

## **Weighing Participation in Protection Context**

### **Marginalization, Exclusions, and Situated Agency of Children in Klaten, Central Java, Indonesia**

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## **List of Acronyms**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ADB    | Asian Development Bank                        |
| CRC    | Convention on the Rights of the Child         |
| MOEC   | Ministry of Education and Culture             |
| PISA   | Program for International Student Assessment  |
| SBM    | School Based Management                       |
| TIMSS  | Third International Mathematics Science Study |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children Fund                  |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Program            |

## **Abstract**

Practitioners and scholars working for child protection have long been finding ways to create more effective policies, research, and interventions addressing childhood violence. Using social norms as an approach to prevent childhood violence has been considered promising, as it can create avenues for people-led interventions to challenge local norms within their local cultural and social context. Situated in a program site of 'Roots' in poor district of Klaten, Central Java, this research aims to unpack structural and social-cultural issues that may affect the outcomes of a student-led bullying prevention program. This qualitative research uses participatory action techniques in order to understand the structural, social-cultural issues situated within the school community, from the perspective of children, young people, as well as adult communities. Here, I identify forms of social exclusions in education, marginalization of young people through the socio-cultural construction of childhood in Javanese communities as factors that influence children's restricted agency. This research calls for a more contextualized and comprehensive strategies addressing childhood violence. To improve child protection, social inclusion of children must be fostered by expanding children's opportunity and capability rather than restricting them.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

In many instances, the lack of empirical and theoretical groundings can create situations where protection measure will incline towards the imposition of moralism. As a consequence, protective measures may actually bring harms for children they are supposed to help and protect. Discourses on child protection needs to take into account the contextualised facts regarding childhood, wellbeing, and development, through the use of solid empirical research in order to inform policy and interventions that are contextualised and impactful to the protection as well as wellbeing and development of children and their communities.

## **Keywords**

Social norms, bullying, childhood, protection, participation, wellbeing, agency.

# Chapter 1

## Studying bullying in school: a qualitative research

### 1.1 Introduction

*“The protection of children involves much more than keeping them safe; our objective should always be to promote their well-being and development”* (Myers and Bourdillon 2012: 613).

At the time of writing this research paper, I reminisced about a couple of years ago when I was a junior high school student in a public school in West Java, Indonesia. There was a teacher in my school who was known as a ‘killer teacher’, a teacher who would directly humiliate any student in the class who couldn’t answer properly any of his questions. As students, we were terrified, we studied hard days before his class in order to avoid being humiliated in front of our peers. He always told us that any stupid opinion is intolerable. We were taught to listen and to say anything that is really important and to say it right. Often times, we preferred to stay quiet instead of becoming a target of his bullying in class. Growing up in such a silencing environment, this, is what many Indonesians understand as “*Tong Kosong Nyaring Bunyinya*”, roughly translated as “empty vessels make the most noise”, a well-known Indonesian proverb that refers to people who are considered to have ‘little knowledge’ who usually talk the most and make the greatest fuss.

Years later, in my position as a child protection officer at UNICEF Indonesia, I was appointed to co-design a program aimed at addressing bullying in school. We were thinking of something engaging, that could involve the meaningful participation of children as the main component. During the design process, I could not stop wondering about my experience a couple of years back when I was in senior high school. As a survivor of bullying myself, I realized that being silent was a really safe thing to do. Despite this situation, I remembered vividly how well spoken and smart my friends truly were, how wasteful it was of children’s potential that could have been used as assets in schools or in other child development programs.

In recent years, many child protection practitioners, just like me, have been thinking about better ways to create more effective policies, interventions, advocacy and research, not only to improve the protection of children from violence, but also to ensure children’s wellbeing and development. As quoted by Myers and Bourdillon (2012) above, one of the key challenges in child protection is to move beyond creating safe spaces for children, but also to ensure that our efforts are leading to the positive development and wellbeing for children and their communities. Myers and Bourdillon(2012) specifically promote the idea of shifting the emphasis from seeing protection as an end in itself to protection linked with enhancing children’s agency through child participation.

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) enshrines child participation in its guiding principles as a key to achieve child rights. As the most widely adopted international treaty, CRC requires that children under the age of 18 have the right to participate in areas that affect them, including their own protection. Although the link between child protection and participation seems compelling, in reality, many have seen it as rhetorical. Many others are questioning the definition and the real intention of children's participation, that is who (should) define it? What mechanisms are necessary to ensure that children's participation is meaningful, effective, and sustainable? (Ruiz-Casares et al. 2017: 2), and, how can child participation challenge the social construction of childhood in contexts where children are seen as incapable, victims, and vulnerable human beings?

This research discusses the role of a social-norms based child protection program that uses child participation in its framework. While social norms-based programs can open new, contextualised programmatic avenues for violence prevention in low- and mid-income countries (Chung and Rimal 2016; Miller and Prentice 2016; Tankard and Paluck 2016), it is important to assess, acknowledge, and address the broader ecology of factors that contribute, be it directly or indirectly, to a given practice (Cislaghi and Heise 2018). This research aims to unpack the structural and cultural issues surrounding childhood in Javanese communities in order to understand the complexity of factors that influence the outcome of a social-norms based program that aims to tackle bullying in school through student participation.

Through this research, I argue that child protection can be improved through meaningful participation of children and young people to ascertain their realities and respond. In order to do that, an investigation of contextual structural and socio-cultural aspects of childhood is necessary to uncover broader factors, such as local values, norms, and attitudes as well as their interaction with structural issues (e.g. policy gaps) that shape the pathway that promotes or hinders protection and participation practices. This research is situated in a project site of a bullying prevention pilot program named "Roots" in Klaten district, Central Java, Indonesia. This investigation looks at the dynamics of the implementation of the Roots program by teasing out structural and socio-cultural issues within the intervened community. As such, this research offers some critical reflections as well as implications for the improvement of the program and similar programs using a social norms based approach in the future.

## **I.2 Roots Program: Addressing bullying in junior high school using a social norms approach**

In 2016, UNICEF, in collaboration with government and local partners developed a school-based anti-bullying action research in South Sulawesi and Central Java, Indonesia. This pilot study combined two central elements: a group of student 'Agents of Change' aged 12-15 selected through a social network approach to develop and spread anti-conflict messages to their peers, and a positive discipline teacher training component. The main aim of the intervention was to reduce the prevalence of bullying through spreading pro-social norms and behaviour within the school.

Adapted from its original program in New Jersey, USA, we piloted this program in public Junior High Schools in two provinces namely South Sulawesi and Central Java, with 8 intervention and 4 control schools, to optimize the evaluation of the program outcomes.

Using social network theory to inform our approach, we started our intervention by identifying highly socially connected students from each year group to become 'Agents of Change'. Young facilitators were recruited by local partners to facilitate 12 meetings with the selected 'Agents of Change', in order to develop anti-conflict messages and strengthen the student's capacity to spread the messages to their peers.

Figure 1.2

Students declaring their Anti-Bullying agreement in the school-wide event



Source: Roots Program, UNICEF

To evaluate, UNICEF and partners conducted mixed-method evaluation research involving a total of approximately 7,500 students who took part in a waitlist control trial in four schools in South Sulawesi and across eight schools in Central Java. Quantitative evaluation of the intervention effects was conducted using baseline and outcome data (endline). A questionnaire was used as an instrument in the baseline and endline survey in order to identify norms and experiences of bullying in schools. We compared the findings from baseline and endline surveys in order to measure the changes in norms and violence perpetration in schools before and after the intervention. The period under evaluation was October 2016 to May 2018.

The results show that in South Sulawesi, bullying perpetration decreased by 29% and victimization by 20%. Teachers and facilitators also noted important improvements in the behaviour of students, particularly those selected to be Agents of Change. In Central Java, the findings were more mixed, with bullying perpetration and victimization increasing in both control and intervention schools, suggesting that our intervention may have raised awareness and hence identification and reporting of bullying.

This research paper will also analyse the implementation dynamics of the program intervention in one school named SMP 212, in Klaten, Central Java, in order to get a better picture regarding the reasons behind the mixed findings in Central Java, as evident in the evaluation research.

### I.3 Research Questions

This research will look at the implementation of a social norms-based program addressing bullying in school that uses child participation as its approach. This will be done through investigating the structural and socio-cultural issues surrounding childhood in the Javanese communities' context of Klaten, Central Java, and how it affects the implementation and outcomes of the program.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research question:

**“How do the structural and socio-cultural issues surrounding childhood affect the outcomes of social norms intervention addressing bullying in school?”**

In attempting to answer the main question, my analysis will answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the contextualized structural and cultural aspects that promote or hinder children's participation in attempting to protect them from harm, including violence?
2. How do children and adults understand child protection and participation through their local worldviews, norms, and attitudes that relate with cultural practices?
3. How can children's agency be used as an asset for child protection programs?

### I.4 Research Methodology and Sources of Data

A qualitative research method, using participatory action research techniques, was used to unpack the socio-cultural issues on childhood in the research context. Additionally, a literature review was conducted to gather more data on social relationships in the Javanese context. In general, the research process is divided into the following steps:

The **first step** was to contact the implementor of the program, UNICEF and its local partner, Lembaga Perlindungan Anak Klaten (LPA Klaten) in order to get their permission to undertake this study. This also includes being able to access their evaluation data regarding the program, to engage with their program beneficiaries, and being able to collaborate with their young facilitators in order to co-design the discussion activities with students. My previous work experience as a child protection officer in UNICEF Indonesia enables me to get easier access to data and local partners. A letter issued by ISS was shared with UNICEF and LPA Klaten in order to provide more official information about the research process. After getting permission from local partners, they advised me to choose 1 Junior High School (later called 'SMP 212 Klaten' in this paper) from their intervention site as my research subject, as they have built a good relationship with the school, as well as its interesting socio-geographical location, as it is located in the village area between Klaten and Yogyakarta, and near tourism sites.

The **second step** required my own engagement with the young facilitators of the program. Their experience engaging with the students in Klaten district was useful not only in informing the approach and ethical issues for my discussion activities with the students, but also in helping me build trust and helping with my lack of Javanese language knowledge. I conducted 2 meetings with 4 young facilitators (2 males and 2 females) in order to explain the purpose of my research, and to consult them about the discussion techniques, outcomes, and task division. The reason for this was to build their sense of ownership of this study. From these discussions, they advised me to choose the student agents of change as my main research participants, as they already have valuable experiences from their engagement with the project, as well as to get easier permission from the school.

**Figure 1.1**  
Reflexive discussion with facilitators to design the data collection activities with students



(Source: Research documentation)

The **third step** was to conduct 3 focus group discussions with the students, with young facilitators from the Roots program to co-facilitate the sessions with me. We conducted discussion activities once a week, on a Saturday, from July to August 2018. In alignment with the research objectives, we conducted 3 discussion activities in the following order: 1) to gather their general impression about their engagement in the Roots program as well as aspiration for schooling process, 2) to gauge their views on unwanted behaviour, including violence at school, in the home, and in their community, 3) to ascertain their views on childrearing and the learning process in school. We used interactive games to collect data, including drawings, theatrical performance, mapping exercises, and letter writing during the discussions. All the drawings and pictures from the activities were documented and used for the analysis of this research. In addition, I interviewed youth facilitators to give feedback about the discussion activities with students.

