art, religious, block, gymnastic, music, academic centre. On the second floor, socio-drama centre was situated

- The participants involved 30 children aged 2 to 6 years old, children's parents and carers, 4 teachers, a school owner, and a school's principal

# Types of Data



# Findings

# Child Centred Discourse: Document Analysis

- The use of jargon such as “each child is smart, each child is unique, to become themselves, and developmental milestones”.

*Every child is smart, it is the task of the parents and teachers to identify what type of intelligence a child possesses and becomes his/her strength. Nowadays, it has been recognized that there are 8 types of intelligences. They are linguistic, musical, logical-mathematics, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinaesthetic and natural*

- Linking child-centred discourse with local values

*Despite of the fact **that Ki Hadjar Dewantoro** has introduced to integrate the mind, body and soul aspects into educational system, current society tends to overlook these non material aspects and focuses more on the material aspect. Mind, body and soul cannot be separated and thus, they need to be stimulated from early years.*

- Linking child-centred discourse with religious values

***Children's growth and developmental milestones operate on a sunatullah (nature) principle that has been set by Allah. Stimulating children's development beyond their milestones will only put children in disadvantages life. Therefore, basic learning and stimulation are our main priorities. We attempt to develop simple and basic cognitive schema and paying attention into each child's uniqueness.***

- The text seems to be opposed to concept of hothousing.
- Hothousing itself can be defined as “the process of inducing infants to acquire knowledge that is typically acquired at a later developmental level” ([Sigel, 1987, p. 212](#)).
- It emerges that the text believes that hothousing invades children from their childhood ([Sigel, 1987](#))
- The religious determination underpins the implementation of child-centred discourse in the school

- The text's attempt to connect child centred approach with national as well as religious values can be perceived as the school's attempt to ensure the teachers and parents that the implementation of child centred is in accordance with the local values and thus the parents will embrace the approach unreservedly
- The school's attempt to link child centre discourse with local values and religion, might also be interpreted as an expression of hybridisation.
- Hybridisation as [Nef-Saluz \(2007, p. 1\)](#) defined, is *“a process of cultural transactions that shows how global influences are assimilated in locality and how locality is assimilated with global trends”*.

- The text moreover regulates a version of childhood
- The text is aimed at the parents, and thus, whilst doing these, the text also discipline a version of parenting. The text seem to impose its power by assuring that parents will realize that their behaviour can be supervised by the school, a consciousness resulted from panopticon effect

## 2 years

- observe his/her peers playing
- play with his/her peers
- defend his/her belonging
- is able to choose between 2 options
- show some degree of independence
- help adults to clean up his/her toys
- involve in parallel play
- establish eye contact when speaking

## 2.6 years

- play simple game
- play with his/her peers
- take turn
- do role play
- do something together with adult for at least 5 minutes
- use doll or toy when doing role play
- try to do something new
- play independently for at least 15 minutes

# Construction Of Childhood In The School

# A Unique Child: Difference Is Beautiful

***Differences are beautiful***

*Differences are beautiful*

*Differences are beautiful*

*Colorful is beautiful*

*You are red, I am yellow*

*You are blue, I am green*

*We don't need to be similar*

*Colorful is beautiful*

*You are thick, I am thin*

*You are tall, I am short*

*Your hair is straight, mine is curly*

***We don't need to be similar***

*(Field Notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010)*

- *“what do we do with differences? Are all differences acceptable? If not, which one are not?”* (Rinaldi cited in Browne, 2004)
- The school respects differences but at the same time, it continues to promote the sameness as well
- As ([Browne, 2004](#)) argues, the concept of differences seems to not include gender differences because existing gender discourses are not challenged and thus gender power relations in the school remains the same.

