

Chapter 12

Feminism and Early Childhood Education in Indonesia: Teachers' Reflections

Sri Marpinjun and Patricia G. Ramsey

Abstract This chapter describes how early childhood educators and center directors in Yogyakarta, Indonesia responded to a workshop on gender equity. In particular it analyzes how gender-related cultural and legal contradictions are reflected in participants' personal and professional lives. In the past, Indonesian educators have been resistant to gender equity work because the term "feminism" is seen as a western concept and alien to the Indonesian culture. Some also have found the didactic tone and sweeping assumptions of many trainers to be alienating and contradictory to their experiences. Furthermore, some educators believe that gender does not affect the social dynamics of their classrooms. To address these issues, the first author and her colleagues developed an alternative strategy for the workshops described in this chapter. First, the term "gender equity" was initially used to avoid the negative connotations of "feminism." Second, in contrast to a "political approach," the workshops were based on a "psychological approach". In this model, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their lives and the circumstances that have influenced their gender identity, including experiences that have strengthened their capacities and have enabled them to overcome gender conformity and inequities. As participants in the workshops began to understand their own gender-related history and identity, they became aware of others' unique experiences and views. They also began to recognize gender biased behavior and teaching practices in their classrooms and started to develop teaching strategies to create more gender equitable learning environments.

S. Marpinjun (✉)

Institute for Women's Empowerment (IWE), Jakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: marpinjun@yahoo.com

and

Yogyakarta Early Childhood Care and Development
Resource Centre (ECCD RC), Yogyakarta, Indonesia

P.G. Ramsey (✉)

Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, USA
e-mail: pramsey@mtholyoke.edu

Keywords Feminism · Gender equity · Early childhood teacher training/workshops · Indonesian political and cultural contexts

Introduction: Contexts of the Workshops

Before describing the workshops, we will provide an overview of Indonesian geography, history, national policies, and educational practices that relate to feminism and early childhood education.

Indonesia is a complex country with 17,000 islands and 300 different ethnic groups and languages. These distances and diversities make any educational innovations challenging. Moreover, as with all nations, contradictions in cultural principles and practices create a complex context for teachers who are interested in feminist practices. Despite these obstacles, Indonesia has a strong national commitment to early childhood education and to human rights.

The intersections between gender, culture, and religion play out through policy and practice in everyday life, including early childhood education. The historical and contemporary policy context is influenced by key Indonesian policies that both support and undermine gender equity, as will be discussed later in this section. This chapter will describe the experiences of early childhood educators that participated in workshops that used a “psychological” approach to explore gender roles and equity in early childhood pedagogy. The workshops were based on the belief that feminism:

seeks a transformation that would create gender equality within an entirely new social order – one in which both men and women can individually and collectively live as human beings in societies built on social and economic equality, enjoy the full range of rights, live in harmony with the natural world and are liberated from violence, conflict and militarisation (Batliwala and Friedman 2011, p. 61).

During the workshops participants reflected on their own childhood and adulthood experiences and how they have influenced their gender-related views and teaching practices. Many of their memories and current beliefs echoed the contradictions and complexities of Indonesian policies, values, and practices.

Indonesia became independent from the Netherlands and Japan on 17 August 1945. In preparation for this change, the founding leaders developed Pancasila, 5 Common Principles to guide the nation during its formation as a nation. These principles included:

1. Belief in the one and only God, (in Indonesian, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*).
2. Just and civilized humanity, (in Indonesian, *Kemanusiaan Yang Adil dan Beradab*).
3. The unity of Indonesia, (in Indonesian, *Persatuan Indonesia*).
4. Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives; to ensure a fair process to reach consensus, (in

Indonesian, *Kerakyatan Yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan, Dalam Permasyarakatan dan Perwakilan*).

5. Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia, (in Indonesian, *Keadilan Sosial bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia*) (Pancasila n.d.).

The Indonesian constitution Undang-undang Dasar (UUD1945) elaborates these principles and stipulates the rights of Indonesian citizens and residents. Chapter X of the UUD1945 states that all citizens and residents are equal before the law and are guaranteed a wide range of human rights, including: the right of children to grow up free of violence and discrimination; freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, and association; freedom to choose education, work, and place of residence; freedom from discrimination and coercion on any grounds whatsoever (Constitution of Indonesia n.d.).