During my discussion activity period with the students, I had an opportunity to have in-depth interviews with two students and two young facilitators. To close my data collection with children, I had an opportunity to participate as a speaker in a Jamboree event held by LPA Klaten. I used the opportunity to discuss with young people (aged 13-17 years) who participated in the Jamboree about their views about their school and their short-term aspirations ('things I want to learn in a year') to capture children's needs and situation in their context.

The **fourth step** was to conduct focus group discussions with 5 parents, 5 teachers, as well as to interview 1 school counsellor, 1 school headmaster, 1 government representative, and 1 local NGO representative. Additionally I attended a local child participation seminar as a participant, held by LPA Klaten, which enabled me to gather additional data about a local religious figure's perceptions about the 'good generation' through his presentation.

The **fifth step** was to closely interact with UNICEF representatives at the national level, through meetings and email conversations in order to validate the findings. Secondary data analysis was conducted in order to get a better understanding about the program as well as Javanese social relationships. This secondary data process involved analysing UNICEF's periodic evaluation of the program, socio-demographic profile of the research site (village level), and journal articles about Javanese social relationships, particularly on familial and schooling discourse.

To conclude, all the steps along with its inquiries are summarized below:

**Table 1.1**  
**Data Collection Techniques**

| <b>Data collection activities</b>  | <b>Areas of inquiry</b>  |
|--|--|
| <b>FGD with 4 Young Facilitators in Klaten</b>   | Reflection from their role as Facilitators, Preparing for activities with children   |
| <b>FGD with 11 Students Agents of Change SMP 212 Klaten</b>  | 1 <sup>st</sup> FGD: Reflection from their role as AoC<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> FGD: Violence and protection in School and Communities<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> FGD: Child rearing values                      |
| <b>FGD with 5 Teachers SMP 212 Klaten</b>  | Teaching practices and values<br>Perception on children and childhood<br>Reflection from Roots   |
| <b>FGD with 5 parents SMP 212 Klaten</b>   | Childrearing practices and values<br>Perception on children and childhood  |
| <b>In-depth interview with 2 Facilitators</b>  | Life-history to explore their agency: motivations, challenges, protective and supporting factors<br>Perception on childrearing practices and values<br>Perception on teaching practices and values |
| <b>In-depth interview with 2 Students agent of change</b>  | Perception on teaching practices and values<br>Perception on childrearing practices  |
| <b>In-depth interview with a local government representative</b>   | Institutional concerns on child protection and other child development issues in Klaten  |
| <b>In-depth interview with an NGO representative (KLA Klaten)</b>  | Perception on the importance of child protection<br>Perception and reflection from Roots program   |
| <b>In-depth interview with UNICEF Indonesia</b>  |  |
| <b>Participatory Observation in a local village-level meeting related to child protection</b>                | Local concerns and values on child protection and development, particularly from religious leader  |
| <b>Participatory Observation in a Jambo-ree event</b>  | Young People's aspiration and schooling process  |
| Desk Review:<br>1) Village profile<br>2) Social norms programming<br>3) Javanese childrearing and protection | Socio-cultural situation and values of Javanese communities<br>Socio-economic profile<br>Social norms programming  |

#### **1.4.1 Data Analysis**

Manual data handling technique was used to analyse the above data. To do this, I transcribed all focus groups discussions, documented all drawings and pictures from the activities and noted down reflections from the sessions with the young facilitators (for discussions with children), organized my observation notes, and in the end, I extracted all the data to certain specific thematic units.

#### **1.5 Research challenges and limitations**

Using participatory action research techniques in my research context was really challenging. What I learned during the process is that even when young people are involved in the design of the data collection process, it does not always translate to their openness to answer questions nor their participation during activities. In my case, it was about the ‘culture of silence’ (which I describe in the next chapter) that hinders their active participation during the discussions. I tried to design creative and engaging activities for children, and worked together with young facilitators on the discussion process, but later we realized that there are cultural and perhaps, ethical barriers that hinder their openness during the interviews and discussions.

Additionally, I realized that my identity as a non-Javanese who cannot speak the Javanese language, and being an adult male from a European university, influenced my positionality in this research as an ‘outsider’ to the community. Often times I was called as ‘someone from the Netherlands’ when the local NGO officers introduced me to my research participants. Also, young facilitators often interrupted me during my discussion with children in order to quickly translate the conversation into the Javanese language. Taking all these conditions into consideration, it created certain barriers during my data collection process. I acknowledge the imbalance of power that emerged during the data collection process, and my inability to reduce these barriers due to the time limitation of this research.

As a limitation of this research, I acknowledge the need to employ ethnographic research for similar studies that aim to investigate a social construction of childhood in a particular community. I would like in future to take a longer time and more deeply engage with the research participants in order to collect more rigorous findings.

#### **I.6 Outline of the paper**

The main chapters of this research paper are divided into 4 parts, by looking at the situation at the school level, community level, and the individual level (children and young people). In **Chapter 2**, I explore the situation at the school and how it impacts the implementation of the program. This section explores the marginalization of children through school policies and practices that also reflect the broader issues regarding social inequality and exclusion in the context of a rural poor district in decentralized Indonesia. Following that, in **Chapter 3**, I explain about the construction of childhood and protection at the community level, how do some cultural aspects interplay to position children and young people as marginalized, vulnerable in need of protection, which restricts their

opportunities to exercise and develop their agency. In **Chapter 4**, I will explore how young people negotiate their situated agency despite their marginalization within their school and communities. Lastly, in **Chapter 5**, I will offer some recommendations for policies and programming on childhood, protection, and wellbeing based on my findings and analysis from this research.

# Chapter 2

## ‘Trashy School’: Social Exclusions in the Schooling Process

### 2.1 Introduction

Education is one of the most influential factors that contributes to children’s wellbeing and development (Klasen 2001), and is increasingly seen as key to an inclusive and sustained development of a society (UNESCO 2012). From a rights and capabilities perspective, Klasen (2001: 423) argues that education has fundamental intrinsic significance, as education is a widely recognized right (see Article 23 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child) and *being educated* is as important as it relates with children’s opportunities to gain and exercise their capabilities. Furthermore, *getting educated* would also bring opportunities for children to participate in society, particularly in areas that affect their protection, development, and well-being.

Against this backdrop, in reality, education can be a source of social exclusion for many children, particularly when education policy and the system fail to acknowledge and develop children’s potentials, fail to ensure their protection from any harms that contribute to their development, as well as its denial to promote their civic participation, including in education processes. Education, in this regard, must meet the standard called for in the CRC of ‘development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potentials’, including to promote equal participation of children in the schooling process.

This chapter presents some critical findings about Indonesia’s education process, that are linked with children’s opportunities to develop their capabilities, particularly their participation, and therefore, their right to be protected and protect themselves from harms that may affect their learning process. Through the example of ‘trashy school’ in a poor rural district of Klaten, Central Java, I will explain how the school regulations and practices reinforce the notion of good versus bad students, and how it further moves children away from enjoying access and quality educational activities.

Through this chapter, I argue for the importance of school as a site for children to exercise and develop their full capabilities, including their capabilities of agency. However, as I will describe later, education and school policies and practices, influenced by cultural aspects within the Javanese communities, do not always correspond with education’s intrinsic and instrumental significance, as they exclude children from fully enjoying the benefits of educational processes.

## 2.2 Indonesian Education in Context

Indonesia is a geographically and culturally diverse country comprising of 34 provinces, 440 districts, and 300 tribes with different languages, dialects, and beliefs. As the fourth most populous country in the world, providing education is challenging, particularly in ensuring universal access to education as well as improving its quality. To provide educational opportunities to almost 227 million people, Indonesia has provided more than 226 thousand schools with 45 million students and 2.7 million teachers deployed nationwide (SMERU 2018), consisting of public, private, as well as Islamic schools. The education system is divided mainly into 4 types of levels, namely Early Childhood, Basic (elementary and junior high schools), Secondary (high school), and Higher education (university level). In its delivery, the government has implemented a decentralized public education management system starting in 2001, by promoting school autonomy to enhance the distribution of quality education nationwide, through strengthening the role of provincial, district and sub-district government (Suratno 2014). However, as you can see below, some types of schools are still managed under the auspices of the central government.

Figure 2.1

| Age      | School Year | Education Level           | Education Delivery   |   |
|----------|-------------|---------------------------|--|---|
|          |             |                           | Decentralised  | Centralised   |
| Above 22 | 23          | Higher Education          |  | Doctoral<br>(includes general & Islamic, and vocational, academic & professional) |
|          | 22          |                           |  | Master<br>(includes general & Islamic, and vocational, academic & professional)   |
|          | 21          |                           |  |   |
|          | 20          |                           |  |   |
|          | 19          |                           |  |   |
|          | 22          |                           |  | Undergraduate<br>(includes general & Islamic, and vocational & academic)          |
|          | 18          |                           |  |   |
|          | 21          |                           |  |   |
|          | 20          |                           |  |   |
|          | 19          |                           |  |   |
| 18       | 14          | Secondary Education       | General senior secondary & vocational senior secondary (SMA & SMK) | Islamic general senior secondary & Islamic vocational senior secondary (MA & MAK) |
|          | 17          |                           |  |   |
|          | 16          |                           |  |   |
|          | 15          | Basic Education           | Junior secondary (SMP)   | Islamic junior secondary (MTs)  |
|          | 11          |                           |  |   |
|          | 10          |                           |  |   |
| 10       | 9           |                           |  |   |
|          | 12          | Early Childhood Education | Primary (SD)   | Islamic primary (MI)  |
|          | 11          |                           |  |   |
|          | 6           |                           |  |   |
|          | 9           |                           |  |   |
|          | 8           |                           |  |   |
| 9        | 7           |                           |  |   |
|          | 5           |                           |  |   |
| 8        | 4           |                           |  |   |
|          | 3           |                           |  |   |
| 7        | 2           |                           |  |   |
|          | 1           |                           | Kindergarten (TK)  | Islamic kindergarten (RA)   |

Source: ADB 2015

The Indonesian government has introduced a 'Nine-year Compulsory Education' program since 1994 to ensure the universal access to primary and junior high secondary school for all its citizens. The implementation of this policy has been strengthened along with the education reforms after political and economic crises in 1997-1998, through the enactment of Law Number 20 in 2003 on the National Education System as the national legal framework for education development. This law in principle guarantees free education for students in the basic

education program in an attempt to foster universal access to education. Additionally, this law also serves as a framework that regulates the standards of curriculum content, processes of education, competency of graduates, personnel in education, facilities, management, funding, learning assessment, as well as quality control, in order to ensure the school's quality (Firman and Tola 2008).

Considering the wide geographical distributions of public schools in Indonesia, along with the spirit of the decentralized system, the Government has implemented School-based Management (SBM) as implied in the Education Law, in order to provide more autonomy to schools and enhance the involvement of the school's community in order to contextualize the national education system in school. According to Firman and Tola (2008), SBM allows the school's community to be active in the school's decision making process so that the school can provide services that are more relevant to the needs and situations of its students.

The decentralization system makes education delivery bigger and more complex in nature, which brings challenges in many aspects. A report from the Asian Development Bank/ADB (2015) noted that while Indonesia has made remarkable achievements in providing school facilities and availability of teachers in basic education through its decentralization system, disparity in education throughout the country remains high, particularly in remote and poor areas. According to UNICEF (2010), in terms of the net enrolment rate, geographical disparity remains significantly high with 85,7 percent of junior high school students attending schools in urban areas compared to 74,4 percent in rural areas. Socio-economic status also plays a role in influencing student enrolment rates, where only 55 percent of children from low-income families are enrolled in junior high schools (World Bank 2017).

