
AN INVITATION TO WONDER: TEACHING THE BEAUTY OF NATURE TO CHILDREN IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The beauty of nature always has the power to inspire knowledge, hope, inspiration and joy. Our awareness of the seriousness of the environmental crisis has led educators to take seriously the education of the youth. They are beginning to try to devise ways to awaken young people to an awareness of the connection of their lives with the whole of nature. It is important to note that the ecological crisis begins in our homes, schools, and communities where in educating young people we should teach them sustainable environmental protection rather than exploiting nature. This is an education that invites young people to wonder about the beauty of nature and living harmoniously with all other creatures in the universe. This methodology or Invitation to Wonder is to show to young people the beauty of nature that precedes and supports cultures and civilization. A healthy culture and civilization demonstrates human care for their environment. By storytelling and visiting cultural heritage sites, young people may be helped to get the insight of living sustainably together with nature. While these methodologies are universal, particular attention will be paid to education of young people in Indonesia.

Keywords: Philosophy for children, storytelling, environmental ethics, Indonesia

Introduction

The ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle contended that man by nature has a desire for knowledge. Philosophy is a way of knowing which questions natural things. This development of knowledge also involves a movement from myth to logos. This development of reason is the contribution of the Greeks to education to enable young people to pursue a meaningful life.

According to Plato and Aristotle, without human community it is impossible to fully become a human being. Education therefore takes the social relations within the family and gradually adapts them to civil society. It means that education is not only a matter of the individual acquiring knowledge but also acquiring the values, skills, and habits which aid the community. The whole achievement of education is both internally connected to social world and externally to natural world. It is therefore the task of educators to facilitate young people to discover the meaning of life through natural and cultural things.

In J.J. Rousseau's *Emile* (first published in 1782) he noticed that education is the best and most important way to train the capability of thinking rather than that of following custom or beliefs. In Book I, he talks about developing young people from their beyond their natural instincts to the ability to rationalize their choices. In Book II, Rousseau talks about the task of educators to confront young people with the world surrounding them. This is part of education that emphasizes training children to develop their senses. Learning by experience is the best way to grow in knowledge, and more important than book learning. Book I and II are united in Book III where Rousseau strongly stressed the complementariness of thinking and experience that leads to proper human growth. Although the next two books in *Emile* are controversial they are also worthwhile because of their themes of faith in reason (Book IV), and gender sensitivity (Book V). The main point in *Emile* is the idea that education is a profession that allows faith in fundamental human rights.

John Dewey focuses on education for democracy. Educators work for social reform for the greater good of the whole society. For Dewey,

schools are instruments that can be used to encourage young people to part take in social change. It is therefore the duty of professional educators to try to construct curriculum and teaching methods to help in education the young people to fully expand their potential. It implies that although the school is considered as an instrument it is also rationally constructed to serve the achievement of the end. This requires a professional educator to do the job effectively under the pragmatic use of reason, values, skills, and habits.

John Henry Newman (1801-1890) responded to the problem of education by saying that it involves a specific training to cope with change. The main idea of Newman's book is that the education of mind should be liberal rather than conservative. Education is about facilitating critical thinking for young people to be able to choose what is truly good rather than what seems to be good. A liberal education teaches one to be receptive to the changing world so that young people can choose what is reasonably true and do it consciously at the right place and at the right time. The education of this critical aspect of the mind is distinguished from moral education or moral formation. In moral formation, imperatives of doing good are shaped by certain beliefs in a community while in education of mind, imperatives of doing good are universally tested by rational arguments. Like Newman, Allan Bloom (1930-1992) developed a critique about American higher education that it has failed democracy and has impoverished the souls of today's students.. Although Newman and Bloom differ concerning the final aim. Bloom's critique aims at moral formation to recover of the American spirit once established by the Founding Fathers in the American Constitution. Relativism in American education leads the nation back to a state of nature. Like Bloom, Newman stated in his *Grammar of Ascent* that the importance of the cultivation of the mind cannot be restricted in scientific standards for evidence because science tends to narrow the concrete. What we need in real life is decision-making that is beyond logic as such. *The Grammar of Ascent* is a defense about faith as the legitimate product of rational human activity. In this sense, faith is not contrary to human nature. Education of mind therefore