Since the time of Independence, Indonesia has joined several international efforts to support women's and children's rights. In 1984, Indonesia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979). This action committed the country to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system and to establish tribunals and other public institutions to protect women against discrimination by persons, organizations, or enterprises.

In 1990 Indonesia ratified, and in 2002 accepted into law, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that stipulates, among other principles, that nations work to ensure children's healthy development regardless of race, gender, culture, and disability. Indonesia also ratified the UNESCO Dakar Declaration in 2000 on Education for All (EFA). The first of the six goals of the EFA include: "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children"; and "Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality." Together these goals emphasized the importance of early childhood education and gender equity at all levels of schooling. The ratification of EFA led the Indonesian government to create a directorate of early childhood education (ECE) in the Education Ministry and a special section on ECE in the National Education System law in 2003.

At the same time Indonesia, as evident in the first of the five common Principles, is a religious (not a secular) nation, and Indonesians use their religion (any religion, not only Islam) to define their way of life individually and collectively. The wording "The one and only God" was politically contested in 1945. It refers to Islam, which is the religion of the majority. However, Islamic lobbyists wanted to have "Shariah law" be the Indonesian law. Therefore, the wording which alludes to Islam but also potentially embraces other religions was a compromise. Officially, the state of Indonesia encourages the religious life of all people by providing facilities of each religion, and resolving religion-based conflicts.

Because Indonesia is a religious state, the customs and social life of all citizens are highly regulated by the Marriage Act of 1974 that is based on Islamic and other

religious and cultural principles. It stipulates separate and unequal roles for men and women, particularly when they are married. In Chapter VI, Sect. 31:3 and Chapter VI, Sect. 34 of the Marriage Act. The husband is the head of the household and is obliged to protect his wife and provide every necessity of home life according to his ability. The wife is required to manage the affairs of the household as well as possible. If the husband or wife neglects his/her obligations each can file a lawsuit to the court.

Over the past decades, many women's rights activists have proposed judicial reviews to make changes in this marriage law, but these efforts have mostly failed. For example, recently the High Court of Constitution refused a judicial review to change the minimum marriage age for women from 16 to 18 years (Putri 2015). In their deliberations, the judges in the court based most of their arguments and decisions on religious interpretations. Because most religions espouse the division of roles between husband and wife, these divisions are maintained, and most Indonesians still accept these distinctions. For example, women expect men will be the breadwinner, and men expect women will do all the domestic work.

Thus, like most countries, Indonesian policies embody many contradictions related to gender roles and equity. Indonesia has adopted and actively supported many national and international principles that respect the rights of all human beings, including those of women and children. On the other hand, the nation still upholds traditional laws that maintain gender role divisions of husband and wife through the stipulations of Marriage Law in 1974.

As a result, children growing up in Indonesia and teachers working in schools are pressured by two conflicting principles related to gender equity: first, the expectation that gender roles are distinct and divided, and second, the belief that all people should enjoy equal rights and freedom from discrimination in all spheres of life.

These contradictions were evident in a two workshops on gender equity that the first author and her colleagues conducted in 2015 with early childhood teachers. The following sections describe the workshops and then themes that emerged as teachers reflected on their own lives and their work with children in classrooms.

Description of the Workshops

The first author Sri who has worked in early childhood education in Indonesia for several decades developed the workshops described in this chapter. As we discuss later, she had participated in previous feminist trainings but felt that they had not been effective because they did not engage teachers actively. After Sri designed and facilitated the workshops, she had the transcripts translated into English. Then she and Patricia, the second author, analyzed the data and wrote this chapter. Throughout this process, we had many email "conversations" about the workshops and participants' responses, and Sri wrote several reflections about the contexts of

the workshop and the responses of the participants. We have included a few of them in this chapter.

The workshops were conducted in the spring of 2015 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Each one lasted for 5 h and followed a similar format. The participants in the first workshop consisted of ten women who were all early childhood teachers or teaching assistants. The second workshop had ten participants (nine women and one man) that included early childhood teachers, center directors or managers, and instructors in early childhood education. Both workshops were facilitated by the same five facilitators who had been trained by the first author and were all highly experienced early childhood educators who had previously participated in training of trainer programs.