Another challenge facing Indonesia's education system is the government's concern towards the 'crisis of morality' of Indonesia's young generation today. This has been emphasized recently in several national policies related to national planning on education. In the National Planning Document of 2015-2019, for example, there is a recognition to utilize educational processes as ways to shape people's behaviour and character through the internalization of character education in the curriculum, learning system, and measurement system in education (Ministry of Planning 2016). Additionally, the government launched the 'Character Building Strengthening' program in 2016, by focusing on inserting 5 national values, such as religious, nationalism, integrity, independence, and togetherness, into the national education curriculum (MOEC 2017). However, as the implementation mechanism of this program is still unclear, the implementation is open to local contextualization and integration into the school curriculum.

## **2.3 “50% students here are bad students”: Trashy School as a site of social exclusion**

During the education reforms in the early 2000s, the government implemented the national examination system to determine student's graduation as well as a requirement to enrol into higher education. In its implementation, Firman and Tola (2008) argue that the system raises controversy, considering the discrepancy of the quality of education across schools and regions. However, the Government insisted on adopting this system as a form of quality control through the results of schools education, as it tends to encourage quality assurance, as well as improve the awareness of the school community regarding their education delivery.

The discrepancy in the quality of education as a result of the national education system can be seen from my research findings. My research site is a public junior secondary school named SMP 212 Klaten, located in a poor rural district between Yogyakarta and Prambanan, two cities considered as popular tourism cities in the country. Most of the people living in this district work as labourers in the agricultural sector. Brimming with the context of poverty, a local government officer that I interviewed, Johan, identified this school as a 'suburban school', a type of school that receives students with low intellectual and emotional qualities.

*“Generally, the suburban school receives students with low Intellectual Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ), when these aspects are lacking, it will trigger their violent behaviour” (Johan, In-depth Interview, August 2018)*

In the same vein, teachers and parents that I interviewed called this phenomenon differently, as a 'Trashy School'. To elaborate, what constitutes a trashy school is the characteristics of its students that are seen as 'problematic' in terms of their behaviour. As the school is considered as a non-favourite school in the district, it creates certain challenges in terms of fulfilling the quota of students. Often, the school authority has no option but to accept students who have dropped out from their previous schools due to their concerning behaviour. As mentioned by Fitri, a student counsellor, and concurrently the Vice Principle of student affairs at SMP 212 Klaten,

*“Children who really want to study here are not more than 50 percent from the total number of the students. Most of them are forced to study here due to the lack of options. It's even hard to fulfil the quota of the school. Even, we assign teachers to go to (elementary) school to attract potential students to study here. But they say, they would prefer to study elsewhere, like in Muhammadiyah school or other private schools in Yogyakarta, as long as not in here” (Fitri, In-depth interview, August 2018)*

As I later explain in the next chapter regarding the community's perception on children and childhood, teachers argued during the focus group discussion that the 'problematic students', often being called 'naughty adolescents', are the ones who have problems in their family ('brokenhome') or those coming from violent families, low learning motivation, engaged in risky behaviour (including bullying, gang fights, substance use), as well as students who are disobedient and

disrespectful towards adults, particularly teachers. Fitri (In-depth interview, August 2018) also mentioned that these students are creative and powerful in influencing others (the 'good ones') to exhibit the same characteristics.

As the Roots program aims to use reference groups, the student 'Agents of Change' are used to spread positive messages to their peers. In its implementation, the Agents of Change reported that they were faced with difficulties in their role as the 'messenger' of positive values and as examples, as they argued that 'most of the students are bad students' who have more power than the Agents of Change appointed by the program. As mentioned by a student, Didik, who I interviewed,

*"50% students here are bad students, they are disobedient, stubborn, they can be aggressive or argue against the teachers."* (Didik, In-depth interview, August 2018)

Moreover, Didik argued that the ones who exhibit bad behaviour are mainly boys, where his 'percentage' is even more higher, that he said "*75% of boys have good manners, 25% are the good ones*" (Didik, In-depth interview, August 2018). This raises certain issues, according to him. First, when the Roots program mainly involves the good students as the Agents of Change, who are in fact, less dominant and less powerful than the rest of the students, agents of change find it difficult to approach them, especially when they are not being guided by the program on how to approach 'the hard to reach students'. Secondly, as mentioned by Didik (In-depth interview, August 2018), when the program focuses on the role of the 25% (using Didik's percentage illustration) as Agents of Change in the context where being 'good' becomes deviant, the 25% students can face bullying from their peers at the time when they are executing their role as 'messengers'. This speaks to a concern raised by young facilitators that many Agents of Change decided to quit due to their fear or being bullied or being seen as deviant by others.

This 'trashy school phenomena' speaks to a larger issue regarding education disparity in public schools in Indonesia. It happens due to the emergence of favourite and non-favourite public schools as a result of the competitive nature during the national education enrolment system, compounded by the lack of managerial skills and resources that affect school quality. Children in a poor district such as Klaten, who have low academic achievements are left with no choice other than enrolling in a school with characteristics like SMP 212 Klaten. Consequently, in this context, it is crucial for programs to take into account the complexity of children's issues based on the school's characteristics and its links with broader structural inequalities, in order to inform suitable necessary points and ways of intervening.

In the use of reference groups as an entry point as well as an approach for the intervention, the case of SMP 212 Klaten illustrates how the Agents of Change students, faced the dilemma of either fulfilling their role as Agents of change but also facing the risk of being bullied by their peers, which later impacts on the level and quality of their engagement. According to Cislaghi and Heise (2018), social norms systems can be protective of individuals, since the ones who challenge the norms might face social punishment. However, as described previously, the failed attempts in challenging the equilibrium can result in greater

harms than compliance. In this regard, Cislaghi and Heise (2018) also argue that for more effective and less likely to elicit backlash against those who venture to unsettle the equilibrium, is to have more concentrated interventions that work with people's social networks, not only for some of the most benefited people, such as the Agents of Change.

At the time of writing this paper, the government of Indonesia has just launched the new national school enrolment system based on neighbourhood zones. This new zoning system aims to ensure equal access to education for all students through eradicating exclusivity and discrimination in public schools, as emerged in the previous system that favours student's achievement as the only requirement to enrol to public school. However, if this policy is implemented without concerted efforts in providing equal and equitable distribution of facilities, resources, and school management capacities, this system would still create the exclusion of children, particularly poor ones living in the district, from quality education along with its enabled environment to maximize children's learning, as compared to those living in urban or more developed areas that tend to be provided with better quality schools.

## 2.4 Converting 'bad students' through discipline and punishment

In conjunction with the previous section, one of the things that my informants emphasized as their recommendation on how to improve the quality of the school is through the character building program with a focus on teaching good manners to students (*Tatakrama*, as I will explain further in the next chapter). As mentioned by the teachers and school authorities, the way that they see the Roots program is as a program that aims to convert bad students to be good students, with 'teaching discipline' as its main perceived feature. The roots program is seen as an implementation of a national program on Character Building as I have described in the earlier section. This perception confuses the real objectives that the program is trying to achieve.

Additionally, as reiterated by both students and school staff, they argue that discipline must be taught to students through teaching manners as well as stricter school regulation in the form of punishment. In this regard, a school code of conduct has been applied in SMP 212 Klaten with the aim to be "a guidance for students in *speaking, behaving, acting* in order to create a school climate and culture that can lead to effective learning activities" (Code of conduct of SMP 212 Klaten 2018). Furthermore, this code of conduct was developed based on values that are applied in school and community contexts, such as "*the value of piety, manners, association, discipline, obedience, cleanliness, health, neatness, security, and other values that support effective learning activities*" (Code of conduct of SMP 212 Klaten 2018). Generally, this code of conduct serves as a social contract for students (applies for a year) in order to understand and abide by school regulations as well as social ethics. In the beginning of the school year, a student's caretaker has to sign a document, which indicates their agreement to the school regulations on behalf of the child.

In its implementation, the school code of conduct also serves as guidance for students to know what is and is not expected from them at school, which determines how much they will be rewarded and/or punished for their actions. School authorities implement certain sanctions if the students break the school's ethics and norms. These sanctions are divided into 6 types: 1) verbal warning, 2) recorded and written in their academic report, 3) assigned to do a certain task, 4) school authorities to call their parents, 5) suspension, and 6) expulsion. A scoring system is applied with regards to the implementation of this sanction. At the beginning of a school year, every student receives "100" as a total individual score, points can be deducted whenever they break the school's ethics and regulations as written in the contract, and they also gain extra points whenever they can prove their achievements to school authorities. In total, there are 78 types of violations and 17 types of achievements. To summarize, these are the top 10 types of violations and achievements based on the number of the points gained/deducted:

**Table 2.1**  
**Types of rewards and punishments**

| Types of violations (top 10)   | Types of rewards (top 10)  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Married (-100)</li> <li>2. Pregnant and Impregnated (-100)</li> <li>3. Use, keep, or distribute drugs (-100)</li> <li>4. Crime acts (rape, stealing outside of school) (-100)</li> <li>5. Sexual harassment or disturbs the opposite sex inappropriately (-75)</li> <li>6. Drunk from consuming alcohol (-50)</li> <li>7. Bring and keep sharp object (-50)</li> <li>8. Gang or mass fight (-50)</li> <li>9. Stealing/Gambling/Fraud/Blackmailing (-50)</li> <li>10. Bring, keep, or distribute porn materials (book, magazine, pictures porn movies) (-50)<br/>...among others</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Winning a national or international competition (+150)</li> <li>2. Winning a provincial competition (+100)</li> <li>3. Winning a district/city level competition (+50)</li> <li>4. Top 1-3 in parallel class (+30)</li> <li>5. Top 1-3 in the class (+15)</li> <li>6. Winning a subdistrict competition (+15)</li> <li>7. Representing school in any competition (+10)</li> <li>8. Become a class representative in the student board (yearly) (+10)</li> <li>9. Active in any community organization (+5)</li> <li>10. Become a committee member in any school activity (+5)<br/>...among others</li> </ol> |

Source: Code of Conduct's contract

Although it is not clear in the contract document on how the case should be handled and who is in power to give or reduce the score, the document does not mention anything about the school's measure to prevent and respond to any of these violation cases. In terms of the investigation mechanism, a counselling teacher mentioned during an interview that the school's response primarily is dependent on the complexity of the case itself, where the school acknowledges the need for informal investigation in order to better understand the context to inform necessary action. At the time of my fieldwork, the school recently had to expel a male student due to his aggressive behaviour towards some teachers, where a school officer mentioned that the case was related with a supernatural force that could not be handled by the school. Additionally, a female student had to be expelled from the school as she was caught pregnant and attempted

to abort her pregnancy near the school environment. During my group discussion with the students, a female student added that the sanctions does not only apply to 'serious' violations such as criminal acts, but also applies to student's ways of behaving in school, including being impolite and disobedient to teacher's instructions. The lack of a regulating mechanism often leads to teacher's exercising power, by reducing the student's score without having to investigate the case.

