

# The Implementation of Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) in Early Childhood Programs in Indonesia

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*Playing has an important role in young children's development, especially in developing self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. Through play, children develop self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence, which increases their motivation and affects their learning. Therefore, play-based curriculum is currently widely used in early childhood programs. In such curriculum, play is seen as an integral part of children's lives, and that each child has their own unique interests and needs.*

*The Directorate of Early Childhood Education Development introduced the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) curriculum in 2004. It is a play-based curriculum which employs some learning centers and four kinds of scaffolding in order to support children's holistic development. It is also child-centered and aligned with the basic principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).*

*The Indonesian government realizes that early childhood programs have a pivotal role in preparing children for their future and academic lives. Consequently, strategies are needed to improve the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia and support learning process of young children. The implementation of BCCT is in fact an effort to achieve these goals. This study aims to provide a short review of the implementation of BCCT in early childhood programs in Indonesia, as well as its advantages and challenges.*

**Keywords:** *play-based curriculum, beyond centers and circle time, early childhood program*

## VI. INTRODUCTION

Play is beneficial for young children's development, because it helps them develop self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence (Morrison, 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Ostrosky & Meadan, 2010). Through play, children also acquire many skills, which increase their motivation and affect their learning (Morrison, 2007). Therefore, play-based curricula are currently widely used in early childhood programs, because play is seen as an integral part of children's lives.

Nowadays, many early childhood educators in Indonesia apply a play-based curriculum in their programs. It was started in 2004, when the Directorate of Early Childhood Education Development introduced BCCT. It is a play-based curriculum, which employs some learning centers in order to support children's holistic development (Hasan, Hyson, & Chang, 2013). The approach is also child-centered and aligned with the basic principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) by

the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Newberry, 2010).

This study employed a narrative review technique for analyzing a number of academic literature and research related to the implementation of Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) curriculum in early childhood programs in Indonesia. Its advantages and challenges will also be discussed.

## VII. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. The Importance of Play

According to Reet (2012), learning through play builds the foundation of children's analytical thinking, which is very essential for their social and academic lives. Through play, children obtain more opportunities in controlling themselves, expressing their ideas, and acting in certain situation appropriately.

Moreover, Galinsky (2010) believes that each child needs to have seven essential skills in order to succeed in their social and academic lives. They should be able to focus and develop self-control; to recognize others' needs; to interact; to make connections; to think analytically; to deal with challenges; and to manage their own learning in acquiring new knowledge or skills (Phelps, 2012).

As play and active learning are crucial for addressing children's interest and needs, it is necessary for them to have adequate playing time. Additionally, early childhood educators also need to prepare well-planned play activities which consider children's development and allow them to improve their knowledge and skills for their future academic lives (Pica, 2008; Phelps, 2012)

### BCCT: A Supportive Learning Environment

Children learn by experimenting and investigating. Hence, teachers should provide a supportive learning environment to attract children to play and work with all appropriate learning materials provided for them (Isbell & Exelby, 2001). The well-planned learning environment is not only helpful for children to engage in the activities, but also able to decrease their challenging behaviors (Ostrosky & Meadan, 2010).

John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator, also believed that learning can be done in an environment which provides opportunities for children to work with materials and

their peers, without neglecting their interest and needs. His idea could be seen through play-based learning centers that are part of an integrated curriculum (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; State of Connecticut Department of Education, 2007).

Nowadays, most early childhood curricula are based on child-centered approaches, such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, HighScope, and Creative Curriculum. Those curricula employ learning centers in helping children to acquire, as well as expand their knowledge and skills. Such centers are prepared by the teachers and can also be set up based on children's interests and needs (State of Connecticut Department of Education, 2007).

Subsequently, Pamela Phelps of Tallahassee, FL created a new curriculum called Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT), which is based on Montessori, HighScope, and Reggio Emilia curriculum. Like some other curriculum, BCCT also employs some learning centers. What makes it different is the four kinds of scaffolding which become the main concept of BCCT (Phelps, 2012):

1. Scaffolding the environment – preparing the environment before play
2. Scaffolding the pre-play experience – usually conducted in a circle time
3. Scaffolding the individual child's play – the teacher offers support to each child when it is needed.
4. Scaffolding the post-play experience – review the play (recalling)

The current level of children's competence defines the assistance (scaffolding) they receive. The newer the task, the more support that will be given. As the child's competence increases, then he/she will receive less support. The supportive learning environment and the scaffolding aims to encourage children's creativity and sharpen their skills (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2006; Phelps, 2012).