The workshops were developed around a process of self-reflection. This psychological approach is an alternative to the “political approach” that has been used in the past to introduce gender equity. The political approach is more didactic and starts with the assumption that women are oppressed by a patriarchal system (e.g., showing statistics that there are fewer women in the government, that women receive lower wages, and that women are victims of domestic and public violence). This approach works for women who have experienced injustice in their family or work place as they feel understood and protected. However, this approach does not take into consideration the complexities of Indonesian history, laws, and values. Moreover, it rests on the erroneous assumption that all women are in the same situation. Many women have experienced different realities. Despite the constraints of the Marriage Law, they have been able to access and control resources equally with men. Moreover, many men are poor, oppressed and living with very limited access and control. Thus, starting workshops with sweeping statements such as “all women are oppressed” has often led both women and men, to resist the trainers and principles and terms related to gender and feminism.

Sri experienced and observed this political approach many times since the 1980s and noted how it placed participants in subordinate roles, emphasized their histories as victims of gender discrimination, and, in some cases, undermined their confidence and led to less rather than more equitable work relationships. While writing this chapter, she reflected on these experiences in the following statement.

I think we were using this [political] approach... to convince the participants of our trainings to agree with the gender issues (imbalanced power relations between men and women). That's why the trainers provided information with the expectation that it would be simply accepted, not to reviewed or critiqued. So it was like a brain washing process! The impact of this approach was terrible. Even though they did not really understand gender issues, some participants became afraid of being labeled as “gender biased.” This label was particularly detrimental if they were working with women's organizations.

To illustrate these problems, Sri described a particular program in Makassar in the early 2000s that used the political approach. In the first session the facilitator used statistics to demonstrate persistence of the “culture of patriarchy” in Indonesia. She illustrated the ongoing gender discrimination with the example that women were not allowed to put their legs on the table in front of others. The participants felt that these statistics and examples did not make any sense to them and were so

negative that the training almost ended. These negative reactions actually were not really connected with the gender issue promoted by the facilitator, rather, they did not like the way the facilitator was directing them (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014). Sri intervened by using a “psychological” approach and was able to redirect the session. When the participants were encouraged to view gender from their individual perspectives, they were able to see that everyone wants self-development and how homogenizing people along gender lines are harmful to individuals.

In her reflections on these experiences, Sri noted that many trainers are activists and are comfortable with concepts such as the “culture of patriarchy”. However, this type of analysis is not meaningful to many teachers who primarily care about their individual/family/work life. So any gender equity work needs to start from that perspective rather than from unfamiliar and abstract concepts such as patriarchy.

In response to these experiences and insights Sri and her colleagues developed workshops based on the psychological approach that encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and views and to touch their heart feelings. Usually, adults like to talk and share and be respected as resources rather than simply persons who need to be taught. Thus, the workshops we are describing in this chapter were organized to first, encourage participants to share their personal and professional experiences in a nonjudgmental environment; and second, through self-reflection and group discussions to critically reflect on their histories, views about gender roles, and teaching practices. This approach also reflects the principles of a participatory and experiential learning approach: “Gender training will have the most impact and relevance when it is designed for the professional, social and cultural context where it is being conducted... It should also take into account the background and needs of those being trained. Where possible practical examples from participants’ own experiences should be used, and there must be enough time to discuss any questions that arise” (EIGE 2012, n.p.). This reflective approach to gender equity is also consistent with current teacher education approaches in other countries such as the United States, Ireland, and Australia (Aina and Cameron 2011; Erden and Wolfgang 2004; Fulmer 2010; MacNaughton 2000; MacNaughton and Williams 2009; Ramsey 2015; Zaman 2008; Murray and Urban 2012).

The guiding principles of the workshops were:

- Gender identity already exists in every person because it was learned and internalized when the person was very young. However, the process of identity building is not realized by all persons. Through self-reflection of what they do, feel, and think participants will know who they are as women and men and why.
- Gender equity is one aspect of human rights and the universal desire to be treated respectfully as an individual. Through self-reflection and discussion of their experiences of having to conform to gender roles and expectations, participants will begin to see that every individual should have the right to be herself/himself and to recognize the connection between gender rights and other human rights.
- Through self-reflection and conversation, participants will gain some insights into their early experiences of being respected and accepted or targeted by

discrimination and rejected by their families, peers, and institutions such as schools. Through this process they will begin to see how children need to develop self-confidence in order to cope with experiences of discrimination and to face the future with optimism. They will also recognize the critical role of early childhood educators in supporting this development.