The implementation of the scoring system speaks to the school authorities' fear that unwanted behaviour would influence the behaviour of other students as well as in an effort to keep a good public image of the school. The nature of competition among public schools driven by the national enrolment system, as I explained in the previous section, urges the school to implement stricter regulations to students. Some teachers expressed their confusion and difficulty in teaching good manners to students. The scoring system, in this function, serves as a systematic mechanism to enforce the obedience of students, by reinforcing social scripts on 'bad versus good students' as based on the community's social ethics.

The school's vision to enforce this social script is also reflected in the school's plan to implement a Full Day School program, following a proposal from Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture in 2017, a program that aims to strengthen student character through prolonging school hours up to 8 hours per day. At the time of my fieldwork, the school was preparing the strategy to prolong school hours, through the scaling up of the Roots program to become an extracurricular activity at school. In my interview with the school's headmaster, Budi, about the school's development plan, he emphasized the need to scale up the program to be an extracurricular activity in order to shape the student's character to have polite and obedient manners.

*"We will continue this program, by making it as an extracurricular. Of course, this is the first step, the second one would be to improve the school facilities. I am hoping that the agents of change will shape the character of the students, what is important is how they can learn about tolerance, anti-bullying, become a good friend for others. It has to start from there. Later, this program will not only involve the good students, but will target the bad ones. After that, we can move to the other forms of characters. The most important thing now is how do they behave, speak, and communicate with their friends" (Budi, In-depth interview, August 2018).*

When asked about their opinion about the school regulation and the new plan, students came up with mixed reactions. Students expressed their support for the implementation of stricter regulation through the scoring system as they think it is a proper way to discipline students, but they disagree with the Full Day School as they aspire to use their time to play and do other social activities. As mentioned by my informant, although he thinks that enforcing a stricter regulation is a good step, he doubts that it is an effective solution in changing the behaviour of 'bad' students. Instead, he proposes a more considerable way to deal with those rule-breaking students:

*"In terms of regulating, for me, what can be done is to enforce a regulation or a set of rules. If a student has committed something wrong, we must be firm, reduce the score so that there will be a deterrent effect. If this student continues to break the rule, we*

*can act neutral, we must talk to the student, or if the case is more serious, call the parents. If the student wants to stay in the school, they must have good attitudes, if not, leave the school. But sometimes, if the regulation is too strict, it can make the student becomes wilder" (Adi, In-depth interview, August 2018)*

These findings from the student point out two important issues. Firstly, students feel the need to have a zero-tolerance policy in place as well as its enforcement, but also suggest having a more considerable way in order to understand the complexity of the issue. Secondly, their response shows their lack of understanding about the violation of their rights, as a result of a zero-tolerance policy. Furthermore, in another group discussion, some students complained that they were not being involved in the development of this regulation, although the teachers mentioned that this regulation was developed following the school's plan of action after participating in the Roots program.

A growing number of studies has indicated a zero-tolerance policy as one popular among school-based intervention to deal with school-based violence, although it has proven to give minimum effect (Shariff and Johnny 2007). The implementation of zero-tolerance policies can result in the exclusion of children from their educational opportunities as it places them in criminal-like-institutions. Skiba and Peterson (1999) also raise an important concern that the implementation of these policies would dismiss the school's role of providing students with necessary services to deal with their behaviour, such as mental-health or other necessary education or social services.

While it seems that this policy derives from a good intention to provide a safe space for learning, it is critical to bear in mind that this policy teaches students to suspend individual rights and liberties in order to create a safe space in school. Furthermore, the punishment mechanism indicates that there is a selection of certain behaviour that further reinforces the social script about being a bad versus good student, without educating the community about the prevention and the need for practical responses to deal with unwanted behaviour.

## Chapter 3

# Understanding Childhood: Violence and Protection in Javanese Communities

### 3.1 Introduction

As one of the most adopted international treaties, the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) specifies that State parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from violence. It further defines *“physical and mental, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child”* as forms of violence that children need to be protected from (United Nations 1979).

Violence and childhood are two concepts that are culturally constructed and influenced by its portrayal. Regardless of how appealing the categorizations of violence as defined internationally, including in the most adopted human rights treaty, it is important to question the cultural relativity of this definition in specific socio-cultural contexts, such as, how do local people define childhood and violence? What kind of forms of violence come to adult, children, and community attention? Unpacking these questions is important as violence is not a unitary phenomenon nor is childhood experienced the same everywhere (James and Prout 1997).

A review of anthropological literature on children and violence offers some ways to organize a discussion about these subjects, with particular attention to tease out the intersection between the socio-cultural construction of childhood and violence. Korbin (2003) offers 5 levels to consider when discussing children and violence can be organized by definitions of culture and violence in cultural contexts.

Given this consideration, I argue that understanding contexts is critical in studying the intersection between childhood and violence. This consideration resonates with a growing concern towards universalised interventions of child protection, where imposing solutions that do not fit with the local context is not only wasteful but can also be catastrophic for children and communities that practitioners are trying to help (Bissell et al. 2009).

This chapter presents the three main findings which emerged during my research fieldwork. Firstly, as the Roots program aims to address violence in school, particularly bullying, by only addressing specific forms of violence through a universalised approach of a ‘national pilot’ program, the program disregards wider protection and well-being concerns in the community. As a result, when the wider concerns are unchallenged, not only does it affect the desired result of the program, in practice, but it also dismisses the urgency of addressing the interconnected root causes of violence in the context of prevention. Secondly, although the program uses participatory methods by strengthening students’ role as ‘agents of change’ in addressing violence, in reality, the program does not adequately challenge the socio-cultural factors that contribute to children’s marginalized status in the community. Lastly, by bringing up the social-cultural construction of childhood in Javanese communities, particularly through

child care taking practices, my findings call for a more nuanced approach in addressing protection and participation issues, by investigating and addressing the unequal power relations, particularly between children and adults, within which the marginalization and violence occurs.

Studying childhood and violence through understanding its cultural context should not disregard the importance of bringing up issues regarding child rights. Moreover, by understanding the context in protection settings, it should open up discussion about child rights in a broader perspective. By looking into its context holistically, it opens opportunities to see the intersection between the need for protection and other aspects of children's well-being and development. In doing so, it provides more possibilities for interventions with due regard to children and the community's circumstances, strengths, and susceptibilities (Bissell et al. 2009).

### **3.2 Child Protection in Indonesia and Javanese Communities**

Indonesia is home to almost 90 million children (World Bank 2017) with more than 300 ethnic groups scattered across more than 17,000 islands (UNICEF 2010). The largest ethnic group, the Javanese, are mainly situated in Java Island, and account for almost half of the entire population (United Nations Statistics Division 2010). Indonesia has, since 2005 achieved its middle-income country status, but significant poverty and inequalities continue to affect children's well-being. Some studies indicate that approximately 11 million Indonesian children live below the poverty line (Indonesia Ministry of National Development Planning and UNICEF 2017).

In Indonesia, it is assumed that the national data on childhood violence remains too limited to inform policy and programs (Rumble et al. 2018), but some available studies reveal its widespread. Whilst some data is available on the prevalence, the percentage varies from 2 percent to 90 percent, depending on the sites, data collection method, and forms of violence investigated (Rumble et al. 2018). Only one study provided a national prevalence on childhood violence, but the data is not comprehensive as they are only limited to bullying and forced sexual intercourse among 13-19 year old students<sup>1</sup> (Indonesia Ministry of Health et al. 2015). This study found that 21,3 percent of children were bullied at school, and 3 percent of females and 5 percent of males reported having experienced forced sexual intercourse. Another study found that 75 percent of students experienced forms of violence at school in the last 6 months, and 90 percent of boys and 79 percent of girls experienced it in their lifetime<sup>2</sup> (Bhatia et al. 2015).

Key determinants that put children at risk of violence are identified in some studies. Although some studies are not exclusively subject to the population aged 18 and under (Fulu Jewkes et al. 2014; Diarsvitri et al. 2011), nevertheless the findings highlight important evidence about the nature of childhood violence. Generally, it shows that childhood violence is an intergenerational problem that

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<sup>1</sup> This study, conducted by Indonesia's Ministry of Health and WHO published in 2015 called "Global School-based Health Survey", with 11,110 children involved school-based self-administered questionnaire data collection.

<sup>2</sup> This study involved 1,738 Indonesian students (816 male and 922 female, aged 12-15) of graders VI to VIII in 30 schools in Jakarta and Serang. It used mixed-method, a self-administered questionnaire, and a set of focus group discussions with students. This study also found that Indonesia has the highest percentage of prevalence compared to the other 4 countries participating in the study.

is related with unequal gender norms in society, especially when it comes to children's exposure to domestic and community violence. A school-based study shows that students who have seen parental violence at home are more likely to perpetrate violence in school, and girls who have seen their father beating their mother are more likely to perpetrate violence (Bhatla et al. 2014). This indicates how violence is intergenerationally transmitted and impacts children's vulnerability to becoming a victim and perpetrator of violence when they are adults. This is also true in Diarsvitri's et. al (2011) investigation that shows how intimate partner violence is also influenced by unequal power dynamics between men and women, which might have been established or socialized from an early age

Given the geographical and cultural diversity of Indonesian societies, specific social and cultural norms may influence the way a community perceives and practices protection and wellbeing of children. In the context of the majority ethnic communities in Indonesia, The Javanese, some classical anthropological studies indicate that achieving *rukun*, or harmonious society, serves as a Javanese way of living. To achieve that, mutual assistance and sharing of burdens (*gotong royong*), be it within the family or the community, is necessary in order to maintain a harmonious life (Mulder 1978; Koentjaraningrat 1985). Raising children is perceived as a blessing for a family and the community as it brings warmth, joy, and happiness (Geertz 1961).

When it comes to power dynamics within households, women tend to have less of a decision-making role (Williams 1990), and gender inequality is a likely cause of domestic and childhood violence in Javanese communities. A study conducted by Hayati et al. (2011) in rural Java found that 22 percent of women had reported sexual violence, which was higher than physical violence (11 percent). Women's exposure to physical violence was strongly associated with the husband's characteristics such as witnessing his mother being abused, being unfaithful, using alcohol, as well as fighting with other men. Additionally, cultural and religious based gender norms that confer absolute sexual autonomy over women were identified to contribute to intimate partner violence in rural Java (Hayati et al. 2011: 7). This was exacerbated by the high adherence to the norm that '*family problems should be discussed with people in the family*', making it difficult for women to seek help during violent incidents and remaining silent as to maintain a harmonious family (Hayati et al. 2011: 8).

Although some identified risk factors on childhood violence were related with social (gendered) norms, unfortunately, there is limited evidence regarding factors that protect children from violence (Rumble et al. 2018). Some studies in Lower and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) found that close neighbourhood integration, low levels of social isolation among young people, low drug and alcohol use, among others, were identified to be protective factors (Ji, Filkelhor and Dunne 2013; Wessells 2015; Rumble et al. 2018), although there is limited evidence on how these factors influence children's agency through their participation in promoting their protection and wellbeing.

### **3.3 ‘Risky’ boys and girls ‘at risk’ in need of protection: gendered protection concerns among children**

How does the school community define protection? What are the most concerning forms of violence identified in the community? And does the program address them? In this section, I would like to unpack the notion of ‘protection’ and ‘violence’ in the context of Klatten district. To do that, I would like to highlight some key findings from my interviews and discussions with children that I gathered using participatory techniques. As suggested by my research facilitators, in my discussion with children and adults, I did not use the word ‘violence’ or ‘abuse’ because the word ‘violence’ (or *kekerasan*, in the Indonesian language) is often understood as only an aggressive physical act against one or more persons. For this reason, I used ‘unwanted behavior’ as an attempt to open up discussions related to all forms of concerning behaviors, including violence, in the community.