Another concept in BCCT is the three kinds of play that young children can engage with: sensorimotor or functional, dramatic or symbolic play, and construction (Phelps, 2012). Hasan et. Al (2013) also mentioned of four main pillars of BCCT that support all domains of children's development: learning through play and social relationships, hands-on materials, scaffolding; and equal amount of child-initiated and teacher-guided activities.

## VIII. DISCUSSION

### A. Current Practice of BCCT in Indonesia

BCCT was brought for the first time to Indonesia by a non-governmental organization (NGO) in 1996. Later on, the Indonesian government endorsed BCCT to be applied in Indonesia's early childhood programs. During the period between 2004 and 2009, the Indonesian government also acquired permission for using it exclusively (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2006)

In order to disseminate the use of BCCT, a number of training sessions were organized. They resulted in dozens of trainers as the outcome (Newberry, 2010). The trainers trained early childhood educators about BCCT and guided them in the process of applying the curriculum in their programs. In several

occasions, Pamela Phelps also personally spoke about the curriculum she created to early childhood educators and policy makers in Indonesia.

In early childhood programs where BCCT curriculum is used, there are at least six learning centers: literacy and math readiness, fluid play, blocks, art, dramatic play, and religion. If possible, other centers could also be added, such as music/movement and cooking. Small groups typically spend about an hour and thirty minutes at the centers that include a circle time (about 15 minutes), individual play (45-60 minutes), and a closing review or recalling of the activities (15-30 minutes).

Since many early childhood programs in Indonesia have only a small room for accommodating all children's activities, learning centers are mostly not permanently assembled in the classroom. Instead, the teachers provide different learning centers on daily basis (generally three learning centers per day). The activities also could be done outside the classroom, if needed.

While some early childhood programs which provide learning centers require high tuition fees, BCCT actually can be done with low-cost materials. If some materials are unaffordable, there are other alternative materials that can be used as substitute. This is a compelling reason behind the adoption of BCCT by many early childhood programs, which serve children from middle to low-income families in Indonesia.

Compared to traditional curriculum, BCCT is designed to be more systematic and possesses detailed guidance on theme and activities based on children's interest and needs. In addition, children are provided with supports prior to, during, and after play. It also offers many kinds of meaningful activities that require children's active participation. Teachers who understand children's development prepare all of the activities, because they know that young children learn best from their environment and experience. Those made the play activities more enjoyable and adaptable regardless circumstances they faced.

### B. Challenges in Implementing BCCT

Compared to traditional curricula that employ direct-teaching method, which makes children to be passive learners, BCCT can be considered as one of the alternative curricula which is feasible to be applied in many small to medium-scale early childhood programs. It is a research-based, child-centered, and encouraging all children to be active learners and critical thinkers through its various activities. Even with a tight budget, the implementation of this approach is still possible.

However, the implementation of BCCT in Indonesia currently is still facing some problems. This is due to many early childhood educators in Indonesia who do not have adequate skills related to children's development and curriculum. They are passionate in educating young children, but do not have sufficient knowledge to support their role.

Moreover, although many Indonesian early childhood educators have become aware of BCCT, there is still a lack of trainers for them, who could help them in implementing BCCT. This obviously prevents a widespread implementation of BCCT curriculum, because such an implementation requires a mastery

of the whole details of BCCT. Consequently, those educators still prefer using traditional or direct-teaching method to BCCT in their classroom.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The Indonesian government has adopted and endorsed the implementation of BCCT curriculum in order to improve the quality of early childhood programs, and support learning process of young children. BCCT has the flexibility to be applied in most early childhood programs. However, Indonesia still lacks trainers who are capable of introducing the curriculum to early childhood educators.

Moreover, without sufficient knowledge and skills about BCCT, currently many early childhood educators still prefer using traditional or direct-teaching method. Hence, it is necessary to have more training sessions in order to introduce BCCT to more educators, as well as to disseminate the advantages of using it within their programs.

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