Respect and Obedience in the Culture of Education: A Narrative of Transformative Journey in Viewing a Lifelong Practice in Indonesia.

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Abstract

This self-narrative retells stories that attempt to make sense of my cultural practice called *salim*—kissing the hand of teachers, the elderly, and powerful people to show respect. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elucidated how narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical and unique. These stories are those I have experienced, witnessed, told, and reflected to achieve transformative learning, which refers to “questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and belief based on prior experience” (Taylor, 2009, p. 7). In Indonesian schools, students line up every morning to do *salim* to teachers, much like an assembly line. I have been conditioned to do *salim* since I was little, yet now I started to question its benign purpose. My intent is not to eliminate the practice but to create awareness among educators to see whether they have earned such respect.
Acknowledgment

No one does thing in solitary. I would not be able to do this without guidance and support that I have received.

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Dedication

To fellow educators who put their hand on top and forget to look in the eye.

We have a story to tell.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mezirow (2000) theorized how critical reflection starts with an awareness of conflicting beliefs, views, or actions that can lead to a perspective transformation. This study started with an unsettling question as I inquired about a lifelong practice in my culture that I have always taken for granted: a social and traditional cultural practice that has penetrated the education setting. To understand this practice and to make sense of it, I have recalled and relived my experiences. Thus, I will be using self-narrative inquiry which, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is a way of understanding experience. I have dared myself to look critically at an eminent practice in my country, Indonesia, that is still highly valued: a cultural practice of bowing down and kissing the hand of older people—a practice called salim. Spencer-Oatey (2012) explained that to understand a culture, it is imperative to examine the essential yet unconscious assumption behind it to determine how the society of the culture perceives, feels, and thinks. Salim is performed in social gatherings, political meetings, and education settings to show respect. I have been trained to do this my entire life, and I also instilled this practice in my children and my students. It is an expectation that salim be done without individuals being told or asked. Salim exemplifies what Dewey (1966) referred to as “unconscious influence of environment” (p. 17), subtle and pervasive in affecting people and acquired through habitual action. Ill-advisedly, as a culturally approved and highly valued practice, questioning or challenging this taken-for-granted assumption would be considered benighted (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

The challenge that I have burdened myself with now is the constant jitteriness of whether I have asked the right question. Is it appropriate for me to question a lifelong practice? However, White (2009) articulated that a critical self-narrative is a fundamental part of realizing who I am and who I want to be. Hereafter, I have to tiptoe around this issue, and I intend no disrespect to
the culture. Neisser (1994) reiterated that the search for the truth might make one a victim of overly individual determinants; thus, I have to carefully put things into perspective. It is not that I do not appreciate this practice; it is how I question what it represents in educational settings and how this gives rise to inequality in education.

This study is a self-narrative of a transformative journey in seeing my cultural practice as a subtle yet overdone act of inculcating respect. Being immersed in doing so my entire life, I reflected on Freire’s (1968) words that “every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the ‘culture of silence’ he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others” (p. 13). With this, my story begins.

The Starting Point

Every story has a beginning. As this study is a story on a transformative journey of questioning and challenging a long-held cultural practice that is still highly valued and proudly practised, before I start, I need to elaborate on the practice itself.

Living in a society and forming a community requires communication; however, many human relationships in social groups still act “upon the machine-like plane” (Dewey, 1966, p. 5). In most areas of Indonesia, as soon as babies can understand instructions, they are trained to wink their eye, wave goodbye, and do salim. Conditioned and reinforced consistently, whenever they can do salim, they are praised for being a smart baby. Whenever we encounter relatives and friends, we ask our children to do salim to them, even though they are probably never going to see these people again in the future. We are taught to do salim to show respect, yet are never asked to share what we think or how we feel. Dewey (1966) cautioned that giving and taking orders might modify action and secure useful habits, yet the individual “is trained like an animal rather than educated like a human being” (p. 13). A person may act in agreement to assimilate themselves in the group, but not necessarily agree with the action if no dialogue takes place. As a
culture, *salim* is not easily defined, but the people who share it, understand it. It is, however, a cultural practice to indoctrinate respect.

Transformative learning has social and individual implications that demand awareness of how the knowledge has been acquired and how values lead to a new perspective (Mezirow, 2012). The question leading to my transformative learning started during my field experience in a school in Ontario. I met a principal who knew all 500 students by name. Above all else, I came home with this particular fact lasting in my head. Discussing this with my daughters, the oldest one told me that in her opinion, her Indonesian principal of the last 6 years did not know her name, and she did not see the principal on daily basis. She was often chosen as the flag bearer in flag ceremonies. Flag ceremony in Indonesia is an important occasion to celebrate national events: Independence Day, Pancasila Day (Indonesia ideology), Youth Pledge Day, and many other national days. In most public schools, the ceremony is done every Monday morning. As shown in Figure 1, there are three children raising the flag; the flag bearer is in the middle holding the flag (see Figure 1). Despite being chosen often, my daughter thought her principal did not know her name. “But I think he knew my face,” she hypothesized. Her next remark was what started this study: “When I saw the principal in the hallway, I just did salim and went the other way.” This sentence bothered me. The lingering effect of her words drove me to another question: Why was it so important for her to do salim without building a connection? Why was it important for me to do it back then? It was troubling and uncomfortable to admit that I questioned the practice of a culture I was raised in. Wlodkoski explicated that people learn more at the edge of their comfort zone: their learning edge (as cited in Gravett & Petersen, 2009). This learning edge brought me to a different perspective in viewing this practice of *salim*. 
Figure 1. Flag ceremony. Source: Santoso (2017).
The Turning Point