During my focus group discussion with children, most of them considered mental violence as the most common form of unwanted behavior that they have observed and experienced inside and outside the school environment. To be specific, parent’s name calling and humiliation based on physical appearance became the most common form of mental violence, followed by physical fighting amongst boys, and *melabruk* (confronting) among girls as gendered-specific unwanted behaviors.

To elaborate on the gendered aspects of unwanted behavior, in another discussion, children identified the role of gender norms as influencing the most concerning unwanted behavior in school, and how the norms also affect the way children position themselves in such situations. This was also portrayed through a *Human Sculpture Activity*, where two groups of students were asked to demonstrate two sculptures that illustrate the most concerning unwanted behaviors and how they deal with them.

In group one, the students illustrated the role of boys as the main perpetrators in mental violence, be it towards other boys or girls. Additionally, these pictures show the role of bystanders in mediating the abuse when it is happening. As mentioned during the reflection after the activity, boys are regarded to have more ‘ego’ when it comes to conflict resolution.

**Figures 3.1**  
**Boys as the main perpetrators**



*Left: Problem, Right: Ideal situation*

*(Source: Research documentation)*

In the second group, they also illustrated physical aggression and violence among boys as the most concerning unwanted behavior in school. Boys are regarded to have more physical power and have fragile emotions that makes them more susceptible to getting involved in physical fights. In a similar vein with Group 1, this group suggests the importance of awareness and acts from bystanders in mediating the fight. To conclude, this activity highlights common practices among students, particularly boys, who adopt rigid models of masculinity and how this affects the perpetration of unwanted behaviour in schools.

**Figures 3.2**  
**Boys and rigid masculinity**



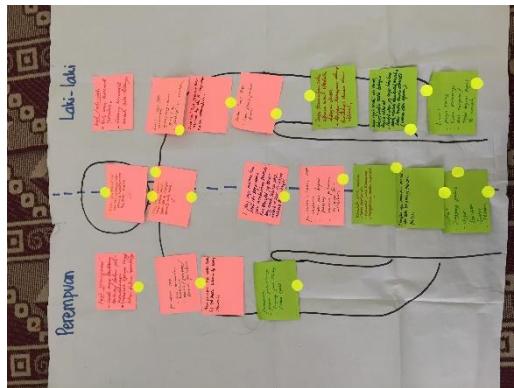
*Left: Problem, Right: Ideal situation*

*(Source: Research documentation)*

In my discussion with a UNICEF officer, he acknowledged that gender is an important aspect that is missing in the program's content and delivery, as well as something that needs to be incorporated in the future development of the program.

The use of 'unwanted behavior' has enabled me to unpack the community's concern regarding children's behavior. In my discussion with parents, a body mapping activity shows how children are regarded as 'risky' and 'at risk' of unwanted behavior. Girls are seen to possess more 'at risk' to any kind of harassment, whereas boys are commonly associated with gang violence and excessive substance use, such as cigarettes and alcohol, that position them as 'risky' for others.

**Figures 3.3**  
**Human body mapping exercise**



*Human body with Girls on the left side and Boys on the right side. Sticky papers were provided in two colours (pink: concern, green: value). Participants were asked to put the paper accordingly to the gender and were given the chance to stick them in the middle if it that does not refer exclusively to one gender*

*(Source: Research documentation)*

In this body mapping exercise, girls and boys are seen differently in how parents see children's positions as 'at risk' and 'risky' with regards to unwanted behaviors.

**Table 3.1**  
**Community's perception about children**

| Perception towards: Girls  | Perception towards: Boys  |
|--|---|
| <p>"My daughter tends to be secretive about her problems. She has a big ego, but she is not arrogant"</p> <p>"Junior high school girls: like to dress up. At risk or easy to experience harassment"</p> <p>"My daughter is still in elementary school. She is still pampered but she is independent"</p> | <p>"My son is lazy and not discipline"</p> <p>"Lack of motivation to pursue his dreams"</p> <p>"My son who is quite mature likes to smoke but in the house he is a good son"</p> <p>"Tempered, easy to get angry"</p> <p>"Associated with gangs"</p> <p>"Low discipline"</p> <p>"They like porn materials like film or picture"</p> |

*(Source: Research documentation)*

However, parents also identified similarities of boys and girl in some behaviours and habits, as identified by some of discussion participants below:

*"Hang out with their friends, play their mobile phones often they forget about time and their responsibility as a student"*

*"Lazy to study, because after school time they are usually very tired and their friends usually come and ask them to hang out with them"*

*"It seems urgent to give the proper sexual education for junior high school-aged children. Because the influences out there are very dangerous"*

*"They don't want to think about the future"*

*"They like to seek attention excessively to the opposite sex"*

(Parents, Focus Group Discussion, August 2018)

In my in-depth interview with two male students, both of them reiterated similar concern about boys' aggression and their tendency to adopt unwanted behaviors, compared to girls. As mentioned by a male informant (Adi),

*"For girls, there is only one... or maybe two students who often break the school's regulation, most of them are obedient girls. For boys, most likely, from 100 percent of boys here, 75 percents have bad behavior, 25 percent are the bad ones"* (Adi, in-depth interview, August 2018)

One of the dominant character of boys' adherence to unwanted behavior is the tendency to do it with their fellow male peers. Adi later mentioned that aside from smoking with their male peers, the boy groups often use their male peer network to challenge students from other school, to engage them in cross-school physical fight or *ugal-ugalan* (reckless) motorcycle riding.

Furthermore, according to Adi, this peer-based unwanted behavior is not something that happens in his school generation, but it has been inherited intergenerationally. This notion of being 'bad boys' exclude those who do not adhere to this norm as a group of 'other boys' in the school, putting them at risk of being bullied by their male peers, as quoted from Adi,

*"It is something that happens from one generation to another. The male seniors often encourage new students to join their groups and activities, making new students become curious and later they become part of the gang. Also, these 75 percent of bad boys often exclude the 25 ones, they often become the victims of bullying if they do not want to involve in the gang."* (Adi, in-depth interview, August 2018)

While this community's narrative puts boys as those who are 'risky' and 'dangerous' as their behaviour can influence others, girls are seen as more compliant to community's norm for being more obedient. However, this does not mean that girls become absent from community's concern regarding adolescents risky behaviour. A counselling teacher mentioned during an interview that girls are seen to be more vulnerable as 'victims' of delinquent behaviour, such as teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortion. In cases of teenage pregnancy, girls become more targeted to school' intervention, including school's expulsion, as teenage pregnancy is seen as a disgrace to the community that might affect school's reputation.

In the context of the implementation of Roots program, the program's focus to address bullying among peers has failed to acknowledge and address broader concerning behaviors among adolescents as had been indicated by the community. While mental violence became one of the common form of violence

in school, violence does not happen in silo, as they interact with the other forms of violence and behaviors.

In addition, a UNICEF officer that I interviewed mentioned that participation rate among male students of ‘Agent of Change’ was lower than the female students, indicating the lack of interest among male students to continuously take part in activities to promote positive behavior among their peers. The lack of gendered approach in the program delivery could be the factor behind this low participation rate, noting that the program was inadequate to challenge gender norms, and to incorporate gender perspective to the delivery of the program, particularly targeting adolescent boys.

### **3.4 Dealing with confusion: caretaking in Javanese communities**

With the social perception of children as ‘risky’ and ‘at risk’, studies on Indonesian childhood highlights that many caretakers believe in the idea of supporting restraint and high control as the appropriate way to educate and to protect children (Muhammad 2012). As elaborated in the previous chapter, school discipline and punishment is an example of this. However, this is not always the case, since my research findings show child negligence by caretakers who do not have sufficient time to parent their children and lack capacity in child rearing. During a focus group discussion, two caretakers (parents) mentioned that when it comes to challenges in parenting, they emphasized their confusion on how to deal with risks associated with the use of internet and social media. One informant, for example, mentioned that the behaviors of today’s children are ‘*ngawur*’ (non-sense) that it often makes them confused on how to deal with children’s behaviors.

*“What is difficult for today is the presence and influence of social media to our children. It is common to hear from other parents that when children are in the school, they study. When they are in their bedroom, they do nothing. But that’s not always the case. In their room, they can open the internet easily, that’s something I cannot control. Social media can bring benefit, but it can make our children have bad behaviors. I don’t know how to control the influence, maybe by giving them more religious education”* (An informant, Focus group discussion, August 2018).

According to French and colleagues, collectivism has been recognized as a key influence on Indonesian parenting (French et al. 2003), meaning that Indonesian society perceives itself to have deep interconnections within their societies, particularly their adherence with social norms and their duties for their community (Triandis 1995). When asked about values in child rearing, despite their recognized confusion in childrearing practices, my research participants emphasized the importance of teaching religious (Islamic)<sup>3</sup> and community values to children that are associated with social traits such as discipline, obedience and respect to elders. Children are regarded as *tabula rasa* or ‘a blank slate’, as argued

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<sup>3</sup> The underlying values of Javanese culture are mainly influenced by Islamic teachings, which is the faith held by the majority of Indonesians (Hakim et al. 2012). However, many studies indicate that Javanese culture is a melting pot of the past dominant religions including Hinduism and Buddhism (see Geertz 1976; Mulder 1978).

by Muhammad (2012) that what children become depends on what the parents teach.

*“Children in my generation, they are obedient, they have good manners. Children nowadays... they are rude, disobedient, not only in the home, but also in school”* (An informant, Focus Group Discussion, August 2018).

This phenomenon is relevant with classical studies on Javanese societies. According to Clifford Geertz (1961), for example, Javanese children are taught to uphold certain concepts to maintain social harmony, through the practice of *isin* (shyness), *wedi* (fear), and *sungkan* (respectful politeness), especially towards older people. In this way, Javanese respect and trust their seniors and superiors (Koentjaraningrat 1985), although such respect is counterbalanced by a reciprocal claim of patronage and protection (Zeitlin et al. 1995; Mulder 1978). It is known in Javanese society that overcoming hardships is part of embracing life’s fate, where children are taught to continuously feel *eling* and *pribatin*, or “forever feeling concern” (Koentjaraningrat 1985: 121) about their hardships and misfortunes (Koentjaraningrat 1985). In collectivist societies like the Javanese, protecting children is seen as part of the community’s responsibility, where children are seen as the ones to be protected, undermining their independence and agency (Zeitlin et al. 1995).

In hierachal societies where parents are regarded as superior “givers” and children are inferior “receivers”, most Indonesian children are not permitted to be emotionally expressive (Serad 2012). Therefore, they tend to be shy, silent and accepting, which, according to traditional beliefs, are the best ways to express politeness. During the discussions with students, I observed that almost all students seemed to be hesitant to speak out and elaborate their answers during the discussion activities. While I acknowledge that the selection of discussion method, or facilitating skills, among other potential research factors, could be the contributing factor leading to the children’s silence, however, during some reflection sessions with the young facilitators of the Roots program, they echoed similar difficulties in engaging with students during the implementation of the program.

Some of the students were quite vocal, but most of the students seemed reluctant to share their opinion. My informants mentioned ‘*the culture of silence among adolescents*’ during my interviews as well as my reflection sessions with the youth facilitators, pointing to the role of teaching styles and childrearing practices as contributing factors, that have been long ingrained in Javanese culture. These childrearing styles and practices undermine children’s voices and participation in family, school, and community.