deals with the knowledge of being that historically develops in society. Bernard Lonergan called this “insight.” Lonergan applied Aristotelian thought in seeking understanding of the universe as a personal discovery. Like the education of mind, Lonergan contends that the foundation of every kind of inquiry is the self-appropriation to what is as it is. The method of achieving this insight is both through exterior sensation (data given) and internal data of consciousness. He calls his method as critical realism where insight is the true judgment of fact and value and involves a critique of consciousness.

So we see in the above theories an attempt to contrast and balance reason and myth, reason and instinct, reason and faith, liberalism and conservatism, and the individual and the community. The challenge of education for children in early primary school is to make them wonder about the world around them, to value their cultural heritage which gives a foundation to their community, to value both the dignity of the human person and the lives of nonhuman creatures. If philosophy is based in wonder, then wondering is an important means to educate young people. The significance of this study is to understand how to educate wonder, and how it can develop skills values, beliefs, and a respect for natural and cultural things. It is therefore to enhance the natural desire to know which is specific to human beings among all living beings.

From this philosophical point of view, education of children in early primary school comes to terms with *eros* which is the Greek word referring to humans’ natural desire to know. Through wonder, they question the things around them. Once they discover the meaning by questions and answers they develop love for the world around them. This is the essence of philosophy as a love of knowledge. There is a great opportunity for this philosophical education when children are receptive to his wonder in preschool up until eight years of age.

As wonder is considered to be the starting point of educating young people, the philosophical concept of the natural desire to know can be established, emphasized and developed through a dialectical process beginning with early family relationships towards the greater

relationships of the community and the nation-state. A hermeneutics of interpretation can be applied which can coordinate everything from nature, culture and the history of the nation-state. This can be an aid for both lawmaking powers, and society to work hand-in-hand to develop the quality of education for the next generation to come.

Foundations

A recently published e-Book by Elisabeth Ayres provides an approach on how to educate children develop their respect to fellow humans and the diversity of beings in the universe. What distinguishes Ayres approach is that she touches upon the beauty of nature and shows how we can discover hope, inspiration, and joy through our receptivity to the environment around us. Ayres suggests that we create a space in which we can experience the truth and beauty of all things in the universe. We may learn to approach things from scientific or spiritual point of view and bring them to our minds and hearts in order to achieve healing and peace. Science and arts lead us to explore the wonder of the cosmos and everyday life. There is a spiritual tendency to Ayres' book that suggests that education for young people should allow them see beauty of the Divine mind in creatures and in the world around them.

Storytelling also plays this same role. It has always been a sharing of social and cultural wisdom. Stories mimic life and reveal how people celebrate achievements and repent their sins. In stories we learn about mankind's trials which bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. However, sometimes our sins make such glories impossible at certain points in time. We witness hate, despair, cruelty, unfaithfulness, even as we try to do right things. To this extent we do notice that education is important even in the early stage of primary school because at that stage young people need to grow in moral consciousness and knowledge, and need to develop the skills to do the right things.

Through stories we learn about these conflicts between good and evil. We learn that from the most minor and insignificant acts of life lead

to great things. That is why we have to start by educating young people by making them receptive to the minor acts which are true, noble, authentic, compelling, and gracious.

With this aim, F.W.A. Froebel has founded the first *Kindergarten* in Blankenburg, Germany in 1840 in order to bring hope, joy, love, and peace to children. A few decades later Maria Montessori founded *Casa dei Bambini* in Italy in 1907. Here in Indonesia, the *Bustanul Athfal* was established in 1919 by an Islamic Women Organization called *Aisyiyah* in Yogyakarta. The three institutions educating children such as Kindergarten, Montessori, and Bustanul Athfal were specifically dedicated to shape good behavior for children. Even the German name kindergarten refers to a garden for children. *Casa dei Bambini* refers to a house for children in its Italian origin, while *Bustanul Athfal* is a garden for children in Arabic. The three kinds of education are concerned with children of up to 8 years of age.