Transformative learning experiences are mostly unsettling and threatening for learners (Gravett & Petersen, 2009). I have reviewed several articles explaining the practice of salim and have found nothing but conjecture to maintain this practice. Rachmadiana (2004) conducted a qualitative study to examine salim in different races in Indonesia. One of the interviews was done with a teacher who was observed deliberately standing in front of the school’s gate to greet students. The teacher revealed that he purposefully stood there for students to do salim to him. As the teacher noted, “I know that salim is not an indicator of students’ good character, but it is one of the ways to build a polite, gentle, and calm soul” (as cited in Rachmadiana, 2004, p. 38). In addition, this teacher stated that he wanted the students also to bow down when seeing teachers. In its conclusion, this study suggested the need to preserve the practice of salim (Rachmadiana, 2004). What bothered me was that I could not understand the underlying “why” and “how” when everyone seemed to agree, without considering its significance. To bow down and kiss someone’s hand is prescribed, expected, and a requirement. Most of all, I could not find the connection of not doing salim that would lead to a sense of disrespect. If students do not do this, and instead just wave their hands and smile, would this mean they are impolite, disrespectful, and in the end show less of good character? Why the craving of such an illusion of respect? Brookfield (2009) defined critical reflection as “the deliberate attempt to uncover, and then investigate, the paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal assumptions that inform how we practice” (pp. 125-126). Freire’s critical pedagogy suggested that education is a means to reinforce domination yet also to promote social transformation (Schugurensky, 1997, as cited in Torres, 2014). By questioning whether the purpose of salim is to dominate and instill obedience, the critical reflection in my case, advocates for social transformation.
Several weeks after the conversation with my daughter, I was perusing the education system in Indonesia for an assignment, when I accidentally read about a case of abuse that occurred in Central Java, Indonesia. Haryanto (2018) reported in an article in the *Tirto* online newspaper about a student who hit a teacher and caused the teacher’s death. The teacher was an art teacher in a public high school in Sampang, Central Java, who had a remarkable review as a young multitalented teacher. Before the event, the student was not paying attention during the teaching session, and the teacher came to him and marked his cheek with a paintbrush as a warning. Angry and insulted, the student yelled to the teacher to which the teacher responded by hitting him with an attendance-list paper. Intensified with emotion, the student hit the teacher back, on the head. Later that day, while at home, the teacher became weaker and was taken to the hospital. Within 1 hour in the hospital, he was pronounced dead due to nerve damage. All articles in other newspapers reported the same glowing recommendations of the teacher. None talked about how the teacher initiated the argument with a demeaning action towards the student.

Responding to abusive cases that have emerged in Indonesia, many articles reported comments from the President, Ministry of Education, law and justice enforcers, educators, and psychologists. In one of the articles, the previous Chief Justice of Constitutional Court remarked how this abusive case was a sign of decaying morality in education that happened due to the influence of foreign culture and globalization, and that most students were less respectful to teachers compared to students in the past (Puspita, 2018). In another article in *Tirto* online, the President of Indonesia commented how students should be technology savvy, yet alert to foreign content that was not appropriate for Indonesian culture (Saputri, 2018). The underlying themes were respect, morality, and modernized culture.
Investigating this, I questioned educators in Ontario, as representatives of so-called foreign culture, asking whether cases of students abusing teachers ever took place. Ontario’s educators claimed no abuse cases conducted by students ever happened as far as their knew, which brought me to question whether foreign culture was not to blame. Thus, the dialogues with other Ontario educators invoked critical reflection, where “experience is reflected, assumptions and belief are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). In retrospect, I replayed the words of the previous Chief Justice of Constitutional Court how most students were less respectful to teachers. Hasn’t respect been forced through salim?

As reported by Setiawan (2017) in an article for the National Commission for Children Protection (KPAI), the data derived from the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) regarding statistics of violence showed that out of 100 students, 84 admitted having experienced violence in Indonesian schools from teachers, staff, or other students. This high number (84%) puts Indonesia on the top of the list within Asia, above Vietnam (79%), Nepal (79%), Cambodia (73%), and Pakistan (43%). From the data, it could be seen that 45% of male students and 22% of female students claimed an act of violence by teachers or school officers. With this amount of violence, how could teachers expect students to respect them? I felt apprehension wondering if the emerging cases of teacher abuse were signs of struggle. These students were asked to bow down and kiss the hand of teachers who not only did not reciprocate such respect but also had been oppressing them.

Questioning salim, which has been a long-standing practice and an implanted value since I was in the nursery was disruptive, yet awakening. I was never asked if I wanted to do salim to others, and I never asked if my daughters or my students wanted to do it. However, it should be a choice. Why the excessive need to be respected? Respect is not something that is taken for
granted; it should be earned. Moreover, someone who is giving respect should consciously realize the purpose in doing so, and not be controlled in doing it. “Plato defined a slave as one who accepts from another the purposes which control his conduct” (Dewey, 1966, p. 85); however, the giver and receiver of salim might not agree with this illustration. The victim of injustice would prefer not to admit to be one unless conscientizacao as conscious critical learning has taken place (Freire, 1968).

