

## CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOL: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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### Abstract

Living in a democratic and always changing world, children have to learn the basic facts about their rights and to acquire the needed democratic life skills. Such democratic life skills can be reinforced through the surrounding environment itself, such schools. A Child Friendly School is a framework designed by UNICEF as the answer to the above needs. A Child Friendly School is a school that recognizes and nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. A school is considered child friendly when it provides a safe, clean, healthy and protective environment for children. At Child Friendly Schools, child rights are respected, and all children. Based on this concept we can design classroom practices which are child-centered and learning-friendly. The classroom practices provide us ideas about how to deal with children with diverse backgrounds and abilities that attend the class, as well as how to make learning meaningful for all the students. This paper is specifically intended to discuss the underlying principles of Child Friend School and the implication in classroom practices.

**Keywords:** child rights convention, child friendly school, child friendly learning

### INTRODUCTION

We live in a democratic society. As adult citizen we have to prepare children for living in a democratic society that values diversity and is committed to equality and social justice. Such understanding and practice should be developed at an early age. Children have to learn the basic facts about rights and to acquire the needed democratic life skills. Gartrell (2012) mentions the five democratic life skills as follows: (1) Finding acceptance as a member of the group and as a worthy individual; (2) Expressing strong emotions in non-hurting ways; (3) Solving problems creatively—independently and in cooperation with others; (4) Accepting unique human qualities in others; and (5) Thinking intelligently and ethically.

Such democratic life skills can be reinforced through the very nature of the surrounding environment itself. An appropriate environment is very essential for the children to promote their understanding about their own rights and others and to develop their life skills. It is believed that children's rights are best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, and where there is

fairness and justice. A Child Friendly School is a framework designed by UNICEF as the answer to the above needs. This paper discusses the underlying principles of Child Friend School and the implication in classroom practices.

### UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

#### **The United Nations Convention Child Rights**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which is commonly abbreviated as the CRC, CROC, or UNCRC is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children (UNICEF). It is the most rapidly and widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. This Convention has changed the way children are viewed and treated, for example, as human beings children have a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity. The global acceptance of this Convention clearly shows a wide global commitment to advancing children's rights. As a result, there is much to celebrate from the Convention, from declining infant mortality to rising school enrolment. However, there are a lot that remain to be

done. Too many children still do not enjoy their full rights as such as discrimination, bullying, physical, psychological, sexual, and verbal abuses on children. (UNICEF, 2016)

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 after nearly a decade of compromise and negotiation among member states and wide consultations with NGOs. Since then around 196 countries have ratified the CRC and nowadays most all of the countries have ratified the convention, except the U.S. Indonesia ratified this Convention on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1990 with Indonesia Presidential Decree number 36/1990. It then ratified the Law on Child Protection Number 23/2002 on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2002. Since the ratification of the CRC, child rights becomes a serious concern in Indonesia and the government has been very active in disseminating these ACTS for many years.

The CRC strongly emphasizes the primacy and importance of the role, authority and responsibility of the child's family. It affirms the child's right not only to the language and culture of the family, but also to have that language and culture respected. The Convention also encourages the state to support families are not able to provide an adequate standard of living for their children. The CRC defines a child as anyone below the age of eighteen and affirms the child as fully possessed of human rights. It contains 54 articles of children's rights that can be divided into three general categories, sometimes known as the 'three Ps' (Provision, Protection, and Participation). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an internationally recognized agreement between nations which establishes a comprehensive set of goals for individual nations to achieve on behalf of their children.

In general, the Convention calls for: (1) freedom from violence, abuse, hazardous employment, exploitation, abduction or sale, (2) Adequate nutrition, (3) free compulsory primary education, (4) adequate health care, (5) equal treatment regardless of gender, race, or cultural background, (6) the right to express opinions and freedom of thought in matters affecting them, and (7) safe

exposure/access to leisure, play, culture, and art. In other words, according to this human rights instrument, all girls and boys in the countries are entitled to the rights for survival, development, protection, and participation. First, the right to survival, which includes necessities for life: food, clothing, housing and medicine; second, the right to development, meaning that a child is entitled to develop his/her potential to the fullest, which includes the right to be educated, to play, to rest, to engage in cultural activities, to have access to news and information; third, the right to protection, meaning that a child is entitled to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The CRC explicitly states that children should be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence. Children should not suffer inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and school discipline should be consistent with the child's human dignity; and fourth, the right to participation, with freedom for expression in the community, in matters affecting the child's life, and in ways that prepare children to take on increasing roles and levels of responsibility as grow up. (UNICEF, 2016)