- When teachers understand from their own experience how gender equity is central to the best interests of children, they will view it as a moral principle, essential to their teaching practice. They will understand that children need to (1) build their own identities; (2) accept that they are okay being a girl or a boy that they are neither inferior nor superior but equal to others; and (3) have strong self-esteem so that they are confident to reach out into the future.
- Through these reflections, participants will learn that anyone, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion can embrace feminist principles (e.g., the beliefs that personal is political and biology is not destiny; and goals to promote equality, inclusion, and diversity; peace and security; bodily integrity and freedom from violence of any kind) (Batliwala and Friedman 2011). Participants will see how these feminist principles are already part of their lives and find their own reasons and political positions for their teaching practice. They will see that “feminist” is not a term restricted to individuals “out there” (i.e., Christian, Western) but a term that everyone—Indonesians, Javanese, Muslims—can embrace.

Both workshops included a range of activities that encouraged participants to reflect on their own identities, histories, and values and to share their experiences and views with others. After these self-reflection activities, participants then discussed teaching practices and peer interactions in their classrooms and whether and how they reflected gender-related assumptions and roles. At the end of the workshop they developed possible strategies to challenge gender bias in their classrooms.

Participants’ Responses to the Self-reflection Activities

Transcripts of the participants’ responses to the self-reflection activities were read numerous times by the first and second author and another colleague from the United States. Together they identified several themes that emerged in the responses to different activities. We do not have the space to describe all of the responses but will highlight ones that were particularly interesting. Although each participant had a unique history and perspective, many of the comments reflected the contradictions between the gender roles and divisions that are codified in the Marriage Laws and the emphasis on gender equality that underlies the Indonesian commitment to human rights.

In their responses to the “Who Am I?” activity, during which participants drew pictures of their life journeys and shared them with group members, many described

difficult, painful, and circuitous life paths. Some used the word “mountains” to describe the hardships that they had encountered. One person repeatedly used the word “sorrow” in her story. Many accounts described families being separated by death and distance; some parents had such busy work schedules they sent their children away to foster families or relatives. (Note: At the end of the following quotes, pseudonyms of the participant speaking are provided in parentheses.)

I am the youngest child with two brothers... My parents were busy as my father was in the army and my mother was active in wife organization. Me and my brothers were looked after by foster parents. I had problem in controlling my emotion. When I was in secondary school I was living in a boarding room in Madura, my family were separated out. My father moved to Yogyakarta, my mother lived in Kalimantan, and my first brother was graduated from high school and then moved to Madiun. My second brother then moved to Semarang lived with his foster parent (Parti).

Often being raised by relatives meant that children, especially girls, were strictly disciplined and pressured to conform to gender roles:

My life is up and down. My origin is Lampung, I am the oldest child, and I was feeling that my mother did not love me because she was getting pregnant again. [It was difficult for me to attend high school because it was far away so] my father sent me to my grandparents' house in Yogyakarta [to attend high school]. I thought my sorrow would be over. But it was like being trapped in the cage of a crocodile. I was given a lot of work to do by my grandmother; cooking, and helping her such as harvesting morning glories to be sold. I really wanted to play with my peers. When I graduated from high school, I thought I was going to end my sorrow. But... [I] was wrong. I was sent in a [very strict] boarding school [to study health]. They said that staying in a boarding school was better for me because I was [used to] living under strict rules... (Lisa).

Many described early experiences that pressured them to conform to societal expectations, especially around gender. In their descriptions of their families of origin, several participants described strict upbringings in which their roles were very confined. As noted in the quotation above, one participant vividly described being raised by her grandmother as being like living in a “crocodile cage.” Some also noted that their access to school had not been equal to that of male family members. Furthermore, teachers were often harsh and did not encourage girls to fully engage in the school programs. Several grew up in isolated communities where there were few resources to broaden their experiences.

