

Open Opportunity for Handicapped Children in Yogyakarta

Education is one of the most important things that Indonesian government always try to improve, because education is one important sector that can boost up all areas of national development. That's why, from year to year of Indonesian history, the government always tried to improve the educational system in Indonesia, so that everyone in the country could gain the education properly. The fact that, until 2007, 99 percent of youth in Indonesia (15-24 years) are literate,¹ could be evidence that, at least, the government of Indonesia has succeeded in making an improvement in educational sector. But even though the education system in Indonesia may be quite good for children in Indonesia, the fact says no for handicapped children in Indonesia, where many thought about how education system in Indonesia is not good enough for handicapped children. There aren't enough facilities for handicapped children so there are only few of them could gain some proper level of education. The fact is surely quite contradicted to Indonesian constitution about equal opportunities for handicapped children to gain education.

But, as a student in Yogyakarta, the writer found something quite different. There are some public schools in Yogyakarta for handicapped children (Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri). This shows us that local government of Yogyakarta have awareness for handicapped children that they accredited the schools to be public schools. The awareness itself came off because, based on the statistic, the number of handicapped children in Yogyakarta was increased. Based on the fact, there was also an increasing need for the government to pay more attention to them so they can have a chance to gain the education needed. The accreditation itself was an important step taken by the government, because handicapped schools are usually owned

by private owners, and the consequence is that the educational fees is quite expensive. By being public schools mean that they got educational subsidies from the government, so they can improve the educational facilities for handicapped children, and surely widening the opportunity for handicapped children to gain the education needed considering that there's no school fees for them.

From some public handicapped schools in Yogyakarta, the writer made an observation to one school, Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri 1 Yogyakarta (SLB N 1). The school is said to be the oldest handicapped school in Yogyakarta. The school is given the status of SLB C, which means that this school is specifically for children with mental disabilities. As a public school, there's no school fees at all - means that all students don't have to pay for anything related to their study as long as they study in the school, except the fees when they enter the school for the first time which is not much. The school provides the education for children from the kindergarten, elementary school, junior high, and high school. All of them are provided with the curriculum specifically to improve the skills of creativity of the children. The curriculum itself was set by the local government of Yogyakarta and provincial government of DIY. From the explanation given by one of the teachers there, it seems that the government of Yogyakarta paid an extra attention for handicapped children. That's quite a good thing considering not many of local governments in Indonesia could pay attention for handicapped children as much as the local government of Yogyakarta. Perhaps the cause came from the value inherited by the local culture, where the government really serves the people.

Beside the active role from the local government, there are also active roles came from the students' parents, and the school is gladly accept the voices came from the parents. The school provides a routine forum where the parents could meet the school staffs and give their

thoughts and aspiration. The forum itself is held for a minimum time of once per year and makes a very good impact for the improvement of the school itself.

As the writer has explained before, the curriculum of SLB N 1 is made specifically to improve the skills of creativity of the students, because of the minimum ability of the children to learn academically. The activities given for the students are various, for example cook, make up, music, computer, etc. By giving those kinds of activities, the students are hoped to have a decent skills for, at least, deal with the outside world independently. There's also one special program from the school called "bina diri" which is given to the students so that they can take care of themselves independently, like how to comb their hair, how to tie their shoes, etc. The program is quite good, because the writer thinks that those kinds of things are the most basic needs for the students. Beside formal activities, the school also gives some times to learn outside of the school for once every month, and also school recreations for once every two years. The activities are held because the teachers thought that handicapped children need some alternative ways of learning things. The school also held an annual event for its students in the Kartini Day, where there are usually competitions for the students, and there surely are religious activities for the students. The school has some achievements from its students, most came from sports and arts, and those achievements show us that the school can help the handicapped children to improve their qualities of life.

Finally, the existence of SLB N 1, as a public school, shows us that the local government of Yogyakarta is giving an equal right for every child, even handicapped one, to earn the education. The school is also a way to improve the quality of handicapped children's life without payments from their parents. That makes this kind of educational institution is

needed more in other regions in Indonesia, in order to improve the quality of Indonesian children.