- Differences are related to students' ability and academic achievement

- *“Ehm, **we believe each child is unique**, they all have their own talent, they have potentials and these what we are trying to facilitate. That philosophy is transferred to all the teachers. So teachers basically only assist and facilitate so that each child can reach their potentials. **So we never try to reduce children’s differences into the sameness, that everything must be identical.** For example in term of reading, each child has his/ her own abilities and we just let them like they are. We want everything to be natural. **We facilitate children’s development but we don’t want to push them.** So very often in the school’s final year performance, parents are eager to see the extent to which their children can read. So, ok, we take the children to the stage to do some reading, but the reading abilities are varied. So we ask the parents to write certain words and ask the children to read it. Some children, they can read those very well, but other children can only read up to a syllable. So, we ask the parents to write a syllable such as ba-tu. So, children’s ability are varied, in many aspects including in reading and writing. **So we want to emphasize that differences are acceptable here”***

# Active Child

- *Mrs. Yuni also mentions that parents need to be patient in dealing with their children's development. She says the school believes that the children have the **ability to construct their own knowledge**. She gives examples in writing. She says each child has their own developmental track and the teachers as well as the parents need to respect this. She says some children can write better, while other children need more time. She says sometimes some children are not able to write in a straight line but teacher in this school has been trained not to correct that kind of behavior. The idea is if teachers or parents corrects children's behavior, **it will destroy children's self esteem and may result that children do not want to write anymore***

*(Field notes, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010)*

- The concept of active child is linked with the development of self-esteem
- [Young-Eisendrath, \(2008\)](#) has criticized self-esteem as a form of trap. He critiqued self-esteem as focusing on the individual and thus it dislocates individual from relationship with other individuals
- [R. Smith \(2002\)](#) has also scrutinized the concept of self-esteem. He argues that self-esteem discourse is situated within therapeutic discourse that view human as weak and is in need of constant motivation and guidance to develop fully.

- The conception of active child may associate with the principle that learning in early childhood education should be democratic ([DEPDIKNAS, 2006a](#)).
- This principle might be seen as ([Morss, 1996](#)) claims as an attempt to bring politic into early childhood education. The use of the term democratic in the early childhood education is transformed when early childhood education attempts to include children in the decision-making processes.
- This idea is also closely related to the belief that young children are rational subject that are capable of making decision for them.

- The concept of active child also situates the teachers to not interfere children's playing even when the playing has segregated boys and girls

*In the closing session, I notice 4 girls are sweating. I ask them what they have played. they say, they have played hide and seek with Bunda Sari. After the school is over, I ask Bunda Sari if Indra joined the game. Bunda Sari says No. **She further says that Indra doesn't want to play with them and she doesn't want to force him.***

*(Field notes, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2010)*

- This concept of active child is rather ambiguous as well since at the same time, the school was also situating the child as a powerless individual who needs protection and guidance from adult.
- Despite of the fact that the school regards children as an active individual, children are still structured as the binary opposition of adults.
- Children, despite of the fact are argued to be active, they are also consistently defined as opposite to adults.

- *The theme in playgroup is also related to mother. The playgroup children are doing activities in block area. Prior to do the activity, Bunda Intan asks the children what their mothers favorite things are. Kakang replies. He says his mother likes robbot. Bunda Intan and Euis laugh. Bunda Intan says it may be Kakang's favorite thing but it certainly is not his mother's. **Children give various, but it appears that Bunda Intan only wants one answer. She directs children's various answers to one single answer by concluding that mother's favorite item is necklace.** This is related to today's activity; children are going to make a necklace for their mother*

*(Field notes, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010)*

# Playing versus Studying

- Piaget ([cited in Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 2001, p. 11](#)) believes that “play can facilitate learning by encouraging children to assimilate new material into existing cognitive structures”.
- In UK, The Early Childhood Education Forum and The United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) urged the UK government to review the literacy programs in early childhood education ([Alexander et al., 2010](#)).
- Teaching literacy to early to young children may result in a culture of deficiency.