Wickenberg et al. (2009: 17) summarize the CRC into 3Ps (Provision, Protection, and Participation). The first P (provision) guarantees the safety of children and covering specific issues such as with the access of food, health, and education. The second P covers the special needs of children such as education and health care, the protection against maltreatment, neglect, and all forms of exploitation. The third P recognizes the child's evolving capacity to make decisions and participate in society as he or she approaches maturity; it deals with the right to act and be involved in decision making. Indonesian government has developed a lot of projects to promote the child right.

### **Child-Friendly School**

A Child Friendly School is a school that recognizes and nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. A school is

considered child friendly when it provides a safe, clean, healthy and protective environment for children. At Child Friendly Schools, child rights are respected, and all children – including children who are poor, disabled, living with HIV or from ethnic and religious minorities are treated equally. The learning environments of Child Friendly Schools are characterized by equity, balance, freedom, solidarity, non-violence and a concern for physical, mental and emotional health. These lead to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, morals so that children can live together in a harmonious way. A child friendly school nurtures a school-friendly child, support children for development and a school-friendly community. (UNESCO, 2015)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides an ideal approach for children to learn about their human rights. Because it specifies human rights especially relevant to children. Everyone, but especially children, parents and adults who work with children, should be familiar with this important component of the international human rights framework. Child-friendly school is based on *UNICEF Framework for Rights-Based, Child-Friendly Educational Systems and Schools* that are characterized as inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities - and children. According to this framework, child friendly school has the following tenets: child-seeking, child-centered, inclusive, effective, healthy and protective gender-sensitive, and involved with children, families, and communities.

Child-friendly school is a child-seeking school. It actively identifies excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning, treating children as subjects with rights and State as duty-bearers with obligations to fulfill these rights, and demonstrating, promoting, and helping to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.

Child-friendly school is a child-centered school. It acts in the best interests of the child, leading to the realization of the

child's full potential, and concerned both about the "whole" child (including her health, nutritional status, and well-being) and about what happens to children — in their families and communities - before they enter school and after they leave the school.

Child-friendly school is inclusive of children: it does not exclude, discriminate, or stereotype on the basis of difference; it provides education that is free and compulsory, affordable and accessible, especially to families and children at risk. It respects diversity and ensures equality of learning for all children (e.g., girls, working children, children of ethnic minorities and affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, victims of exploitation and violence); it responds to diversity by meeting the differing circumstances and needs of children (e.g., based on gender, social class, ethnicity, and ability level).

Child-friendly school is effective for learning: it promotes good quality teaching and learning processes with individualized instruction appropriate to each child's developmental level, abilities, and learning style and with active, cooperative, and democratic learning methods; it provides structured content and good quality materials and resources; it enhances teacher capacity, morale, commitment, status, and income — and their own recognition of child rights; it promotes quality learning outcomes by defining and helping children learn what they need to learn and teaching them how to learn. Child-friendly school is healthy and protective of children: it ensures a healthy, hygienic, and safe learning environment, with adequate water and sanitation facilities and healthy classrooms, healthy policies and practices (e.g., a school free of drugs, corporal punishment, and harassment), and the provision of health services such as nutritional supplementation and counseling; it provides life skills-based health education; It promotes both the physical and the psychosocio-emotional health of teachers and learners; it helps to defend and protect all children from abuse and harm; it provides positive experiences for children;

Child-friendly school is gender-sensitive: it promotes gender equality in enrolment and achievement; it eliminates gender stereotypes; it guarantees girl-friendly facilities, curricula, textbooks, and teaching-learning processes; it socializes girls and boys in a non-violent environment; it encourages respect for each others' rights, dignity, and equality.