From discourse and reflective analysis assignments on theories, articles, and cases in my graduate study at Brock University, a critical awareness was triggered to reflect on this salim practice which none of my instructors were familiar with. Events that I have experienced brought this awareness and resulted in my independent and autonomous thinking, which Mezirow (2000) believed should be both the goal and method of adult education. This critical consciousness might be argued to lead to disorder and anarchy, however some people believe that critical consciousness offers the opportunity to no longer fear freedom (Freire, 1968). I admitted the appalling idea of being judged of promoting disorder in Indonesian society went hand-in-hand with the desire to promote freedom of choice in conducting salim in educational settings. Regardless, a transformative journey began questioning this practice in the hope of creating a more powerful future pedagogical stance (White, 2009).

**Research Focus**

Students in uniforms enter the school gate in the morning, lining up to do salim to the teachers on duty. Like an assembly line in a factory, each student moves their hand to grab a teacher’s hand, put it in their forehand, and then grab another teacher’s hand until they reach the end of the line (see Figure 2). The scene of salim that takes place in schools is quick: 1 second to kiss one hand. Depending on how many on-duty teachers the school has on that day, if it is a special day the line may be long.
Figure 2. Kissing the hand of teachers (salim) in elementary school. Source: Ulasan-ulasan gambar 2.1-2.10 (2016).
Dewey (1966) explained a child sticking a finger into flame would not be considered an experience, unless such movement is connected with the pain felt afterwards. In this sense, taking a hand to be kissed without connecting the action to any consequence would not be an experience. Dewey (1966) reminded us that we learn through experience, yet a mere activity would not necessarily constitute experience.

The focus of this research is to question the practice of *salim* in educational settings. It is an important part of the life of learners, as they are expected to do so to respect teachers. I did this to my teachers and adults around me, and I asked my students and children to do the same. It was not until I came to Canada that I started to see things from a different perspective. The aim of education should be to awaken thinking and create one's own meaning (Greene, 1973), and through my education here, I began to understand the meaning of *salim* for me, which challenged my frame of reference. A frame of reference is an assumption and expectation, and a result in interpreting experience which could shape preferences and limit our focus (Mezirow, 2000, 2012). This frame of reference is transformed once a person starts to critically reflect on a problem and redefine it (Mezirow, 2009). In the process of redefining this act of *salim* within educational settings, I asked myself a series of questions that Tripp (1993) used as a technique to analyze incidents as critical. Thus, I arrived at my research questions:

1. What is the nature of the student–teacher relationship gained from this practice of *salim*?
2. Is this tradition that I have practised my whole life creating detachment rather than building attachment, hindering the sincerity of student–teacher relations?
3. If the tradition were abolished, would the teachers work harder to build meaningful relations with their students?
4. Is it the ultimate goal of Indonesian education to create a community of obedience?
5. Are the emerging cases of abusive students toward teachers a sign of struggle due to the oppression?
Purpose and Significance of the Study

Boyd (1991) identified two steps towards personal transformation: “making public, primarily for ourselves, the historical dimensions of our dilemma” and ”confronting it as a difficulty to be worked through” (p. 198). Having gone through a critical reflection of a treasured belief and questioning a taken-for-granted socio-cultural practice is a challenging process, and the final step of this transformative learning is to write this study. Freedom within transformative learning involves more than insight or an idea of change; it requires the power to act upon the purpose (Mezirow, 2012).

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it serves as a crucible for my critical reflection, as explained by Brookfield (2009): “no matter how much we may think we have an accurate sense of ourselves, we are using our own interpretive filters” (p. 133). Thus, this self-narrative is the lens to reflect. Tripp (1993) discovered that though at first critical incidents are argued to be for teachers’ own use, they are believed to be useful to be recorded to enlighten others as well. Second, this narrative serves to explain transformative learning that has occurred through critical reflection on a highly valued cultural practice. Transformative learning is a process that changes our taken-for-granted assumptions to make them more inclusive and justifiable (Mezirow, 2000). Though most Indonesian people and educators would defend maintaining this practice, I take a stand to question the benign purpose of this practice in school settings and to ask other educators to critically view it as well. The third purpose is to awaken educators to the oppressive situation arising from something that has been prescribed and to ask educators to reflect whether their actions have contributed to the emerging struggle of students. Most of all, the purpose of this study is to help educators and students realize that it is not a sufficient reason to do something, just because you have done it your entire life, particularly if the action serves no purpose and meaning, or worse is a demeaning action. Education is, after all, to assist human to adjust in the environment and to reshape it as he lives (Dewey, 1966).
Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study is the transformative journey from the oppressed, the oppressor, and then a liberated human being as explored through a personal narrative. Not once had I critiqued this practice of *salim*. All my life, I have given respect to people I might not have respected sincerely. Having such freedom to choose who to respect being taken away is dehumanizing. Freire (1968) explained how it would be an oppressive act to prevent someone from being fully human. This practice of *salim* is merely a symbol of oppression in education that hampers a healthy relationship between teacher and student. Nonetheless, for years, I was both the oppressed and oppressor. As most middle-class oppressed, Freire (1968) had predicted that I would want to imitate the oppressor. Thus, I have put my hands on top and waited for my students to take it and put in their forehead, yet at the same time, I still did *salim* to my parents’ friends, people in higher positions, and older people. My work as an educator included teaching teachers in urban or rural areas. I am ashamed to say that some people who had kissed my hand were older than I was. They perceived themselves as lower in class, power, status, or intelligence. Admitting I felt agitated at times, not feeling comfortable to be adulated, especially by other adults or peers, nevertheless, I did not pull my hand away. When I asked my daughters or students to do it to those they hardly knew, I became the oppressor too—I was dehumanized, too. The pressure of not following the approved guidelines in our culture was petrifying. Transformative learning is about exposing socio-cultural and prescribed assumptions, and provoking a refusal of domination (Tennant, 1998, as cited in Mezirow, 2012), hence I have to explain what this prescribed assumption of *salim* is in Indonesia. For a better understanding of the phenomenon, I will also elaborate on the Indonesian culture and education system.