- Playing benefits not only short term development, but children's long term development

*Well...it varies actually, but most of our alumni give positive feedback. I **always tell the parents to wait and see the result once their children are in the third grade.** Yesterday, I met one parent in a bookshop and she said her son develops fully now. So the responds from parents whose kids are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade seem to be positive. There was a parent who has two kids. The first one was drilled, so even though he excelled in academic, his social development was not very good. Then when his brother enrolled in this school, his brother developed fully. Because, this parent could make comparison. Even now, when they take their kids to a book shop, the eldest will show no enthusiasm, despite of the fact he is no 1 in his class...but his brother, though is unable to read yet, he shows enthusiasm in reading books. There was also a child who used to cry when someone only asked her name, but then she gradually developed. The development is slowly. This is one thing we have to understand and it requires patience from the teachers.*

- Playing is situated as binary opposition to studying

- Discourse of playing does only control children but it also controls mothers

*Hani bring her exercise books. This book is used by her at home to practice writing. Bunda Siti asks Hani if she likes to study at home. Hani nods her head. Bunda Siti further asks Hani whom she is studying with at home. Hani replies in a very soft voice, she studies with her mother. **It seems like Hani's mother uses certain techniques to teach Hani to write. Bunda Siti asks Hani to tell to her mother not to do that technique since Hani has already known how to write. Bunda Siti then talks to Bunda Sari. They both discuss that they need to talk to Hani's mother about the proper techniques to teach pre-writing to children***

*(field notes, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2010)*

- Disparity between teachers' and students' perception to playing

*Children in the B level kindergarten are playing snake and ladder. The snake and ladder are created by teacher Siti. The dice prepared is big. Indra treats the dice like a ball. He sometimes kicks the dice. Other children also play around with dice. **Teacher Siti keeps on reminding the children that this is not playing but learning how to count.***

*(Field notes, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2010)*

*After writing the recipe, children go to the kitchen. They are going to mix the ingredients and bake the cake. While Bunda Siti and Sari prepare the ingredients, **Ajeng, Ita and Nyai are dancing. Bunda Siti reminds them not to play during studying***

*(Field Notes, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010)*

# Teachers' Gendered Practices

- Gender Segregation and Symbols

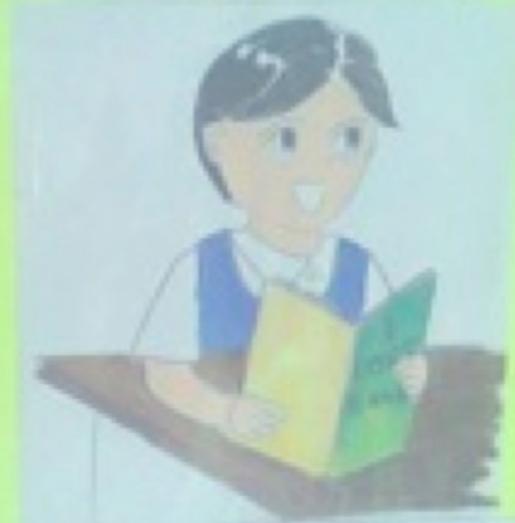








**sentra**



**persiapan**

**1 2 3 4 5 6**

*Every circle time, children are always asked about their feeling, how they feel and why they feel that way. After children answer how they feel, they will be given stars and the star symbolize their feeling i.e. sad, happy, disguise, scare, etc. The stars then will be displayed onto their pockets. **The pockets for girls are decorated with flower pictures, while the pockets for boys are decorated with pictures of bug.** Only the pockets for playgroup children are not differentiated. All pockets from playgroup children, regardless of their sex, are decorated by pictures of fruits. I ask Bunda Siti if these pictures mean anything. She tells me that initially A level kindergarten will be given a pictures of flowers, and B level will be given the pictures of bugs. Yet, all the teachers, she argues are concerned with the fact that it will be in appropriate for boys to be given a picture of flowers.*

*(Field notes, 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2010)*

*Bunda Siti is preparing special hat for the children. The school's theme of the week is International Culture with special reference to Chinese Culture. Thus, the hats prepared are Chinese hats. Interestingly, **Bunda Siti makes two different hats for boys and girls.***