Child-friendly school is involved with children, families, and communities: it is child-centered – promoting child participation in all aspects of school life; it is family-focused — working to strengthen families as the child's primary caregivers and educators and helping children, parents, and teachers establish harmonious relationships; it is community-based - encouraging local partnership in education, acting in the community for the sake of children, and working with other actors to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights. (UNICEF, 2012)

It is obvious that the vision of Child-Friendly Schools for educating children goes far beyond who gets the best score on the final examination. Their mission insists that each and every girl and boy has the right to participate in her or his own learning in a safe, protective learning community. It is the obligation of "duty-bearers", which is us, the adults, to ensure that all children are cared for, protected and supported to be able to develop to the fullest. To the fullest here means physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually with equality and integrity.

At the schools, teachers are trained on child rights, while teaching methods focus on a child-centered approach. Lessons for children include essential life skills aimed at keeping them safe and building the skills they will need to fulfill their potential and contribute fully to society. In addition, Child Friendly Schools bring together students and members of the community to develop and act on ways to improve their school's environment, values, and morals so that children can live together in a harmonious way.

## **CLASSROOM PRACTICES**

Based on the concept above we can design classroom practices which are child-centered and learning-friendly. The classroom practices provide us ideas about how to deal with children with diverse backgrounds and abilities that attend the class, as well as how to make learning meaningful for all the students. Which follows are some insights taken from UNESCO.

### **Use a Variety of Teaching Methods and Activities**

Research shows that children learn in different ways either because of hereditary factors, experience, environment, or their personal traits. Consequently, teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods and classroom activities to meet the different learning needs of the children in their classes. At first, it seems to be a frightening idea for those who teach in large classrooms containing 50 different children. So, they tend to use "rote learning" such as memorization and repetition and remembering. This seems to be an easy method to manage many children, however it is boring. Using different methods for teaching can be more rewarding for both teachers and students.

Scholars believe that children learn in many different ways and at many different levels; that is, there is diversity in learning. Consequently, teachers need to devise different ways of learning using different teaching methods, so that all children can understand the information and can learn in a meaningful way. The range of classroom activities can be in the form of memorization, repetition, analysis, synthesis, and Problem Solving. To address this range we can use blocks, bottle caps, models, and other objects to teach mathematics, which taps into the fine motor skills and visual understanding of children. Teacher can invite children to talk about (or write about) ideas and processes in mathematics, which links their verbal thinking to understanding mathematics concepts. Teacher can ask children to draw pictures for the stories that we read to them, which connects their visual thinking to the

words and events in the story. And teacher can guide children in making maps of the area around school, which links their experience of movement in space to visual and mathematical concepts. When children survey their community, identify problems within it, and use their skills cooperatively to suggest solutions to these problems, they are learning how to apply what they learn in school. (UNESCO, 2015)

### **Children' Various Ways of Learning**

According to Reid (1999) children have their own learning style. Some may learn best through listening to the teachers, reading and note taking (auditory learners), others through visual materials (visual learners), and still others through body movement (playing games, sports) or musical activities (Kinesthetic). Some like to work on problems individually (field independent learners), while others like to interact with others to find solutions (field dependent learners). Teachers should observe and discover the children's preferred ways of learning in their inclusive classrooms as to help all children to learn best.

In addition, Gardner (1999) suggests that children also have personal intelligence profiles that contribute to their learning style. They may use several pathways to help them to understand and remember. Therefore, it is important for teachers to use different teaching strategies that cover a combination of several learning pathways. Gardner (1999) mentions several pathways by which children learn as follows: (1) Verbal or linguistic children think and learn through written and spoken words, memory, and recall; (2) Logical or mathematical children think and learn through reasoning and calculation. They can easily use numbers, recognize abstract patterns, and take precise measurements; (3) Visual or spatial children like art, such as drawing, painting, or sculpture. They can easily read maps, charts, and diagrams; (4) Body or kinesthetic children learn through body movement, games, and drama; (5) Touch or Tactile: Children with hearing and sight problems can learn better through touching; (6) Musical or rhythmic children

learn best through sounds, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition; (7) Interpersonal children learn easily in groups through cooperative work. They enjoy group activities, they easily understand social situations, and they can develop relationships with others easily; (8) Intra-personal children learn best through personal concentration and self-reflection. They like to work alone and are aware of their own feelings, and know their own strengths and weaknesses.

