

The first Waldorf-inspired kindergarten in Jakarta, Indonesia

In December, 2011, Hans and Ineke van Florenstein Mulder asked me if I would be interested to spend some time in a small Waldorf kindergarten initiative in Jakarta. I had never entertained the idea of going overseas to support teachers. I always felt there was plenty to do near home. However, when the question of Indonesia came, I had to take it seriously. It felt like a destiny question, as both my parents were born in Indonesia and grew up there (during the Dutch colonial times). My childhood was enriched with things Indonesian. My question became one of maybe I have something to offer to this beloved country of my parents?

After the contacts were established and approved by the international organisation IASWECE we started to plan for my arrival. Initially I had contact with the founder, Mr. Irdhal Lala, but later I corresponded with the two teachers, who both speak English. The kindergarten was started three years ago with the help of Maria Domning from Germany who spent 3 months here prior to any children attending.

The house in which the kindergarten is operating is spacious, with a large garden, an outdoor gazebo with a traditional thatched roof and an outdoor toilet in the same style. The property borders on a dam with a lake, which is a social 'hang-out' space for the general population as there are very few green spaces in Jakarta.

People send their children here for two reasons: they perceive a difference in education and they like the fact that their children will also learn a little bit of English.

I arrived on 7 July with a suitcase full of books, resources and craft materials. It was a very warm welcome, in more ways than one as I had to get used to +30°C. My room was on the second floor of the house and luckily it had air condition.

The first week was still their mid-year holiday and the teachers and I spent the time getting to know each other, lazuring the room, and finding our way with what we all could do in the next 5 weeks.

The kindergarten is attended still by only very few children, four at most, but we soon saw a need to start a playgroup, where under-threes attend with their mothers. This way, as always, one is able to impart some of the essentials of Waldorf education and support mothers in their parenting process. This new development looks very promising. Word-of-mouth will be a key factor in its growth.

I certainly did not come to turn everything they had established upside down, but the room did require some focus in the shape of a dolls/house corner, a drawing table and general ordering of resources in baskets. We spent time discussing the rhythm of the day. We made some changes,



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Playgroup, which is called Nursery group here.

as we felt that outdoor play was suited more first thing in the morning, when the temperature is still reasonable. We also decided to do away with lunch boxes brought from home with a less desirable variety of snacks. Unfortunately the kindergarten room does not have the kitchen integrated in it, so the children miss seeing the meals being prepared. However, our meal time together, blessed with a Waldorf verse and an Islamic prayer soon became the highlight of the morning.

A lot of my time was spent explaining and stressing the importance of free creative play and the influences that cause the decline of this vital way of learning for young children. A draw-back of having to find out what Waldorf education is about without training or the support of experienced teachers is that very soon it becomes a method, instead of a living experience. We had to break through some barriers of what had become a kind of noose around the teachers' necks.

My humble opinion has always been that this education has to fit in the particular culture of the place where the kindergarten is. The teachers had struggled working with the Grimm fairytales. They would tell them in English, but for most children this is their second language and at best only very limited. We set out finding and adapting original Indonesian stories and making them suitable for puppet play. I soon realised that these stories have the same moral qualities as the Grimm fairytales do. It has been very

satisfying for all to create the puppets and tell the story on a daily basis. It became an anchor for the children, especially when we decided that they had to be told in Bahasa Indonesian as opposed to English. We will build on this and I will challenge the teachers to find more suitable stories. This place wants to be rooted in all things Indonesian from Islam to other religions and in local cultures (and there are many!).

Our afternoons were spent either studying topics like the fourfold human being with an emphasis



The last night of Ramadhan- a puppet story.

on the etheric (NB. An excellent book that has become our new 'friend' is: *Nurturing Potential in the Kindergarten Years* by Cornelis Boogerd²), television, play, human development, the senses and being creative in making resources. A lot of new skills were learnt.

Irdhal, the founder, very often took part in these afternoons and more and more he came to observe in the kindergarten so he could get a feel for it in order to better support the teachers when I leave.

We further worked on two events. On 28 July we held a seminar for interested people on 'Protecting Childhood'. An enormous amount of publicity was put into this event (there were even 10 banners with my name on it all over south Jakarta!), but due to the fact that it was Ramadhan, there was a very disappointing turnout. However, one of the participants was a journalist for an on-line publication and she wrote

² Boogerd, Cornelis (2011): *Nurturing Potential in the Kindergarten Years: A Guide for Teachers, Carers and Parents*. Translated by Matthew Dexter. Floris Books 978-0863158360



The seminar



The parents' morning



3 articles about the education. So the word will still get out. On 3 August we had a parents' morning and we found the questions and the discussions to be very stimulating and the content well-received.

Children in Jakarta are faced with enormous challenges: many primary schools require the children to sit a reading and writing test, for which kindergartens need to prepare them. At Bunga this will not be done. Lacking green spaces and gardens many children spend enormous amounts of time in front of screens. The traffic in Jakarta is beyond words, so for children lots of time is spent in cars or on the back of motorbikes. In general there seems to be a huge decline in the ability of children to play which was noticeable in some who attend this kindergarten. But how exciting it was to see that with a little bit of time and given the right environment, imitation and imagination was still alive and well!

It has been a very rich and intense five weeks for everyone concerned and it is encouraging to hear that my stay has created new enthusiasm and a resolve to make it happen. Bunga, which means 'Flower', exists; the right people are here and under the guidance of Irdhal Lala, with his vision for a better education for young children in Indonesia, it will come to fruition. I hope to be a part of this place and its people for a long time to come! Selamat Tinggal!

NB. As with all initiatives, Bunga would be helped tremendously by someone, a trained and/or experienced Waldorf teacher who would be able to stay for a much longer period of time. If you think you are that person, please feel free to contact me. edith.vandermeer@gmail.com ♦

Edith van der Meer has been a handwork teacher at Taikura Rudolf Steiner School for 14 years and a kindergarten teacher at the same school for 7 years. She is currently involved in kindergarten support, and gives parent and craft courses. She helps to coordinate the Early Childhood In-Service course with Kathy McFarlane and Marjorie Theyer. This course will start its fourth intake with 33 students in January 2013.



Edith is married to Ton and is mother of four grown children (and their partners) and has recently become a grandmother. The young child has always been the centre of her life and to be following the development of this first grandchild has been awe-inspiring!

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