As a social convention in Indonesia, not doing *salim* may not lead to punishment but may result in a frown. *Salim* is an enforced practice in the Indonesian education system regardless of
religion, race, or class; it is, however, a particular cultural practice that may not be practised in other countries, which thus becomes the limitation of this study. Still, the stories included in this self-narrative help to define and to explain *salim*, which is only a symbol leading to another layer of segregation.

Ochs and Capps (2001) reminded us how narratives are versions of reality, thus no such thing as a true story exists. The use of “I” in narratives is highly subjective and also calls for an alert of what might not be told (Kermode, 1998, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Patai (1993) warned how the act of storytelling includes rationalization and projection of one's point of view (as cited in Guerrero, 2011). As this narrative is from my perspective, the possible limitation would be to unconsciously not incorporate some relevant stories.

**Methodology**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) justified how narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. As this study incorporates personal experiences that I have faced and witnessed directly or indirectly, the weaving of a subjective sense of justification calls for a narrative inquiry. This narrative will give an account of what I have learned about a specific phenomenon, and how I articulated the personal interest to a broader social-cultural perspective. The narrative inquiry used here integrates stories about myself and others that I have encountered throughout my transformative learning, from identifying *salim* as a taken-for-granted practice to question its hidden agenda in an education system. This is a study of life which I am inclined to explore through my narrating experiences, as Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) emphasized that “our stories are narratives of events in our lives” (p. 35). Learning from life would also fit Dewey’s (1966) description of “the finest product of schooling” (p. 51).

Substantial learning can emerge from reflection on one’s lived experience as well as through witnessing others’ experiences enacted (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009). In this study,
past conversations that I have conducted with others would be treated as part of my critical awakening. In the perspective of Guerrero (2011), narrative is a system of understanding what we construct and give meaning to daily. Thus, this narrative explains how those past conversations constructed my sense of understanding. To simplify, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative inquiry as “stories lived and told” (p. 20).

There are no designated interviews conducted for this study, and most conversations happened casually before the intention of writing this paper. Regardless, “the process of storytelling is one of reflective unmasking that involves choosing what will be left in the story and will be left out” (Tyler, 2009, p. 143); therefore, as much as I have tried to be as accurate and thorough, I realize the possibility of unconsciously overlooking some details. Consciously, I chose which incidents to tell: those that would not be harmful to anyone. All subjects engaged throughout the transformative journey will not be given any identifiers; therefore, the risk of re-identifying them is very low. Likewise, job titles/positions or venues are not specified, unless those publicly accessible.

**Theoretical Framework**

Freire’s (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is crucial to this study. Throughout my starting point and turning point looking at salim from a different perspective, I was preoccupied with questions. The problem-posing question that empowers people through questioning was the one that led to this critical reflection (Freire, 1968). Most of my experiences in schooling had suppressed the need to ask questions. In most Indonesian culture, teachers are the ones with knowledge and power while students are not, thus embodying the banking model proposed by Freire (1968). This teacher–student segregation is symbolized by salim. I was dumbfounded that I had not queried the practice sooner. Portraying teachers as powerful persons to be bowed down
to and be hand-kissed leads students feeling self-depreciated. Nonetheless, this is internalized by students as the oppressed (Freire, 1968).

The practice of *salim* that has been internalized is, therefore, taken for granted. Without considering whether a true relationship is capable of being built, this practice serves its purpose: to respect and obey. Not doing *salim* would mean no punishment, but the fear of not doing it is existent. This practice of *salim* is requested to be done by learners, and not doing so would be considered as disrespectful, impolite, and perceived as a sign of insubordination. The lack of choice means not moving individuals toward their ontological vocation to be the subjects who act upon their world (Freire, 1968). Doing *salim* as an “oughtness,” closely linked to the meaning of “good,” is seen by some people as spontaneous, while others might perceive it as deontological (Greene, 1973). The deontological assumes that “the rightness of human actions is determined not by their accomplishments but by the degree to which they are in accord with a preexistent principle or rule” (Greene, 1973, p. 221).

Regardless, Indonesian society and most educators would be the defenders of this practice, as will be revealed in Chapter 4 of this study. The term *conscientizacao* introduced by Freire (1968) referred to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradiction, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 19). Freire (1968) warned against the confusion of freedom with maintenance of the status quo, and *conscientizacao* that would be seen as a threat of freedom. Hence, most people would not question *salim*. Things are better the way they are: doing *salim* is not an onerous task, and there is no imminent threat to lives. Why change the situation that leads toward discomfort?