Unfortunately for some, marriage had not been an escape from these rigid expectations. Some participants told of having abusive or demanding husbands and controlling in-laws who expected wives to be obedient and subservient. One participant described the picture she drew of her struggles to first live with and then leave her abusive husband and then survive as a single parent:

I draw a tangled thread here in red and a road in yellow. There is a cross road with 3 people standing there. The tangled thread describes my life in the past with 2 children and husband who is not with us anymore. I was not yet an EC educator. I was producing foods and selling them to stores. I could not rely on my husband. My husband would not talk about our problems with me. I was thinking that I needed to be respected, but he would ...hurt me and our children too. I draw many red marks as he did [this] many times. I tried to stay because my children needed [their] father. Therefore, I stayed till something happened; we

were arguing and he hurt us again. I said to myself that it was enough. It's ok to hurt me but not the children. I asked myself why I stayed. I decided to leave him. It was hard because I have to do everything. I lived in suburb, and my children's school was in down town. I had to go to work and provide pickups for children every day. It was so tiring (Farah).

Finally, a few described their decisions to be good obedient Muslim wives as illustrated by the following quote. Interestingly, the speaker indicates that this decision was made willingly and did not require rigid gender conformity as she works outside of the home.

I draw a woman with a head scarf. While I was in secondary school, I did not know about responsibility. I had a gang, but it was positive; we played basketball, music, but my academic performance was bad. I was aware that I must study seriously at school. I met an Islamic teacher who taught me about being a Muslim woman and suggested [that I] wear a head scarf or cover the 'aurat' [parts of women's body which are considered as private] and pray 5 times [a day]. Not so long after graduation from the university I got married... Two-three years back I just understood how to be a good Muslim woman wearing a head scarf and becoming a wife as well as a teacher (Cantika).

In contrast to stories about parents and other relatives enforcing strict gender roles, others had different experiences growing up. Their parents had told them that they could do anything they wanted. They encouraged their daughters to be independent and to pursue their interests and bought them "boys' toys" to encourage them to explore wider gender roles. Interestingly, when their daughters had started to wear head scarves as part of their Muslim practice, these parents were very resistant to this shift toward more traditional attire.

Some participants noted that school had offered them a chance to develop broader gender roles. They described developing confidence both in their academic pursuits and in their participation in student organizations. Furthermore, learning about psychology and early childhood education had given them a focus for their future work:

I went to university to study psychology. I learned much about the cycle of life. I remember that my lecturer said that the life will be not always straight and smooth. It will be zig-zag. At the university my activity was joining student organization, and we had some projects which gave me a lot of many experiences (Anti).

Many participants, regardless of their earlier experiences, said that they had found a sense of purpose, confidence, and a "family" by working in early childhood education. Even those who had had many discouraging experiences as children and young adults, now felt that they had goals, and some aspired to become lead teachers or directors. Working in early childhood had given them an opportunity to feel competent and to explore different roles:

Then I met my relative that was also studying psychology. I felt this was my way. I was studying while working. When [I was doing an assignment on research methodology], I found that I was so interested in children. When I observed Taman Pintar center, I was interested to work in an EC center. Then I applied to Kirana center, and was accepted. I was grateful because my way was smooth... My dream now is to have my own center (Gusti).

Some also found that working in early childhood gave them the opportunity to learn to be themselves and to be more assertive in contrast to the constraint that they felt in their marriages:

I totally left my husband... my husband liked to limit my right to speak up. Now I am more relaxed. No one pushes me to work again every morning like my husband did to me because he wanted me to achieve the target [for harvesting produce] (Farah).

Although most participants recognized how gender inequity and rigid roles had limited their lives and been the source of considerable pain, they still had contradictory feelings about gender roles and feminism as evident in their responses to other self-reflection activities. When asked to respond to various statements that reflected gender-related values, almost all of the participants agreed that economic independence for women was preferable, but in response to a question about feminism, most said that they knew little about feminism, and several confused the term “feminism” with “femininity.” Nevertheless, when one of the facilitators described the six pillars of feminism, all the participants indicated that they agreed with them.

These pro-feminist views also emerged in responses to a subsequent activity when participants were asked to estimate what percent they were masculine and feminine. Almost all of the participants said that they were 50–50 masculine and feminine—recognizing that they had attributes and roles that are commonly associated with both men and women. One woman, who said that she works a lot with her husband, said that she was 95% masculine. Interestingly, the one male participant noted that he does many jobs commonly considered feminine, but he said that he considers himself 95% masculine. This last comment fits with studies that show that most societies are more accepting of girls and women taking on masculine attire and jobs (e.g., wearing pants, working on construction sites) than the reverse (e.g., men wearing dresses and working as early childhood teachers) (Ramsey 2015).