Today in Indonesia, education for children in early primary school is called *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, abbreviated as PAUD. The PAUD is carried out for children up to 6 years old of age before they enter elementary school. It consists of formal, informal, non-formal education of children in early primary school. These are defined as follows:

Formal education for children in early primary school is usually known as kindergarten that takes for of *Taman Kanak-Kanak* (abbreviated as TK), *Raudatul Athfal* (abbreviated as RA), and the like.

Non-formal education for children in early primary school is commonly known as Playing Group such as *Kelompok Bermain* (abbreviated as KB), Day Care or Child-minding Place such as *Tempat Penitipan Anak* (abbreviated as TPA), and the like.

Informal education for children in early primary school is called family child care at home or *Pendidikan Keluarga/ Lingkungan*.

These are the approaches formally recognized by the Indonesian government. Because the problem of education in the early stage is quite complicated, PAUD necessitates law-makers, educators, and society in general to be responsible in preparing the children for a better future for themselves, for their family, community, and for the nation-state. This involves physical, intellectual, and socio-emotional development (social and religious behavior). Beyond all of these we have to take into consideration the philosophical foundation for the schooling the children in their early stages of mental, moral, and spiritual development. There is an awareness that the Indonesian law concerning National System of Education must be further developed with regard to science, economy, politics, and ecology. Science and economy have been traditionally taught, but approaches to teaching ecology need to be more deeply considered. Teaching an invitation to wonder to children can prepare an ecological consciousness in connection with the other curricula.

Insight as Noesis, Aha-Erlebnis, and Epiphany

Wonder is natural to children. They ask many questions about the world around them. It is also an emotion which can be cultivated through a process of questioning and answering. This process of wondering comprises physical, intellectual, socio emotional, language and communication. In other words, the philosophical theory of wondering is about a process of knowing reality as what it is. This knowledge of being is called “insight” according to Bernard Lonergan. These are considered as the end of wondering or *eros* which is a natural desire of intelligible beings to know. **First**, knowledge is the accumulation of facts and data that you have learned about or experienced. It’s being aware of something, and having information. Knowledge is really about facts and ideas that we acquire through study, research, investigation, observation, or experience. **Second**, wisdom is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to your life. It’s the ability to apply that knowledge to the greater scheme of life. It’s also deeper; knowing the meaning or reason; about knowing why something

is, and what it means to your life. **Third**, insight is the deepest level of knowing and the most meaningful to your life. Insight is a deeper and clearer perception of life, of knowledge, of wisdom. It's grasping the underlying nature of knowledge, and the essence of wisdom. Insight is a truer understanding of your life and the bigger picture of how things are intertwined.

In order to help educators carrying the three forms, Christopher Reiss does a great job of summing up the differences among knowledge, wisdom, and insight. For Reiss, knowledge is about knowing how to manage the world. Like knowledge about money enables one in spending and saving. Wisdom is not about know-how but understanding the impact of money concerning the quality of your life and your future. Insight is about realizing that money is simply a tool to be used, that it has no inherent meaning beyond its usefulness. In other word, one may say that man can gain a lifetime of knowledge, yet never see the wisdom in it. He/she can be wise, but still miss the deeper meaning. Insight is the understanding of a specific cause and effect in a specific context that is the knowledge of being which is what is as it is. This is why insight becomes the main concern of philosophical approach in educating children. Based on its etymology, the term insight can have several related meanings such as a piece of information that tells about the act or result of understanding the inner nature of things or of seeing intuitively. Insight is an introspection which is the power of acute observation, deduction, discernment, and perception called intellection or *noesis* by the Greeks. By insight, one gets an understanding of cause and effect based on identification of relationships and behaviors within a system, context, or scenario. Hence, an insight manifests itself as immediate understanding how to solve a difficult problem. The term insight is sometimes called by the German psychologist and theoretical linguist Karl Bühler as *Aha-Erlebnis*. It is also present in the Greek word *epiphany*. There are three names of insight such as noesis, aha-erlebnis, and epiphany distinguished from perspective and perception.