Most appallingly, another question came to mind when reading about emerging cases of abuse toward teachers. Associating these cases with my prevalent question on the purpose of
“salim,” Freire’s (1968) warning of struggle from the oppressed became the linchpin. For a long time, these students were prevented from being fully human, and in Freire’s (1968) words “sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so” (p. 28). This practice of salim should serve as a means of building a relationship; to meet every morning before class starts should thus build a harmonious student–teacher relationship. Reflecting on this, I recalled how many times this salim led to a conversation. Mostly, it was a quick act which at times did not even include eye-contact. To no one’s surprise, sometimes the teachers were busy talking to one another while their hands went up and down, grabbed by students in autopilot motion. This robot-like act stole the humanity of the students. As warned by Freire (1968), “any attempt to treat men as semi-humans only dehumanizes them” (p. 53).

**Chapter Conclusion**

As I have lived my life doing salim without given a choice, I consider myself the oppressed, then the oppressor, and in many occasions both. Until several months ago, I still expected my daughters, students, younger relatives, and acquaintances to kiss my hand and bow down to me. Similarly, I still did it to my parents’ friends whom I had just met and would probably never meet again, older mentors, and teachers. The phase from oppressed turning into the sub-oppressor was mentioned by Freire (1968), expressed by my blind acceptance of and immersion in this practice into my life without thinking critically. I could not agree more that such critical thinking started from discomfort, followed by continuous questioning, and how it gave me a new set of eyes. Therefore, this narrative serves as a method of subjective reframing which includes critical self-reflection of one’s belief and assumption (Mezirow, 2000).

According to Mezirow (2012), human development through transformative learning depends on their values related to social justice, freedom, and education. As such, my
transformative learning narrated in this study will reveal my values. The following chapter explores the literature to support this narrative. Initially, the literature review introduces purpose of education. Prior to discussing about theories on related to transformative learning, I will briefly explain Tripp’s critical incidents theory. I continue with theories on disorienting dilemma and dissonance to elaborate my transformative journey that led me to question this practice, and lastly closing Chapter 2 with how I view this practice through critical pedagogy. Chapter 3 includes methodology explaining about narrative and stories, data and analysis. The fourth chapter will address research questions proposed in Chapter 1, starting with a discussion about culture and Indonesian education reform, then by narrating stories that I have experienced, witnessed, read, and told. The final chapter of this study includes a discussion, conclusion, and suggestions.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As this chapter reviews relevant literature to support this narrative, I start with the universal question on the purpose of education. This chapter also discusses how despite being submerged in doing salim for as long as I could remember and as a devotee of this practice, I could achieve the ultimate goal of education: critical awareness and autonomy of thinking. My transformative learning to ask the purpose of salim came through reflection of incidents that I have experienced leading to cognitive dissonance and disorienting dilemma. To explain my perspective in viewing salim, I incorporate critical pedagogy and theory related to social conformity and obedience, which I believe mirrored why most people are doing this cultural practice.

Purpose of Education

The main purpose of schooling has involved a long-standing debate: to be an agent of change or to preserve and transmit culture (Taba, 1962). Schooling is perceived as a process in initiating pupils to think and behave in accordance to the characteristics of the culture where they were born (Greene, 1973). The materials that constitute the curriculum of a school are derived from society, and the society determines what types of individuals are needed (Taba, 1962).

“Dewey understands education should be transformative and transformational, subjective and powerfully influential on the social context (Rennick, 2015, p. 74). As education and society are closely related, it is subtly conveyed that the power of education is to deal with problems in society and culture (Taba, 1962). As paradoxical as it may seem that culture needs to be preserved but also produces problems, it is crucial to be able to critically view culture. Dewey (1966) claimed habituation is an adjustment without concern for changing and modifying the social environment; thus, the process of adjustment leverages the active sense of habit and becomes a passive learning experience. Greene (1973) generated a profound question of whether
education should guide these learners into a deficient and sick culture; in other words, “if the community is clearly unjust and inequitable, should not the educator be concerned primarily with social change?” (p. 4). Evidently, nothing is “culture free,” however people should not merely “mirrors of their culture” (Bruner, 1996, p. 14), particularly without constructing their own interpretation and understanding. Thus, it would not be sufficient to only maintain the taken-for-granted habit, because it has always been there. As Dewey (1966) argued, it is necessary to produce new habits for a progressive and democratic society, and Greene (1973) challenged reasons in persisting on keeping a declining culture alive. The role of education would, therefore, be an attempt to shape experiences that would not rely on reproducing current habits, yet also develop better habits for improvement on future society (Dewey, 1928, as cited in Taba, 1962). Education should act in a sense that an individual has freedom for critical thinking and for creating own meanings (Greene, 1973), which “gives individuals a personal interest in social relationship and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (Dewey, 1966, p. 99).

According to Eisner (1979), education, schooling, and learning are three different things, and what is included in the notion of educational learning would always be in question. Dewey’s perspectives on three types of experiences in education are educational, miseducational, and noneducational, with the latter defined as experiences undergone without creating impact (Eisner, 1979). In discussing the aim of education, Dewey (1966) reminded us that only individuals have aims, not an abstract idea like education. Consequently, the purposes of the pupils would be invariably different, and it is vital to see how these aims serve not as aims but as suggestions for educators to look at, to observe, and to choose the most liberating strategy for learners (Dewey, 1966). Whitehead (1967) argued, “education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all things, harmful—corruptio optimi, pessima” (p. 2). Educating by simply
duplicating culture and creating habit without motivating and activating thinking would be voiding, or worse: destructive.