Despite the fact that most participants showed some critical awareness of the limitations of rigid gender roles in the first few activities, a subsequent activity illustrated the persistence of traditional assumptions. Working in groups, participants drew pictures of a man and a woman and described their attributes and activities. In almost all of the depictions, men were described as strong, brave, responsible, active, and being good leaders. Whereas women were portrayed as beautiful, soft, calm, friendly, patient, and obedient. Men’s activities included different types of jobs and sports. Women’s activities included only domestic chores, such as cleaning, cooking, sewing, washing, and shopping. These stereotyped depictions were surprising given the participants’ life stories of overcoming many adversities, including rigidly enforced gender roles; their agreement with the pillars of feminism; and the fact that all of them, at the time of the workshops, were working outside of the home. These responses illustrate how traditional values persist even in the face of contradictory evidence. One participant attributed this discrepancy to economic considerations:

It's more about responsibility in building family, and man's responsibility in the family is providing livelihood. It's said in the religion. Otherwise, we will be economically dependent on others (Dinda).

Drawing on Sri's own experiences as an Indonesian, she explains below that many in the Indonesian community often embrace these contradictory principles:

The Marriage Law reflects the strong influence of the tradition of gender-based labor division. And from the time they are very young, people are socialized by the community to follow this tradition. But now young Indonesians also have been learning about other principles including human rights. So they actually are learning both traditional and modern principles. Many Indonesians may understand this ambiguity, but they might not yet have made a decision to choose which principles they are going to adopt. In fact, being "consistent" might not be a good choice for them; being able to apply both principles and to move flexibly between them according to their own complex and changing situations may be more adaptive. For example, women agree with the right to work, but they still look for partners who are economically independent because the man is expected to be the bread winner, and women want to ensure their economic security.

Participants' Views of the Role of Gender in Early Childhood Classrooms

After completing the self-reflection activities, the participants then talked about their work with children. The contradictory gendered beliefs noted in the previous section also emerged in participants' descriptions of pedagogy and peer relationships in early childhood classrooms. As participants talked, they began to recognize that many classroom rules, peer comments, and teachers' questions and instructions reinforced gender segregation and rigid roles. When children did challenge gender roles and expectations, teachers and peers often made comments, especially to boys who were enacting "female" roles. For example, boys were criticized for wearing any clothing that could be seen as feminine, having long hair, or wearing or playing with anything colored pink. They also were teased for playing with dolls and cooking utensils or for crying. The girls were limited by teachers' instructions such as being told that they could not use the climbing structure or must sit politely. Teachers sometimes reinforced gender stereotypes by telling girls that they were cute or pretty. Peers were more likely to tease girls if they wore "male" clothing such as a cowboy hat or if they played with guns or trucks. This reinforcement of gender roles on the part of peers is similar to behaviors observed in preschools in other countries, such as Australia, South Africa, and the United States (Aina and Cameron 2011; Bhana 2007; Cunningham and Macrae 2011; MacNaughton 2000).

As the workshop participants reflected on these situations, they realized that they often unconsciously reinforced gendered behavior and expectations. They talked about "kok" questions that refer to questions that adults and peers ask that imply criticism and serve to reinforce conformity to societal expectations. For example, when a 2-year-old boy brings a doll into the classroom, a teacher might say, "You

are a boy, but you play doll?” The color of children clothes may also invoke a “kok” question. When an adult sees a boy wearing pink, s/he may ask, “You are a boy, but you wear girl’s clothes?”. One participant described how a boy with longer hair was teased by his peers, “You are a boy, but your hair is longer? Are you a boy or a girl?” Although most of the reported “kok” questions were directed at boys, the teachers also mentioned similar questions to women and girls. When women have to work late, they are often asked, “You are a woman, but you get home late?” The assumption underlying this question is that the woman is a prostitute. One example a participant heard in a classroom was “Ah, you are a girl, but you playing cars?”. Sometimes the criticism was more direct, and not couched in a “kok” question. In one case a girl had a short haircut, and her teachers said that the haircut was too short. They also noted that if a girl wears masculine clothes, teachers might say that she looks like “tomboy”.