a. Noesis

Noesis is a Greek word referring to perception of the mind, what the *nous* does. *Nous* is the faculty of human mind and sometimes equated to intellect and intelligence as necessary for understanding what is true and real. This activity is understood in a similar way to the modern concept of intuition. It also refers to the understanding, mind, thought, and reason. It is also often described as the mind's eye. It is like awareness of good sense. In his work entitled *Ideas*, Husserl used a pair of terms, *Noesis* and *Noema* as correlated elements of the structure of any intentional act. *Noesis* refers to intentional acts or the act of the mind (the subject). *Noema* refers to that which is act-matter or the object. He also says that every intentional act has noetic content. This noetic content is that mental act-process which becomes directed towards the intentionally held object. In short, knowledge is the united relationship between *noesis* and *noema*. This is the main core of Husserl's epistemology known as phenomenology. This approach goes beyond Cartesian rationalism and Humean empiricism. It also goes beyond the idealist concepts of intellect such as Leibniz's dualist concept of a passive and active intellect and Kant's concept of intellect as an *a priori* principle before the act of thinking (as *Verstand*). This is significant because it suggests that the teaching of wonder opens an intentional connection between the individual and the natural world.

b. Aha-Erlebnis

The term *Aha-Erlebnis* is known in psychology when a solution to a problem presents itself quickly and without warning. It is the sudden discovery of the correct solution following incorrect attempts based on trial and error. Solutions via Insight have been proven to be more accurate than non-insight solutions. Insight was first studied by Gestalt Psychology, in the early part of the 20th century. Some examples of insight include: suddenly seeing the problem in a new way, connecting the problem to another relevant problem/solution pair, eliminating past experiences that are blocking the solution, or seeing problem in a larger, coherent context. In short, *Aha-Erlebnis* is an experience which gives a sudden insight,

solution or answer to a problem that has troubled someone for some time.

c. *Epiphany*

The term *epiphany* is derived from the Greek word *epiphaneia* referring to a feeling of manifestation or appearance of sudden and striking realization. The term epiphany is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. Epiphanies are studied by psychologists and other scholars, particularly those attempting to study the process of innovation. Epiphanies are relatively rare occurrences and generally follow a process of significant thought about a problem. Often they are triggered by a new and key piece of information, but importantly, a depth of prior knowledge is required to allow a leap of the understanding. Famous epiphanies include Archimedes's discovery of a method to determine the density of an object ("Eureka") and Isaac Newton's realization that a falling apple and the orbiting moon are both pulled by the same force.

To consider the importance of insight in environmental education we need to distinguish it from perspective and perception. Insight is a point of view and therefore distinguished from perception and perspective. The term perspective refers to a point of view while perception is about an individual's interpretation of things. But Insight is an instance of apprehending the true nature of a thing. It is a mental vision or discernment that sees into inner character or underlying truth.

Dialectics

The knowledge of being of what is, reached through a philosophical method is called Socratic method or *maieutics*, or dialectics. It is a cooperative argumentative dialog between master and disciples to stimulate critical thinking and overcoming disagreement to lead to a truth. It is known as the midwifery method because it gives birth to an understanding about something. This method was also used by Husserl in

his phenomenology as a technique of getting the essence of what is talked about. Phenomenological hermeneutic method is a procedure of achieving insight beyond the mere appearance of a thing. Phenomenological hermeneutics was also developed by Paul Ricoeur in a way following the *maieutics* method of Socrates, and his faith in the natural desires in man to know things as they are. Applying a phenomenological hermeneutics method requires that both educators and children to enter into a dialog to help them find the truth and values about things. The end of this method is to make learners ready to knowledge, wisdom and insight. Only within this process of dialog both educators and children arrive at understanding what is, as it is. The dynamic process of natural desire to know namely *eros* is a dialectic process that aims at understanding the nature of things. This method can be used in implementing Indonesian National System of Education Nr. 2003 regarding education for children in early primary schools and can be more developed into the higher levels such as elementary schools, high schools, and even in universities.