### **Theme (Project) Based Teaching**

Teachers should realize that some children need more time to learn and to progress than others. Using theme (project) based teaching teachers can give different children different tasks (some are easier or more difficult than others). This will encourage children to work in teams (in pairs, or small groups). The teams should be put together in such a way that they reflect the diversity of abilities and backgrounds in our classrooms. This will foster peer teaching and learning. The tasks are designed based on their individual abilities and stage of development. And the lessons, thus, should be structured around daily or weekly "themes" rather than unconnected pieces of information. An example of a "theme" is "water". And daily topics related to water can be exemplified as follows: (1) learning about how to keep water clean and prevent pollution (science); (2) writing stories (essays) about rivers, lakes, seas, etc. (language); (3) measure water by using different containers (centiliter, deciliter, liter) and learning about fractions ( $1/10$ ,  $1/4$ ,  $1/2$ ,  $1$ ) (math); (3) finding quotes about water in Al-Quran (religious studies and reading); (5) make drawing, collages, paintings, or patchworks related to water (art); and (6) organize a competition where the students have to run 100 meter with water glasses (measuring how much they water they had in the glass when they started, how much was left in the glass when they reached the goal, to see how much they had spilled, the one who had run the fastest ( $1/2$  the score) but with the least water spillage (the other  $1/2$  of the score) had won) (sports, life skills,

logical thinking, and math). (UNESCO, 2015)

### **Gender and Teaching**

Teachers and schools may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. Teacher-student interactions are the clearest form of classroom inequities. Teachers call on boys more often than girls, ask boys more higher-order questions, give boys more extensive feedback, and use longer wait-time with boys than girls. Teachers fail to see girls' raised hands, and limit their interactions with girls to social, non-academic topics. Girls are rarely chosen to give a demonstration or help with an experiment. Give more responsibilities to boys than girls (such as being the head of the class or head of a group). Make use of textbooks and other learning materials that reinforce negative gender stereotypes. Moreover, many teachers may be completely unaware that they treat girls and boys differently.

In many textbooks, females are still under represented. Pictures of women appear less frequently than men and more often show women in traditional roles. When men and women are shown in the same picture, the woman is in a subordinate role, such as the female nurse with the male doctor. The text may still use sex-biased language and contain no examples of women scientists. Many of the traditional topics of science and examples favor boys' interests and experiences. Girls favor topics that emphasize health, food, and safety rather than the more common topics that relate science to industry and the military.

Changing behavior and creating a learning environment that promotes equity takes time and effort. Teaching that promotes equity must be active and intentional behavior. It also requires sensitivity, tact, and a willingness to examine one's own behavior and assumptions. To be effective equity strategies must be continuous and integrated into daily instruction. (Baker, 2016)

**Preparing for Learning that is Meaningful**  
 "Meaningful Learning" means that we link what the children are learning in school

(topic and content), and what the children are taught to through their everyday lives in their families and communities. Teaching is a complex activity. We must consider many things when preparing for meaningful learning. No one can force a child to learn. Children will learn when they are motivated to learn, when they are given opportunities to learn effectively, when they feel that the skills they will learn will lead to success, when they receive positive feedback from friends, teachers, and parents who compliment them on how well they are learning. (Ausubel, )

To prepare for meaningful learning, here are some questions the teachers must answer before preparing the lessons as follows: (1) Motivation: Is the topic meaningful and relevant to the children? Are they interested in what they are expected to learn?; (2) Opportunities: Are the opportunities suited to the developmental level of the children? For instance, is the topic too hard or too easy for many of the children? Are the activities appropriate for both girls and boys? Are they appropriate for children with diverse backgrounds and abilities?; (3) Skills: Do the children have the skills to achieve the expected result? (4) Feedback: Is the type of assessment and feedback given to the children designed to increase motivation to continue learning? (UNESCO, 2015)

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

A Child Friendly School is a school that nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. It is characterized by equity, balance, freedom, solidarity, non-violence and a concern for physical, mental and emotional health. These lead to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and moral values so that children can grow "a fully functioning people". UNICEF has designed a framework for Child Friendly School as a guide line for teachers manage schools and classrooms which are friendly for children. This framework can be a powerful tool for both helping to fulfill the rights of children and providing them an education of good quality.

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