In discussions about these classroom situations, the workshop leaders and participants made the following points: First, they agreed that children get gender messages from many sources including, but not limited to, adults (parents and teachers), peers, and books. Second, limited gender roles marginalize some children and constrain their freedom of expression and cumulatively lead children to conform. In particular, the emphasis for girls to be polite may discourage them from being assertive and making choices. Third, adults often use words such as “appropriate” to describe gender-typical behavior and “strange” to allude to individuals who push gender boundaries. These words and other types of criticisms such as the “kok” questions may discourage children from developing more open and flexible gender roles.

To encourage children to develop more flexible gender roles and expectations, workshop participants discussed how teachers might first learn about children’s gender-related ideas by asking questions to find out what children think and believe. With that knowledge, teachers can challenge gender stereotyped assumptions with books, pictures, classroom visitors, etc. For example, they might highlight the contrast between the common belief that girls cannot (or should not) use the climbing structures with the highly skilled *penebas*, Indonesian women who climb high trees to pick fruit. Or when they hear children saying that boys should not play in the cooking corner, teachers can talk about famous male chefs and male family members who cook. Participants discussed ways to support flexible gender roles in all activities and instructions and the importance of recognizing that gender roles vary across cultures (e.g., boys with long hair may be more acceptable in some cultures than others).

Participants’ Reflections on the Workshops

In the final reflections part of the workshops, participants described how much they had learned about themselves, their views, and their practice with young children. Although the societal contradictions about gender are still very much a part of their

world views, they had begun to question their assumptions and to reconsider how they interact with children. In terms of their own thinking and lives, the participants said that they had become more open-minded and had a greater understanding of gender issues. One person said that she had moved from not caring about gender issues to understanding the need for gender equity. They also noted that they were more aware of gender in their own identity and that this was enriching:

When I arrived here I thought gender is the same as sex (genital). [From] this workshop... I understand that gender is not only about sex. It opened my eyes that men and women are equal. I did distribute blue crayons for boys and pink crayons for girls, [but] I didn't realize that it [gender-typical colors] is related with gender identity development of children. In the future I will be more open to understanding gender issues (Hanim).

I knew a little bit about gender before this meeting, and now I know more. Gender is not only about sex (genital). In the future I will practice [this awareness] in my work. I will communicate with parents to learn how their children understand gender (Lina).

I understand about gender more. Next step is self-introspection. I found that I still did what we identified as [gendered teaching practices]. I still divide and label children on the basis of their gender... this meeting is so good because we can share with each other (Asmi).

Participants also said that they now had more knowledge about feminism and realized that it was part of fighting for all human rights. One person, who originally had confused the terms “feminism” and “femininity,” stated, “I am a feminist.”

When teachers talked about the impact of the workshop, they made several commitments to change their practice including watching their language with children (e.g., avoiding “kok” questions), monitoring, and controlling their reactions to children, and avoiding being judgmental. They also mentioned exploring children's thinking and knowledge about gender and providing more visual materials to support gender equity. Several talked about communicating with parents and colleagues about the need to develop practices that support gender equity.

Although these workshops were only 5 h long, they were effective in getting participants to think about their lives and to see how feminism, which has been considered by many Indonesians to be a foreign Western concept, is relevant to their personal lives and to their work with children. By having teachers reflect on their lives and share their experiences, the facilitators encouraged them to consider new perspectives, unlike the political training about feminism that often alienated participants by making sweeping assumptions about their lives.

Obviously these workshops are only a beginning and need to be followed with longer sessions (ideally 3 days) that would provide more opportunities for participants to explore their experiences and the cultural contexts of their personal and professional lives and to critique their perspectives and practices. As teachers become clearer about their views and the influence of societal values, they can refine their pedagogy. As part of this process, they might develop action research programs that would enable them to scrutinize the classroom and analyze gender bias in their own practice; in classroom materials such as books, television/video, and posters; and in children's indoor and outdoor play. Then they can try out, evaluate, and critique strategies to promote gender equitable learning environments.