Philosophy for children is designed to teach reasoning and argumentative skills to children aimed at preparing them for a better future especially in dealing with human activities in economy, politics, and ecology. The Socratic method of philosophizing has been applied in many different ways and called by different names in different countries. In the United States of America, the idea of philosophy for children emerged in response to 1960s-1970s of American political condition that aimed to advance democratic forms of life. Matthew Lipman was one of the founders of philosophy for children in the early stage of education. He noticed that philosophical thoughts and teaching experiences of teachers will help children benefit from philosophical inquiry even in early primary school. According to him, teaching children reasoning skill in early life greatly improves cognitive and other academic skills and learning in general. Based on American pragmatism, Lipman made use of John Dewey's philosophy of a community of inquiry to fit his idea of a philosophy for children to take place in a community of learners comprising educators and students. Both teachers and students learn

through thought-provoking stimulus such as texts, images, picture books, or video clips. Readings were used to stimulate philosophical questions to be answered through a dialectic process in expressing opinions, putting forth arguments and counter arguments, providing examples, constructing criteria and building on each other's ideas with the aim of coming to a settlement. The learning process takes a community of inquiry because the central function of a community is to provide a cognitive mirror to our thoughts.

Pancasila and the Unity of Diversity

Hegel gave us a new idea of history as the self-realization of the Spirit from its immediate unity of an unconscious being to the being conscious of separation, and finally integrated into a being conscious of unity. This dialectic process concerned not merely with the substance but primarily with the subject or the Spirit. By Spirit, Hegel did not refer to a transcendent Deity but the totality of the whole reality reached by the Spirit as the Absolute ethical life. From this point, one can understand why Hegel gave high value to the insight of historical epoch rather than writings about historical fact.

For Hegel, history is the world's court of judgment. Reflective history is critical in which the deeds of history themselves confront us and give meanings. It means, philosophy of history cannot be written without judgment and without a system. It is because philosophy necessitates how a concept is to be understood? From this point, Indonesian historical epoch can be used in education to enhance reflection about knowledge and morality for children in early primary schools. Cultural sites can be used to create an appreciation of pluralism in economics, politics, and ecosystems.

The State philosophy is known as Pancasila which means the "five principles" is comprised of the belief in the one God, civilized humanity, unity of Indonesia, democracy, and social justice. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means unity in diversity. What can be learned from this national motto? The insight is diversity in religion, culture, island, ethnic, etc considered

as one nation-state. Diversity is the richness of Indonesia that brings its people into one community that respect one to another in a democratic system of government based on Pancasila as the state philosophy.

But diversity can also mean the rich biodiversity of Indonesia. The relationship between the unity of God and the unity of diversity is a kind of holism which is important for inviting wonder about the natural world. The appreciation of the many cultures and stories of Indonesia and the appreciation of the interconnections within the diverse natural world reflect and support one another. Environmental education fits well into the very principle of Pancasila.

Philosophy may invite young people to wonder about the various cultures, stories, accounts of the past and the diversity and beauty of nature around them. As education starts in the family, it is gradually developed in the classroom to help young people grow into maturity as individual persons, members of a community, and citizens of a nation-state and a responsibility to the natural world and to future generations.

ENDNOTES

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¹⁴ <https://cdbmontessori.com/>

¹⁵ <https://republika.co.id/berita/pwj361453/seabad-tk-aisyiyah-bustanul-athfal-berkhidmat-untuk-negeri>

¹⁶ PAUD is based on the Indonesian Law called the Law of National System of Education Nr. 20/ 2003. According to that law, education for children in early primary school is similar to kindergarten

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¹⁹ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/insight>

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²¹ Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, "Theory of Intentionality," in J. N. Mohanty and William R. McKenna, eds., *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1989), pp. 147-79.

²² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nous>

²³ <https://www.google.com/search?q=aha-Erlebnis&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>

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