Relating this phenomenon to the seminal work of Clifford Geertz on “The Religion of Java”, the concept of *Isin* (shyness) is introduced to children in order to make them feel ashamed about what other people may think when they cannot show proper behaviour (Geertz 1961). *Isin* also refers to a socio-psychological inner state of politeness that is known as *santun* (‘inward’ or ‘self-oriented’ politeness), in order to obey the Javanese *tata krama* (etiquette) so that children will not bring shame with whom one affiliates. As described later in Chapter 4, a youth facilitator mentioned that one of the difficulties when being an active youth participant in a government forum is to overcome fear about the perception of others when she speaks out as a youth advocate. The fear of being wrong

in the eyes of adults is something that serves as a barrier to be active in a space dominated by adults. The feeling of fear, as mentioned by my informant, is also influenced by the notion of social punishment when children are being disrespectful to elders, in local terms, it is called “*kuwalat*” which is similar to the concepts of cursed and Karma (Riany et al. 2017).

A number of studies suggest that values associated with the notions of being polite, obedient, and silent children, have a significant impact on children's social outcomes as well as their academic achievements. A study by Riany and colleagues (2017) found that in the classroom context, speaking out can be considered as impolite (*orailok*) and is therefore avoided by students in classrooms. Teachers perceive silent and obedient students as smart and nice, implying students' low levels of self-efficacy in expressing their abilities in the classroom. As a result, and as argued by Rahman (2009), and Alfasari and colleagues (2011), Indonesian children generally lack social competence, such as confidence and self-esteem, that it impacts on their low levels of critical thinking and creativity. In a report published by Indonesia's Ministry of National Education and Culture (2004) it argues that feeling shy and not being emotionally expressive may lead to serious problems in child development, particularly in social interactions, self-regulations, and in academic performance.

## Chapter 4

# Situated Agency: Young People Negotiating Their Realities and Dreams

### 4.1 Introduction

This section highlights the experiences, perspectives, and aspirations of young people in Klaten. To do that, I will explore the ways in which these young people negotiate the dominant socio-cultural script of being a young person in their community which serves as a constraint for their ability to participate and further to achieving their rights in society. Furthermore, I will discuss the importance of understanding young people's situated agency in the context of developing youth-centered programs.

Using a life-history approach, I conducted in-depth interviews with 2 youth facilitators of the Roots program (female and male, both aged 19 years old), to explore their reflection on their activism, tracing from when they were first exposed to youth activism up to their role as facilitators of the program. In this way, I intend on exploring how they exercise their situated agency within activism spaces, in order to locate points of intervention that are necessary to inform youth programs. In accordance with this, I conducted several group discussions with students and other facilitators to explore their perceived strengths and aspirations in helping us understand how children or youth-centered programs can be improved through incorporating young people's assets as a way to enhance their agency.

Figure 4.1

Girls mapping out their skills and dreams



(Source: Research documentation)

The concept of 'Situated Agency' is used in this section. As agency has been conceptualised differently by many scholars, I draw my understanding from feminist poststructural theorizing on agency. In this context, agency can be understood as the capacity of subjects, an 'effect' of a subject, as well as the processes through which subjects are situated as subjects and constitute their agency (Butler 1989 in Okwany 2008). To elaborate, according to Butler (1994), subject or

subject position is an important component when understanding human agency, in which someone's position in society is influenced by a network of social relations and social forces. As such, even when agency is defined as the capacity of subjects, the positionality of subjects is influenced by other factors that need to be examined and acknowledged.

In the following, you will see how stories and aspirations from young people are related with social conceptualizations of childhood as well as intersecting situated social factors, such as gender, age, and social class that influence young people's marginalization and their resistance.

## 4.2 Context matters: young people's situated agency

As described in the previous chapter, my discussions with adults point to caregivers' acknowledgement of their lack of capacity in parenting, mainly because they do not have time to caretake and communicate with their children. Most of the parents that I interviewed work in a range of informal income generating activities that demand time flexibility on a daily basis. As a result, caretakers leave their parental responsibilities to schools for their children's educational learning. While schools do not provide sufficient learning opportunities to develop young people's social capabilities, out of school activities or organizations become their alternate platform to gain other skills that they do not receive from school. However, the learning opportunities from out of school platforms do not benefit all children equally. These stories show how out of school platforms are used by young people as a channel to develop their capacities of agency despite social and cultural constraints that they have to deal with. Analysis and discussions in the previous chapters have revealed that there are structural and cultural aspects in their communities that serve as barriers to exercising and developing their capabilities of agency. This includes social exclusions that young people face as a result of education policies and practices, as well as the socio-cultural construction of childhood that positions children as marginal beings in society. As I will describe in this chapter, I aim to give a better picture of the constraints faced by young people in their attempt to exercise agency. Two stories from young people below illustrate how they deal with material issues, such as gender norms that further restrict girls' access and capabilities to engage in activities, as well as their attempt to negotiate the dominant cultural script of *Tata Krama* which affects their agency development.

### **Seeking for alternatives, a site for resistance? A story from Adi, 19 years old, male**

*As a former leader of a local youth organization formed by a local NGO, Adi, who is currently a facilitator of the Roots program, argues that his activism was possible because of his supportive social circles.*

*The 'game-changer' moment was when he was a Junior High School student, when some NGO workers came to his school to host a 'dissemination of child rights' seminar where he became one of the participants. Since then, he participated in a number of activities held by local NGOs that work on child protection issues. With support from the NGO staff, he was trusted and supported to attend events representing young people in his community.*

*Growing up in a small agriculture-based village in Klaten, having had the opportunity to speak out in local and national forums, including at the district level of development forums, was something that he always considers as a privilege, and a big personal achievement that he had never imagined before. To be able to participate in community and national meetings, it is not something easy and affordable. Often times, he had to deal with logistical issues, such as the lack of money to cover transportation costs to attend a meeting.*

*Furthermore, as he became well-known in his community for being a youth advocate, he often felt that he was being left aside by his peers, or became a victim of bullying because he was considered 'too active', that he became a deviant, or even a threat to his peers. His parents often forbid him from participating in any out of school activities, prompting it would distract him from his studies.*

*Most importantly, one of the main difficulties was to challenge himself to be able to speak up in activities that he attended on behalf of young people in his community. This includes, to learn not to be silent, to reject a culture in school that has been silencing young people as 'passive learners' in the learning process. Quoting from him, "In school, there seems to be no opportunity to speak up and being critical, students tend to be listeners, and teachers are the ones who always explain. In this organization, I have been encouraged to speak up. From there, I learn how to raise my voice and to influence others" (Adi, In-depth interview, August 2018).*

### **Javanese value and overprotection of girls: a story from Anissa, 19 year old, female**

*Anissa remembers vividly the moment when she saw some of her friends called out by her school principal during a morning flag ceremony. They looked terrified as the principal announced that these students, who participated in a local brawl, will be expelled from the school. For her, this is one example of the school's display of power that violates young people's fundamental right to education. Although in the end those students were not expelled from school, it still portrays her biggest concern regarding the 'reward and punishment' system in school that overcontrols and restricts young people's opportunities to enjoy their social lives and educational activities.*

*Anissa is an active member of a local child forum, a government-initiated platform that aims to empower and involve young people in local development planning processes. For her, she always has to be strategic when it comes to raising the voices of youth in her community. Often times, she needs to be careful and considerate when she says something in a forum dominated by adults. One time, she was afraid to talk in a forum as she saw her neighbours attending the meeting. "I am afraid about their perception about me, I am afraid if they see my opinion as something negative and later creates a bad image for my family" (Anissa, In-depth interview, August 2018), she said. But, as she continued, she learnt to disregard people's opinion about her. "If they want to listen, it is good. If not, I don't care", she said (Anissa, In-depth interview, August 2018).*

*Anissa's parents work in a local market, where they have no fixed working schedules. Often times, her parents have to go to work at 4am and come back later in the afternoon. Sometimes, her parents also take night shifts at the market. For her, her parents' work makes it difficult for her to communicate routinely with them. As the only girl in the family, her parents are often over-protective, forbidding her to go*

*out at night or controlling her social circles to avoid any negative influence from her peers. In her family, if she happens to break any of the family's rules, her parents will preach to her, and give her little opportunity to talk during the discussion. For her, it is common in the Javanese context, where children have to listen, to understand and be respectful to older people, and accept their advice, often without giving any room for clarification or to express their (children's) emotions.*

*This Javanese value of 'respecting adults' is also reflected in the school's culture, where many teachers always apply one-directional interaction in their teaching method that often limits student's opportunities for critical interaction. While she acknowledges that not all teachers use this hierarchical way of teaching, she appreciates the role of some teachers in school that encourages girls to compete with boys when it comes to academic achievement and being more active in class. Supportive adult role models, including her teachers, has been one of the factors that makes her activism possible.*

For both of them, getting involved in and out of school activities serves as an opportunity to develop skills that are not being offered by in-school activities, such as communication skills and confidence building. However, this comes with a great compromise. In Adi's case, he has to deal with alienation at school as he is seen as deviant for being active, whereas Anissa has to negotiate multiple cultural traits of being a protected girl and an obedient child. Their life stories illustrate the grey area between childhood and their transition to adulthood that both of them straddle as young persons. Out of school organizations and activities are used as a channel for self-learning and resistance. Through their reflection, they were able to realize how the cultural ideal of being a (girl) child in their schools and communities serve as a factor that restricts their opportunities to exercise and develop their agency.

Furthermore, these stories also speak to a growing number of studies regarding child agency, that emphasizes child agency as highly life-stage dependent, more relational in nature than adults, because of children's dependence on the role of adults, both personal (e.g. negotiating adult wishes) and context dependent, such as the broader community's cultural notion of childhood (Sumner 2010: 1070). In the context of poverty, young people's constraints to agency is also exacerbated by the lack of opportunities due to minimal support systems (e.g. lack of parental support), lack of resources including financial support, geographical issues (educational activities are difficult to access), the quality of formal education as a site of their agency development. Moreover, for girls in rural areas, they are often excluded from public places and are forbidden from leaving the house and surrounding grounds, which further restricts their access to participation. Therefore, organizational activities, such as Child Forum and the Roots program become a site to reflect and negotiate their marginalization.

Using Lister's (2004) taxonomy of agency especially in the context of poverty, she recognizes that agency stretches from everyday matters of 'getting by' and 'getting back at' (e.g. rebellious behavior), to more strategic actions of 'getting out' and 'getting organized' (e.g. collective action). Despite their contextualized constraints, both Adi and Anissa managed to exercise their agency through 'getting out' of the formal education avenue as a way to expand their educational opportunities, 'getting by' through juggling with the lack of support in the context of a rural poor area, 'getting organized' through their involvement in child forum

and their attempt to raise young people's voices in local development forums. Furthermore, the realities of 'rebellious' children, as emerged in SMP 212 also illustrate children's agency of 'getting back at' in a different way than Anissa and Adi. While Redmond (2009) argues that children's agency is mainly exercised in the domain of the everyday and personal (referring to Lister's 'getting by' and 'getting back at'), but in this research context, agency is exercised in various forms from personal to collective, from everyday to political. In Adi and Anissa's stories, their agency has been supported by the availability of opportunities and support of adults (NGO workers, supportive teachers) as supplements and extensions (White et al. 2007), illustrating agency's relational nature.