Conclusion

Although Indonesia has a unique history and culture related to gender discrimination and equity, many of the issues that participants discussed about their lives and their work with young children are similar to those in other countries. For example, in the United States, many movements have pushed for gender equity for decades, and now there are laws that protect people from gender discrimination. However, men still earn more than women, and when men and women violate typical gender roles, they often have to deal with questions, skepticism, and even violence. Moreover, while there is no explicit “Marriage Law” in the United States, recent studies show that, despite many changes over the past decades, American women still spend twice as much time caring for children and close to twice as much time doing housework than their husbands/partners do (Parker and Wang 2013, n.p.).

Furthermore, American children are still being raised in highly gendered environments. Educational efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and to encourage children to develop more flexible roles are undermined by the commercial products for children (movies, toys, clothing) that relentlessly promote highly gendered images (e.g., action figures and violent video games for boys and Disney princesses and make-up and gowns for girls) (Aina and Cameron 2011; Cunningham and Macrae 2011; Freeman 2007). When the second author read the Indonesian teachers’ descriptions of gender issues in the classroom, she noted that they are very similar to situations she has observed in many classrooms in the United States (e.g., boys criticized for wearing pink or playing with dolls; girls teased for playing with trucks or dressing in more masculine clothes).

Thus, we need to recognize that, while Indonesia has a unique historical and cultural context for gender equity work, the underlying pressures are similar to those in many countries. As this project in gender equity in Indonesia moves forward, it has the potential to contribute to the understanding and innovative practices of early childhood educators all over the world.

References

- Aina, O. E., & Cameron, P. A. (2011). Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 39(3), 11–19.
- Batliwala, S., & Friedman, M. (2011). *Achieving transformative feminist leadership: A toolkit for organisations and movement*. CREA.
- Bhana, D. (2007). “Emma and Dave sitting on a tree, K I S S I N G”—Boys, girls and the ‘heterosexual matrix’ in a South African primary school. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*, 5(2), 84–96.
- Constitution of Indonesia. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved on June 4, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Indonesia#Preamble
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. (1979). Retrieved on June 4, 2015 from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

- Cunningham, S. J., & Macrae, C. N. (2011). The colour of gender stereotyping. *British Journal of Psychology*, 102, 598–614. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8295.2011.02023.x
- Erden, F., & Wolfgang, C. H. (2004). An exploration of the differences in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade teachers' beliefs related to discipline when dealing with male and female students. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 174(1), 3–11.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2012, November 13). *Gender training: factors contributing to its effective implementation and challenges*. Retrieved on December 27, 2015 from http://googleweblight.com/?lite_url; http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-training-factors-contributing-its-effective-implementation-and-challenges&ei=G-AZGSqS&lc=en-ID&s=1&m=847&ts=1451039589&sig=ALL1Aj4JXFzW3wjRrMHXbXbXdTW6iUcogqJQ
- Freeman, N. K. (2007). Preschoolers' perceptions of gender appropriate toys and their parents' beliefs about gendered behaviors: Miscommunication, mixed messages, or hidden truths? *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34(5), 357–366. doi:10.1007/s10643-006-123-x
- Fulmer, C. L. (2010). Unpacking evidence of gender bias. *Journal of Women in Education Leadership*, 8(2), 81–97.
- MacNaughton, G. (2000). *Rethinking gender in early childhood education*. London, United Kingdom: Sage. Retrieved from dx. doi:10.4135/9781446222355
- MacNaughton, G., & Williams, G. (2009). *Techniques for teaching young children*. Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia.
- Mergaert, L., & Lombardo, E. (2014). Resistance to implementing gender mainstreaming in EU research policy. In E. Weiner & H. MacRae (Eds.), *The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Special issue 1, Vol. 18, Article 5, pp. 1–21. doi:10.1695/2014005.
- Murray, C., & Urban, M. (2012). *Diversity and equality in early childhood*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- Pancasila (politics). (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved on June 4, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_%28politics%29
- Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013, March 14). *Modern parenthood roles of moms and dads converge as they balance work and family*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>
- Putri, A. (2015, June 19). *Indonesian court says no to raising minimum marrying age of girls*. Retrieved June 20, 2015 from <http://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/indonesia/96905-indonesian-court-rejects-judicial-review-marrying-age>
- Ramsey, P. G. (2015). *Teaching and learning in a diverse world: Multicultural education for young children* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Zaman, A. (2008). Gender sensitive teaching: A reflective approach for early childhood education teacher training programs. *Education*, 129(1), 110–118.