**Tripp’s Critical Incidents**

My transformative learning happened through reflection on several incidents over the past year. Tripp (1993) formulated how most of these critical incidents come across as typical at first and become critical through further analysis. These incidents were not dramatic or major, and they were mostly the things that happened daily, unnoticed at the time, but became critical once seen through a critical lens (Tripp, 1993); these incidents stimulated my need to inquire how the routines operate and why. Typical incidents according to Tripp are those expected, as they always happened. *Salim* as a governing cultural practice in social and education settings falls in the category of typical incident. My blind assumption at the time was the religious concept behind *salim*, even when Indonesia acknowledges five religions. With Muslims as the majority of society in Indonesia, I assumed the non-Muslim society does this *salim* and follows along only as a courtesy. Tripp (1993) suggested ways to notice critical incidents, and one of them is analyzing the incident by forcing a question: “Is this what I’m looking for or not?” (p. 35), while another way is comparing what is typical and atypical. This *salim* became an atypical incident when I went on my pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and noticed no one did it even after praying. The atypical incidents are those unique events and exceptions that trigger questions of why it did not happen as expected (Tripp, 1993). From this moment, I realized it was not a religious but instead a cultural practice. Yet, I did not challenge the practice of *salim* at the time.

Tripp (1993) suggested the following four approaches in analyzing incidents to determine critical events: (a) thinking strategies, (b) the *why?* challenge, (c) dilemma identification, and (d) personal theory analysis.
Thinking Strategies

Tripp (1993) started with thinking strategies to challenge our habit in thinking and to do so by thinking about what he called non-events: “The fact that one thing has happened always meant that some other things have not happened” (p. 44). When I started realizing how a particular principal in Ontario knew all students’ names, I started to question why it did not happen in Indonesia throughout my or my daughters’ school years. What happened was salim, and what did not happen was the conversation and the relationship. Tripp (1993) elaborated on Bono’s CoRT Thinking program and ended with the importance of reworking the critical thinking to find out what was left out and to see what could be generated.

The Why? Challenge

The constant asking of why could be exhausting, and as Tripp (1993) reminded us that it would not go on forever but might occur for a long time before realizing one of these two: normative or reification. During my far-reaching questions of why, I ended up with the normative and prescribed notion of salim, but still with the question of why it mattered as much.

Dilemma Identification

As mentioned earlier, I have had incidents where I wanted to withdraw my hands, but I did not. The dilemma was whether by doing so I would offend the person who wished to kiss my hand, or whether he would be pleased. In retrospect, I realized the dilemma had always been there without my appreciating it.

Personal Theory Analysis

The personal theory referred to by Tripp (1993) was the belief underlying actions in the material world. In analyzing a critical incident, my belief was always in appreciating a student as a person, thus my protest would be the idea of undermining the position of students.
Cognitive Dissonance, Transformative Learning, and Disorienting Dilemma

According to Sharp (1995), education should give contribution to growth of consciousness as we develop only by choosing our own way. A study conducted by Mitchell and Paras (2018) exploring the occurrence of the intercultural learning of international students indicated a relation between cognitive dissonance resolution styles and intercultural competence resulted from written reflections assignments requiring students to relate their experiences, and how the cognitive dissonance and discomfort often related to how transformative learning started. The catalyst of transformative learning is personal discomfort or dilemma (Mezirow, 2000). Disorientation has been argued by educators as a portal for deep learning (Mitchell & Paras, 2018). As my transformative learning to challenge a cultural practice I once highly valued happened during my study in Ontario, Maertz, Hassan, and Magnusson (2009) pointed out that internal conflict in values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural norms often resulted from expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment.

Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

The theory of cognitive dissonance proposed by Festinger (1957) has a central idea of how belief and attitude could be imbalanced and would change a person’s belief until becoming balanced. Cognitive dissonance is a condition when two elements of belief and/or behaviour are in a dissonant or inharmonious state (Brewer & Crano, 1994). The core of Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance is that cognitive dissonance existed within cognition (belief, attitude, value) or between cognition and action, and how this inconsistency creates an unpleasant feeling which could be reduced through a change of behaviour (Brewer & Crano, 1994). For dissonance to occur, it requires a situation that had inconsistencies of belief and action, along with minimal pressure and minimal justification. Not conducting salim has no severe punishment in effect. The pressure is minimal: a negative label or disapproval. For me as a parent, if my daughters did not
do so, I would feel scrutinized by others. This *salim* is evidence of cognitive dissonance: minimal pressure yet minimal justification. I had no justification why I had to do so for the people I had just met and would never meet again, and I gave no rationalization for those doing it to me. Theory of cognitive dissonance relies on the limited pressure and justification. It would be easier to explain why we do something if somebody put a gun to our heads; a cognitive dissonance happens because we do something without really understanding why.

