

From Dust to Dutch

Changing Conservative Mindset in Educating Children of the Poor

For them, there is no limit to break the limitations. They create their own way to bring these children up to see a brighter future than singing road to road or being scavengers.

Two years ago, I met two children in *kampung Juminahan* near Code River, wearing oversized shirt, bringing a cup of Rupiah's coin and singing in front of me, no guitar, no sandals or shoes, no adults besides them. When I asks them what did they do and don't they go to school tomorrow morning, they shouted in Javanese language: *aku ra sekolah mbak, mung nggolek duit, luwih penak* (we are not attend to school, miss. It is better to looking for some money) And I was surprised that their parents let these two little kids singing road to road till midnight whereas that area was a place for all adults. And they never attend to school!

Yes, that is the reality of the children in *kampung Juminahan* and *kampung Jagalan*, two neighborhoods in the sides of Code River, who lives under the crowded-polluted bridges. Some of them have to drop out from school to help their parents fulfil the daily needs. And few of them never attend to school at all. Ironically, this place located in the middle of Yogyakarta Special Province which is known in Indonesia as an Education City. But since a decade ago, there is wonderful will from the society to change their condition in the middle of Javanese principle, *nerimo*—a concept of Javanese people which means they will never complain about what they get in life, just accept and pray. This different mindset of people has been catalysis by a non-profit institution built by the youth of *kampung* itself, called Anak Wayang Indonesia (AWI).

“AWI formed in November, 10th 1998, right after Indonesia’s New Orde is fallen Since every people has a same right to organized anything they want., we were getting more enthusiastic to build an organisation which facilitate the educational rights for the children of poors around Code river,” said Sipen, one of AWI’s founder.

”We are now guiding 50 students in classes and 150 children in every activities outside the class spreaded in 3 areas: Juminahan, Jagalan and Ledhok Tukangan. Most of them are coming from a poor family which the parents is a *Becak* (Pedicab) drivers, labor and construction worker, hawkers, scavengers, newspaper seller and many more. If one of them drop out from formal school due to economic reasons, AWI will provide the fund and link them to the donators,” said AWI’s secretary, Ema Vidiastuti.

Prioritizing Children’s Rights to be Heard

One thing we usually forget is the most important thing in educational institutions such as family and school is to provide a space for the children to express their opinion or what they want. Whereas this point had been written in Indonesian Constitution and International Convention of Children Rights which include four aspects: non-discrimination, best interests for children, rights for live, protect themselves and develop, and also rights in participation.¹

That is why AWI has a unique way to make these kids—who are not too interesting to study—being engaged in classes: They let the kids arrange their own curriculum and what they’re going to do with it. “When kids come to play and learn in AWI, they will be asked about what do they want to do in AWI. If a little girl says that she want to learn dance and

Math more than another, she will get it. There are no limitations as long as we have an ability to serve it," said a senior volunteer who better known as Pak Pethel. Moreover in AWI's small school, there are no registration process as we found in formal school. The kids just come and start to learn and play directly.

These brilliant ideas attract more and more kids to come and learn "We will never force the children to follow the straight curriculum. We want them to be a free student because they have their own wants. Some school little boys asks to have Punk music lessons. We try to facilitate them using the fund from donators and provide a music room Up till now, underground music subject is still exist in AWI." he continued.

"There are so much fun! We also learn outdoor. Walked along the river sides, plant some trees, learning Math and Bahasa in the beach or in *saung* near the volleyball field, and so on. We didn't have a choice to play in a large space anymore since the field nearby was turned into an apartment." shouted a ten years old student of AWI.

Few Steps Forward

AWI steps in 3 main corridors of cooperation: children, teenagers and parents or society. The program for children is implemented in daily schedule devided to art class (theater, pantomime, painting and music class), *dolanan* (motoric games), language and communication forum and also science class." In the week end, there can be an art show, health controlling and children conseling. The last one is not regulary, but only in special cases. If the student has attend junior or senior high school, we also help them to explore their skills and creativity through the Peace Building Program including film-making, theater and

research. They're gonna be a peer mediator as an effort to reduce the students brawl," explained Pak Pethel.

For the parents and societies, AWI held a forum or discussion in a special time and visited them door to door to discuss their children progress, held some workshops and campaigning children rights through the media, some competitions and carnival, all performed by the kids and parents—things that never happened in formal school.

By changing students and parents mindset about education, they could explore children's ability much better than what formal school do. These children who usually played in a dusty field which is now turn into a 7 floor apartment, had a chance to see another side of the world within Gangneung International Folklore Festival 2004 in South Korea and traveled around Netherland in 21 days to perform Indonesian dance, theater and traditional games on Mundial Festival few years ago.

No, no, without a different way to treat the children of the poor, there will never be a chance to bring them to see the world. This kind of school play the main role to create students *habitus* being more sensitive to the nature, more tolerance each other, and more creative than any other children in formal school. Unfortunately, there are no chance for informal school like AWI to be certificated as a governmental school. Yogyakarta's government budget for education is only about 139 billion Rupiahs, whereas the province income is about 1,4 trillion Rupiahs This is not meet the standard of national budgeting for education which is 20 % from total income of the province. "The government has a big support for the informal institutional education like AWI, but still, it can't be formalized. But we can help in donation anytime" Said Arief, S.IP, Yogyakarta's legislator.

There are still so many parents and children who never ever care about education in another part of rural and urban area in Indonesia. If this condition happened in a country which has full facilitated and low-paying school for every children, or in a country where the government put education for the children as the priority, it is really too easy to put the blame personally, but come and look beyond: if there are no system who support them in accesable educational institutions, let'spoint the finger to the insensitive government.