*(Field notes, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2010)*

*The activity for today is making crown. Children are divided into boys and girls group. Boys are making leaf crown and girls are making flower crown. Bunda Siti was not available to assist teacher Sari. Teacher Sari asks the girls to sit in a circle with me. **Girls' task is to decorate paper flowers. Teacher Sari is in charge with boys. Their task is to decorate paper leaves***

*(Field Notes, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2010)*

# Powerful Children And Powerless Teachers

*“Years ago, in learning or playing, boys and girls played together. They were always playing together though sometimes they mixed the rules (laugh), but they could played together. Even when they played superhero, they played together. **But now you see, there is a segregation.** Faisal wants to play war but girls are so much into Barbie (laugh). There was a time when boys and girls played together”*

*(interview with Bunda Sari)*

- *“Indra used to reject playing with girls. He just sat. He didn’t know how to play with girls. His mother once told me that Indra felt lonely because he didn’t have any boy friends in the school. He just didn’t know how to play with girls. But in the past, boys and girls just play together. Even now, Ardi for example likes to ask Winda and Syakira to play together with him....I think it’s children’s character”*
- *“Maybe each child has different characters because we don’t force children to follow us. I think it’s children’s character...”*

*(interviews with Bunda Siti)*

***“Or sometimes it could be because the children want it. Children really like to decide whom they want to be with. So now the girls are more with the girls, so we just follow what children want. Previously, children were more varied and showing more initiative”***

*Bunda Sari)*

*(Interview with*

- Teachers situated themselves as powerless and thus they were unable to challenge or expand children's understanding on gender.
- The belief that prevent teachers to interfere children's activities thus could be perceived as constraining teachers' opportunity to exercise their agency ([Fenech & Sumsion, 2007](#))

*“In the past, children also mixed very well maybe because there were only four of them. Only when they were in the B level kindergarten, they are a bit segregated. Girls played cooking and boys drew”*

*(Interview with Bunda Intan)*

***“We just want to facilitate what our pupils want. Like Barbie stuff, we don’t initiate that. Princess stuffs..,(pause). They are so materialistic because we have to provide the clothes, accessories and everything else (laugh). Superhero is not very much materialistic. It’s just being a hero”***

*(Interview with Mrs. Yuni)*

# NEGOTIATION OF POWER

- *“Yes and Mrs. Yuni also thinks it is. She always says, we have to prepare two things for boys and girls. We have to give the appropriate one for them. Mrs. Yuni reminds me, not to give pink to boys, but again if the boys ask, we should respect it. Because maybe the children do not understand it, but as a teacher we power to make such distinction....because we have understood it”*

*(Interview with Bunda Sari)*

*“(laugh) I do believe children have freedom to chose, but at the same time, they have to learn what it is being a boy or a girl. They have to know and understand. I think this is important for them. **How do they learn? From the way, we adult treat them”***

*(Interview with Bunda Siti)*

- There was constant negotiation of teachers' power and the child centre discourse ([Tzuu, 2007](#))
- *“A teacher attempting to conform to those precepts encounters an untenable conflict between mandate for non-interference to promote independence, and her institutional position as responsible for children's learning. How can she oversee the individual development of a class of thirty children? Various studies of both accounts of and implementation of “progressive” education...have highlighted how teacher position themselves as both responsible for, but helpless in, moulding children's development”*

( [Burman, 2008, p. 264](#) )

# CONCLUSION

- The child centre discourse leads the teachers to believe that children's gender construction was merely the result of socialization.
- The child centre discourse has situated the teachers in the school as powerless and thus they were unable to challenge existing gender discourse. By positioning themselves as powerless, the teachers thus were incapable to expand children's gender construction.
- Teachers' behaviour might be the result of schooling as an institution that can damage both pupils and teachers ([Francis & Mills, 2011](#))