As cognitive dissonance emerges from the conflict in beliefs and behaviour, external environment with past beliefs (Mitchell & Paras, 2018), dissonance would create an arousing and unpleasant state (Brewer & Crano, 1994). Nevertheless, though people avoid it, they also seek it out as it results in stimulation of interest and curiosity (Deutsch & Krauss, 1965). Festinger (1964) posited that “once a decision is made, however, and dissonance-reduction processes begin, one should be able to observe that the differences in attractiveness between the alternative change, increasing in favor of the chosen alternative” (pp. 8-9). The emerging discomfort would drive a person to use a psychological strategy leading to a change of attitude (Cooper, 2007, as cited in Mitchell & Paras, 2018). Thus, after the disharmony in belief, I came to see the negative aspects of *salim*.

Maertz et al. (2009) listed several cognitive strategies in an attempt to resolve cognitive dissonance: value/belief/attitude/norms modification; perception modification; self-affirmation; rationalization; confession-redemption; and host rejection. Although this study of cognitive dissonance strategy is related to acculturation in an expatriate’s experiences, I reflected some of these strategies in my experience as well.

**Values/Beliefs/Attitudes/Norms Modification**

This modification is commonly referred to as attitude change. The dissonance between my belief of freedom in choosing who to respect and my personal value of equality in an
education setting, became consonant again with a change of attitude: that is, not doing salim unless I wanted to. It is a personal freedom to which I am entitled.

**Perception Modification**

Maertz et al. (2009) examined the change of perception in expatriates when questioning a new culture in a social context and a change of perception in looking at one’s own cultural context. A changing of perception for me was how I view the overriding education purpose in my home country to achieve obedience and respect exemplified through bowing down and salim.

(1) Self-affirmation and rationalization

The reflection of critical incidents I have encountered based on others’ stories and events that I witnessed including observation and stories of strained teacher-student relationships, served as my rationalization and justification to question salim. This is a strategy of adding reasoning to justify the inconsistency creating dissonance (Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009).

**Transformative Learning and Disorientating Dilemmas**

In order to understand transformative learning, it is pertinent to comprehend a frame of reference. As Mezirow (2000) explained, a frame of reference represents a cultural paradigm that is given by primary caregivers; thus, we tend to embrace it. This was salim for me, and for others in our culture. We see ourselves very much related to this value; thus, we did not see what would be harmful about it. Phases of meaning in transformative learning proposed by Mezirow (2000) often followed variations of the following:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition of one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options

6. Planning a course of action

7. Acquiring knowledge and skills

8. Provisional trying new roles

9. Building competence and self-confidence

10. A reintegration

Rennick (2015) suggested that a foreign learning environment offered an opportunity to test substantially predetermined ideas and values, leading to transformative learning. My dilemma started in Ontario when I began to see how certain things did not bear scrutiny. When I asked myself why doing salim is mandated, I could not find an answer that would satisfy me. After the mixed feelings generated by this question, my critical reflection was built from learning about the emerging cases of abusive students and acquiring knowledge behind these actions. Mezirow (2012) acknowledged the emotional aspect of transformative learning and how the subjective reframing is an “intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumption undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional response to the need to change” (pp. 75-76). Through my new role of challenging this practice, I asked people if they understood the need to do salim, and most answers were a simple reply: “To respect” and “It has always been like that”—or worse “Just do it; it doesn’t hurt you.” These answers and responses served as the discourses that challenged my critical reflection, and “in the absence of fixed truths and confronted with often rapid change in circumstances, we cannot fully trust what we know or believe” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 74). I started to critically link one event to another, to see things from a different point of view with many “what ifs,” and most of all, I started to question whether the segregation between student and teacher was a result of the
cultural belief behind salim. This study is the result of the haunting effect of these unanswered queries. Cohen and Piper (2000) explained that the position of not knowing encourages critical reflection, and Brookfield (2000) stated that an act becomes transformative “only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering how one thinks and acts” (p. 139).

Transformative learning is defined as “the process by which we tacitly construe our beliefs may involve taking-for-granted values, stereotyping, highly selective attention, limited comprehension, projection, rationalization, minimizing, or denial” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 23). I have mentioned how salim was and is still highly valued in Indonesia, and how I have been raised to do so without being explained to. Without critical reflections, I would still take this practice for granted. Transformative learning is the journey of how I question the nature of salim, particularly in educational settings.

Learning occurred in one of these four ways: elaborating existing frames of references, learning new frames of references, transforming points of view, or transforming habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000). Frames of reference, habits of the mind, and points of view are influenced by social and cultural contexts, expressed through value and belief systems, and changed through critical reflection discourse (Mezirow, 2012). Critical reflection is a measured endeavour in discovering and exploring prescriptive assumptions (Brookfield, 1995, 2009). Having an experience is not enough to experience transformation; it should be a result of reflection leading to the intellectual growth and independent thinking (Criticos, 1993; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Lange (2009) explained one of the assumptions of transformative learning is about challenging worldviews and implying that the society and individual are both improvable.

Mezirow (1991) categorized three reflections on experiences leading to transformative learning: (a) content reflection, which is thinking about the actual experience itself; (b) process
reflection, which is how to handle experience; and (c) premise reflection, which involves examination of long-held, social constructed beliefs and values about an experience. Premise reflection could be assumptions on self (narrative), the cultural systems where we live (systemic), workplace (organizational), ethical decisions, or feelings and disposition (Mezirow, 1998, as cited in Merriam, 2004). Frames of references may be highly personal, or a shared value in which transformative learning serves to solve problem by reframing it and transforming habits of minds involves critically reflecting on the premises and questioning validity of the assumptions (Mezirow, 2000).