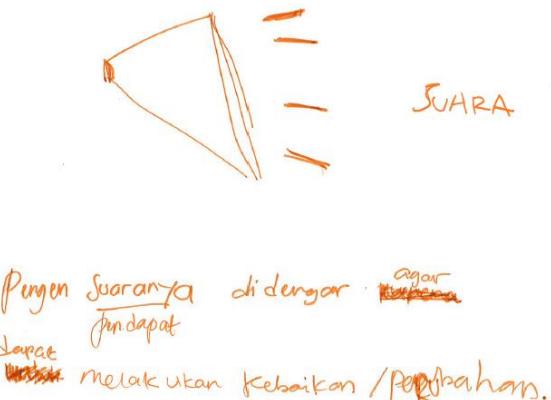
To conclude, as argued by Sumner (2010), individual agency is a product of wider social forces. Despite facing marginalization as a result of intersectional social and cultural factors, the stories from Adi and Anissa reveal that young people are not just passive conduits of marginalization forces such as patriarchal and hierarchical cultures of Javanese societies, but they are developing agents of change who ceaselessly challenge the dominant notion of child(girl)hood in their communities. Adi and Anissa are examples of young people who eagerly attempt to challenge their everyday realities through personal, collective, and political actions. Through their reflection, their stories support Sumner's (2010: 1073) argument that despite existing social forces that marginalize them, what matters is not just how the system of cultural norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors that is transmitted across generations, but also the degree to which a person assumes or identifies themselves with them. In light of these findings, I propose that youth-centered programs must pay attention to young people's forms of agency and its relation with how young people are perceived, conceptualized, and engaged with in their societies.

### **4.3 Beyond vulnerability: using young people's strengths and aspirations as assets**

In the spirit of developing youth-centered programs, efforts must be made to understand young people's lived realities, as well as their aspirations for the future in order to find better ways to improve their lives. This is critical as it attempts to move away from simply seeing young people as 'risky' and/or 'at risk' human beings in the context of their situated and constrained agency to believing that young people can be the agents of change in their communities, using their own potentials and strengths as the main assets of any intervention.

The Roots program, in its design, aims to provide a space for students, as well as young people (through their role as facilitators) as the catalyst of change at the school level. In my discussions with children and young people, despite the program's focus on raising young people's awareness on school-based violence especially bullying, my research participants identified personal development aspects, such as communication skills as something that they have gained the most from the program. During my interview with a UNICEF officer, he acknowledged that the program still lacks aspects regarding improving communication skills and confidence building, echoing many critiques towards youth-targeted programs where young people are seen as having the necessary skills and capacity already to participate in a program.

Figure 4.2  
Drawing from a boy about his desire to be heard



Literal translation: "[Speaker logo] Voice, I want my voice/opinion to be heard so I can make a change"  
(Source: Research documentation)

Figure 4.3  
A poetry written by a female student

Jika Aku Menjadi Orang Tua

Jika Aku Menjadi Ortu Aku Akan Mendidik Anak-Anakku dengan baik,  
Dan mengajarkan sopan santun.  
Dan jika anakku bersalah aku akan menasehatinya tidak memarahinya.

Literal translation: "If I were a parent  
If I were a parent, I will teach my children in a good way, and teach them manners. If they are wrong, I will preach them, not scolding them"  
(Source: Research documentation)

In a community that positions children as risky and at risk, such as Javanese communities, participation might be more effectively addressed when childhood as a political and cultural construct is set alongside the practicalities of delivering responsive and innovative programming and approaches (ICPNC 2015). To do that, efforts must be made to deconstruct the dominant notions of childhood, such as innocence and vulnerable, through emphasizing children's potential, competence, and experience throughout the local construction of childhood. In

this way, protection might engage participation beyond just listening or incorporating children's 'voices' in decision making or program development processes, but to move its benefits to a more substantial and transformational change leading to young people's empowerment (Caputo 2017: 82).

In line with putting agency at the heart of youth programs, it is important to question, how do young people see themselves, what do they wish to see for themselves in the future, amidst their marginalized positionality within Javanese communities.

To answer, I had the opportunity to participate as a facilitator of a local Jamboree where 30 children (15 girls and 15 boys) aged 13-17 years old participated in the activity. As part of my presentation, I asked participants three questions, such as: 1) *What are your personal strengths?* 2) *What skills or knowledge do you want to acquire in 2 years?* They were asked to jot down their answers on 3 different sticky papers. In terms of analysis, I categorized their answers and drew them in cloud-out graphics according to the most mentioned answers:

Figure 4.4

What are your strengths?



Left: Boys, Right: Girls

(Source: Research documentation, based on groupings)

Generally, in terms of strengths, the answers can be divided greatly based on their hobbies and personal qualities. For boys, they identified physical strength associated with their hobbies in physical activities such as martial arts and football. Differently, for girls, they identified a more various set of skills, ranging from social skills such as listening to others, building relationships with new friends (sociable) and also strengths that are associated with their hobbies. These findings highlight the importance of using a gender perspective when it comes to understanding young people's heterogeneous strengths to better inform an approach to youth programs.

Figure 4.5

What skills or knowledge do you want to acquire in 2 years?



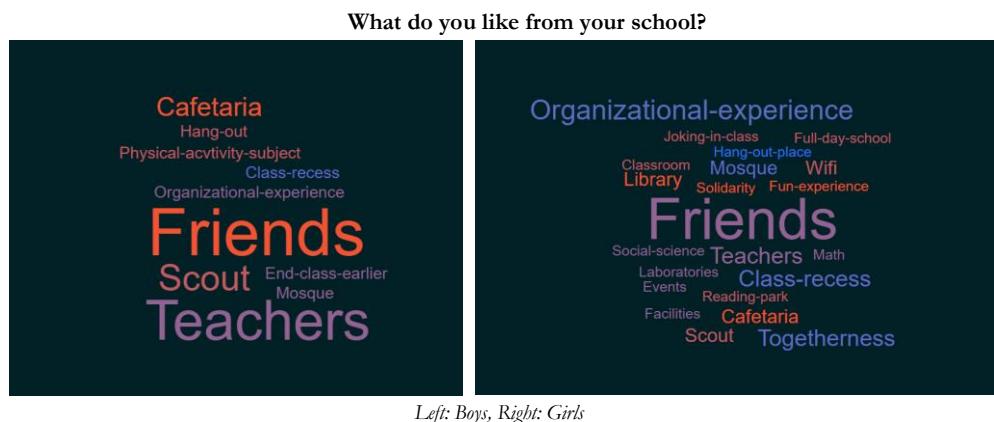
Left: Boys, Right: Girls

(Source: Research documentation, based on groupings)

In terms of their aspired personal development, children's aspirations also varied greatly based on their gender. For boys, they aspire to build more positive friendships with their peers linking to their aspiration to build a positive attitude for themselves, indicating the importance of focusing on male peer circles as an approach in youth programs. This might be related with other findings from this research, as I mentioned in the previous chapter regarding aggressive and troubling behaviors that are prevalent among boys in this research context. In terms of girls, they came up with a more diverse list of hopes, from being more attentive (sensitive to other), confident, listening more, to mastering school subjects such as Maths and English. This might indicate girls' restricted access to self-development learning opportunities due to socio-cultural and structural barriers, highlighting the importance of girls-focused programming that tackles multidimensional barriers in an attempt to provide more opportunities for girls to explore and expand their desired capabilities.

In addition, I also asked children about things that they like in their school. Despite concerns related to children's aggressive and violent behaviors, both girls and boys identified 'supportive friends' as the main aspect that they favor the most. Organizational opportunities, such as scouts, which becomes a compulsory extracurricular in school is an aspect that also emerged in both of the genders. This indicates that peer-based approaches through the utilization of existing organizational platforms in school is a promising approach for youth programs.

Figure 4.6



(Source: Research documentation, based on groupings)

To conclude, I argue that instead of focusing on children's vulnerabilities and their contribution to violent culture, child protection programs can be improved through using strengths and empowerment as the building blocks of solution-focused interventions. As argued by Graybeal (2001), the fundamental premise in programs should focus on thinking where individuals will do better in the long run when they are helped to identify, recognize, and use the strengths and resources available in themselves and in their environment. Using strengths as an approach also implies an attempt to restore the balance of power between young people and adults as a way of challenging an array of manifestations of children and youth marginalization especially in a hierarchical and patriarchal society like Javanese communities.

## Chapter 5

# Ways Forward: Implications for Policy and Practice on Childhood, Protection, and Wellbeing

### 5.1 Conclusion

This research paper presents 3 main issues that highlight children's barriers to participation that contribute to their well-being and development outcomes. I touched upon aspects regarding structural and cultural issues, such as social exclusion in education through educational policies and practices, the social-cultural construction of childhood that perpetuates children's marginalized status in society, as well as children's and young people's agency that is situated and constrained in the context of Javanese communities.

In chapter 2, I discussed gaps in Indonesia's education (schooling) system, by teasing out critical exclusions that emerge as a result of policies and practices that further marginalize already disadvantaged children. As shown in the context of SMP 212 Klaten, the gap of quality education emerges as a result of the school's failure to compete in the district's student enrolment scheme, compounded by the lack of resources and its capacity to better improve the quality of the school. When school resources and supports are limited in the context of schools with disadvantaged and poorly performing students, this maintains the school's position as a 'trashy school' and exacerbates the social exclusion of children by denying them educational benefits. These situations faced by the SMP 212 Klaten community generated barriers for students in participating in the Roots program, including confusion regarding from where and in what ways the school community can intervene to achieve the objective of the program, given the special circumstances that the school has.

In chapter 3, I explored the intersection between structural issues, such as the social exclusion of children through education policies and practices, and social-cultural constructions of children in the context of Javanese communities. Thus, I concur with the argument put forth by Brynner (1999), who emphasizes that '*social exclusion is not a certain outcome of a particular constellation of circumstances, but should be seen in terms of risk factors*'. Social-construction of childhood, that produces and imposes the ideal notion of childhood through social script regarding 'risky, and/or 'at risk' children in need of protection, serves as a barrier for children's exercise and development of their agency. This is shown through how the community perceives children and childhood, adults' child rearing or parenting practices. In my findings, I underline that the social practices of child rearing and education are influenced by social and cultural norms that have been ingrained in Javanese.

In chapter 4, I ended my analysis by highlighting children and young people's ways of resisting and negotiating those barriers by participating in the Roots program as well as in out-of-school activities. I argue that vulnerability, just like power, is not something static, rather something that exists in a continuum. Despite structural and cultural barriers that hinder their exercise and development of agency, young people have their own tactics, aspirations, and dreams, that need to be used as assets for developing policy and programs on youth. In addition, I argue that young people must be seen as capable actors with their situated

and evolving agency. In order to improve child protection policy and programs, there must be a significant shift of perspective to see young people and their capabilities of influencing the world we live in. This can be done through dismantling the systems of oppression, including patriarchy, and unequal and hierarchical power relations that position young people as marginalized beings. Reconstruction and deconstruction of socio-cultural notions of childhood is necessary through challenging our perspectives and practices that contribute to the oppression of young people in society. To conclude, I present below my recommendations and implications for policy, program, and research regarding childhood, protection, and wellbeing.

## **5.2 Addressing exclusion, dismantling oppression: the role of rights-based education**

As emphasized in the previous chapter, education policy plays a role in shaping the results of programs, and moreover, to be a critical site for the social reproduction of childhood in Javanese societies, from how the education system through the national program emphasizes ‘character building’ as its main priority in the schooling process, to how scoring, discipline and the punishment system at the school level is used to sustain and reproduce social scripts regarding good versus bad childhood in society. Therefore, it is critical to think about the ways in which the education system can be reformed in order to better improve the social outcomes of children leading to strengthening young people’s agency in society.

In this regard, I would argue that there must be significant effort in ensuring quality education, particularly in rural and remote areas, along with ensuring the universal access to education for all children. In order to address social exclusion in education, Klasen (2001) argues that education policies should focus on four areas. First, the unequal *distribution* of educational performance needs to be addressed, in order to close the gap between the good and the poor performers both for intrinsic and instrumental considerations. This is shown through my research findings of SMP 212 that is regarded as a site of ‘conversion’ of ‘bad students’ that are associated with risky behavior and poor educational performance. In the context of decentralised education systems like Indonesia, the sub-national and district government must take into account contextualised situations and the needs of their areas in order to improve educational outcomes. The second area is the *structure* of the educational system, instead of merely focusing on ‘output’. This can be done through the identification and provision of a structure of support for disadvantaged students, including students from poor families and those with aggression problems. Educational practices that stigmatize children, such as through a ‘scoring system’ to discipline and punish students with undesirable behavior, needs to be revoked as it moves the problem somewhere else and keeps children away from services they need in order to deal with their issues. Third, the *dynamics* of the educational system, including a restructuring of the curriculum and teaching pedagogy that encourages mutual dialogue between students and educators, needs to be promoted. Lastly, the *output* of the educational system needs to be seen in a broader sense, to think whether the

education system benefits students with opportunities to develop their capabilities, including their agency in society, whether it fosters peace and inclusion, and respect for diversity, in alignment with the CRC principles.

On a particular note, using Paulo Freire's perspective on 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' (1970), education must offer children the freedom to learn, as well as to exercise and develop their agency. In the case of SMP 212, the school is seen as a site of depositing, where the students are positioned, are depositories and the teachers are the depositors, through a one-directional teaching pedagogy. The school seems to adopt the banking concept of education, where the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and restoring the deposits (Freire 1970: 45). The students in SMP 212 are treated as 'problems' in need of conversion, and one way to do that is through the implementation and scaling up of the Roots program into a compulsory extracurricular activity at school. While this can be an opportunity for the program's sustainability, assistance is needed in order to ensure the quality of the program, especially when it is transformed into an extracurricular activity. In this regard, it is important to ensure that the newly designed Roots program, as an extracurricular activity, must incorporate the strengthening of young people's participation and empowerment at the heart of the program, in order to recognize and improve young people's agency in the implementation of the program.

The teacher reform in Indonesia, as suggested by many scholars, needs to start from rethinking and reconstructing the perception of students as empty vessels, depositories, and as having no agency in the educational process. When students are treated as individual cases, marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration from 'good, organize, and just' society (Freire 1970: 45), this is a symbol that children are positioned as oppressed beings in society. Later, as Freire argues, "*the oppressed are not marginals, are not people living outside society. They have always been 'inside'--inside the structure which made them 'being for others'*" (Ibid 47). In other words, there needs to be a recognition of children's agency, as well as their agency as being situated based on the influence from the other social factors, be it their family, school, or system within their living environment. These complexities need to be embraced and addressed when it comes to ensuring children's protection and well-being, in order to prevent us from positioning children as the victims, problems, or threats to society.

Therefore, I argue that any intervention that addresses children's protection, particularly their protection from harm and violence for their well-being, must increase children's awareness regarding their rights in society. A rights-based approach is a critical aspect that must be embedded in the program, as an attempt to transform children as the oppressed to become actors that can influence the world they live in. The rights-based approach, in its principle, is related with the spirit behind The Pedagogy of the Oppressed offered by Freire (Ibid 29), where the pedagogy includes two important steps in its implementation. The first step is that the oppressed, children in this case, unveil the world of oppression leading to their transformation. When the reality is being reconstructed or deconstructed, the pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed, and later, it transforms into a pedagogy for everyone in the process for liberation. To do that, critical and liberating dialogue must be built, in order to foster the oppressed's struggle for their liberation, whatever the stage it occurs. On a practical note, as the Roots program focuses heavily on activities that aim to build students' awareness on

violence around them and finding ways they can solve these problem, the program can be augmented to foster agency by introducing young people to human rights education. This includes, but is not limited to, introducing the concept of human rights, what it means to them, why it matters, what are human rights, what is the implication when their rights or other people's rights are violated, for instance, through violent action perpetrated by their duty bearers as well as themselves as rights holder.

### **5.3 Dynamic framework to embed social norms in violence prevention programming**

As social norms-based approaches aim to challenge targeted social and cultural norms that contribute to the perpetration of harmful practices, it can bring benefits in violence prevention programming. First, it allows the program designers to analyze contextualised drivers of violence, taking into account the specificity of the causes within a given social context, and focus on those aspects to inform the implementation of the program. As a result, it can widen existing positive cracks in hegemonic collective beliefs and generate space where change can happen (Cislaghi and Heise 2018: 5). Second, if executed in a participatory manner, it can mobilize people through their role as active agents in order to challenge particular norms in their community. In this way, it can contribute to the sustainability of the program as it builds a sense of belonging to the program to the local people. As emerged from my research findings, the Roots program brings benefits in the form of awareness on protection and violence, and social skills that contribute positively to children and young people's development.

However, we should bear in mind that using social norms as an approach would bring a tendency to focus on norms at the expense of other factors that inform people's actions (Cislaghi and Heise 2018). As shown in my research findings and analysis, social exclusion in education as a result of education policies, and social and cultural constructions of childhood that hinder meaningful children's participation, as well as the lack of young people's agency development in the program component, are critical factors that contribute to the success of social norms programming in the violence prevention context.

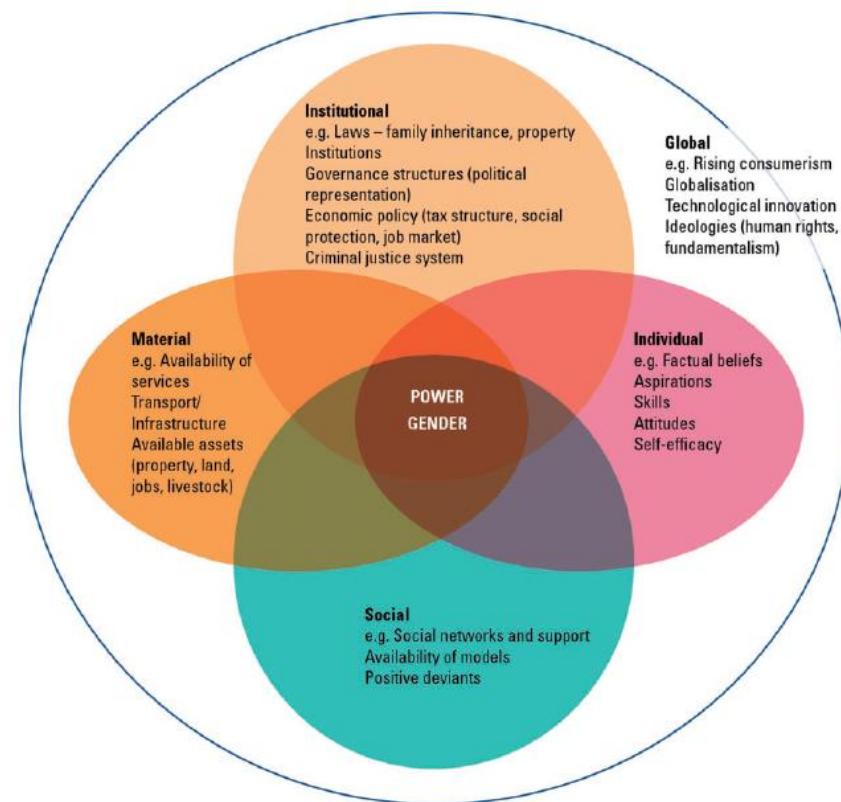
Influencing human behavior that is informed by social and cultural scripts is the main objective of social norms programming. However, as argued by many scholars, particularly from the social psychology field, human action almost never originates from a single factor or cause (Ibid: 3). As such, the use of social norms must be supported by the realization and application of integrated approaches that address the intersecting factors that inform human action within a specific social context. In this way, it helps to avoid oversimplifying the complexity of human behavior, as argued by Brennan and colleagues, *'we doubt that many if any norms provide reasons that literally exclude from consideration any interestingly wide range of other reasons for action'* (Brennan et al. 2013: 251).

A growing number of models are available to inform practitioners about embedding social norms particularly in health promotion programs. To name a few, the 'ecological framework' developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) provides an understanding about the interlinkages of layers, from micro, meso, and macro levels that help shape human behavior. In addition, this framework was

further developed by Heise (1998) and aims to contextualize the ecological framework for intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention and intervention. Heise's model highlights two key concerns in order to improve the application of the ecological framework. First, in the use of the ecological framework, practitioners need to identify contextualized micro, meso, and macro aspects as they suit the framework. In the IPV context, practitioners need to map out predictive factors of IPV across multiple settings, in order to better conceptualize the phenomenon instead of diagnosing the specific driving factor of IPV in a specific setting. Second, practitioners need to tease out hidden factors embedded within the framework, as well as its interplays with other identified factors. For example, power dynamics need to be incorporated as an important factor that intersects with all factors as specified in every layer.

Inspired by the ecological framework and its use in IPV context, Cislagli and Heise (2018) recently introduced a practical framework in order to include four domains of influence that go together with social norms that influence people's behavior. These domains are: institutional, individual, social, and material. Compared to the previous models, this practical framework adds power and gender as intersecting components that are not specifically addressed in the previous models.

**Figure 5.1**  
Dynamic framework for social change



Source: Cislagli and Heise 2018

As seen in the framework above, the four domains of influence can include a list of factors. In the first domain, the individual domain can include factors

related to the individual, such as their factual beliefs, aspirations, skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy. In this research context, I have identified children's perceived skills associated with their developing agency, attitudes among peers, and aspirations for the future, as examples in this first domain. In the second domain, the social domain can include the availability of social support for children's meaningful participation in protection measures, and social networks to influence positive behaviors, among others. In the third domain, the material domain highlights an important issue about the linkages between violence, protection, and well-being of children and families in the context of poverty for instance. As it emerged in research findings, amidst the implementation of the program, young people and adults negotiate their constraints playing their role as caretakers of children, and for young people, they negotiate their agency within the existing constraining circumstances, such as the lack of parental support, poverty, and restrictive gender roles in society. Lastly, the institutional domain covers factors such as law, policy, regulations that restrict or support protection and well-being of children and their surroundings. This includes, for example, education policy as shown in the previous chapter.

To conclude, this framework implies an important call for collaboration between different actors who work at different points in the influencing domains. It suggests that the work to address social norms, which is mainly driven by insider actors at the school (in this research context), such as parents, teachers, community leaders, and most importantly young people themselves at the community level, must go along with the other actors in different domains, health and social provision sectors, for instance, in order to ensure a more nuanced and multi-dimensional approach to dealing with the true complexity of human action.

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