*Salim* as a premise reflection started with a dilemma of the assumption of cultural system and self, and when the questions arose on the underlying purpose of this practice, transformative learning was activated. Transformative learning always includes critical reflection on distorted premises behind what is expected (Mezirow, 1991); however, critical reflection is not merely evaluation of prescriptive assumptions, it has to have a specific purpose in human’s life: power and hegemony (Brookfield, 2009). In the end, the goal of transformative learning would be “greater autonomy in thinking” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 29). Siegal (1990) described a liberated person as someone free from undesirable control of unjustified beliefs preventing one from being in command of one’s own life (as cited in Mezirow, 2000). The autonomy of thinking referred to here would be defined as a skill and competence acquired from transformative learning which appears as the result of personal and social aspects; thus, it postulates the ability to be informed on choices through dialogical critical reflections (Basseches, 1984; Mezirow, 2000).

**Critical Pedagogy**

Whitehead (1967) claimed two vital aspects of education: freedom and discipline. Discipline is not the antithesis of freedom; instead, discipline should be voluntarily and a free
choice, while freedom is the enhancement of discipline. *Salim* being consistently navigated in learners’ lives becomes a discipline, a sense of order, and an act of complying. Was it performed of their own accord? Moreover, was there ever another choice? Freire was adamant how education for development would mean allowing learners to discuss their problems without fear (Torres, 2014). Education serves as a practice of freedom, in contrast with a practice of domination (Freire, 1968). Both educator and students need to learn from one another and convey more equitable relationships through communication and meaningful dialogue. An equitable relationship would be in question as symbolized by *salim* and bowing down to teachers.

Education in relation to culture assumes one of these roles: to prohibit or liberate consciousness (Torres, 2014). When the relationship between teacher and student mirrors the prescriptive behaviour of the oppressed and oppressor pointed out by Freire (1968), education serves the first role to disallow consciousness from emerging. Freire’s (1968) pedagogy of the oppressed acts as a medium for critical discovery, to come to an understanding that both the oppressed as well as the oppressor are “manifestations of dehumanization” (p. 33). Humanization is negated by oppression, injustice, exploitation, and violence, which imminently lead the oppressed to struggle.

An act is oppressive if it prevents a person from being fully human (Freire, 1968); thus, if the students willingly and voluntarily do *salim* on account of truest respect they have for teachers, they are acting freely, and of their own choice, the act is not being forced upon them. Nonetheless, in praxis, a choice is not purely optional, but very much related to what is perceived as normal; thus, making a choice is always in the context of socially acknowledged rules, codes, and norms (Greene, 1973), particularly in education settings where teachers are the elite and the authority.
Student–Teacher Relationship

In analyzing this relationship, Freire (1968) illustrated teachers as the ones giving knowledge, while students are alienated and ignored, thus justifying the existence of teachers as the knowledgeable ones. Dewey (1966) criticized the nonsense of even discussing the aims of education if teachers are still dictating to students. In Freire’s (1968) terms, the relation of student and teacher mimic those of depositories and depositor (of knowledge). A critic towards pedagogy, therefore, is an effort to deskill and dismantle the authority of teachers (Giroux, 2007). Freire (1968) listed schooling that represents an oppressive society:

1. The teacher teaches, and the students are taught.
2. The teacher knows everything, and the students know nothing.
3. The teacher thinks, and the students are thought about.
4. The teacher talks, and the students listen.
5. The teacher disciplines, and the students are disciplined.
6. The teacher chooses and enforces choice as the students comply.
7. The teacher acts, and the students have the illusion of acting through actions of teacher.
8. The teacher chooses the content, and the students adapt to it.
9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority and set opposition to the freedom of students.
10. The teacher is the subject of the learning process while students are merely objects.

As modern education is preoccupied with obedience over authority, “rote memorization, and what Freire called the ‘banking concept’ of education, in which learned teachers deposit knowledge into passive students, inculcating conformity, subordination, and normalization” (Kellner, 2004, pp. 10-11). The more deposits of knowledge made by teachers, the less critical
thinking happened to transform their world. This notion of banking education posited by Freire (1968) results in reduced creativity of students, as he emphasized that “teacher cannot think for his students, nor can he impose his thought on them” (p. 64). With this in mind, treating learners as a blank slate would be dehumanizing.

*Salim* which has been reinforced throughout a learner’s life, was not once challenged. Instead, it becomes somewhat a programmed act which fits neatly to what is expected by society. As *salim* aligned well with the aim of the oppressor to dominate, it rests in how well-fitted they are in the world of created by the oppressor, and how little they question it (Freire, 1968).

Without realizing, the learners are rapidly immersed into the world of doing *salim* as a required, expected, and a way to fit it. It serves the purpose of cultural invasion as the invaders mould and choose, while those they invaded are moulded and follow the choice (Freire, 1968). *Salim* successfully becomes a part of learners’ lives, as the teachers are able to convince them to intrinsically believe in it, and the more they are invaded, the more they want to be like the invaders (Freire, 1968). Though the oppressed voluntarily gives their hand to practice *salim*, they do not have the critical awareness of doing such, and in Greene’s (1973) words, “children are brainwashed by a social machine not interested in persons, except to man and aggrandize itself” (p. 62). Freire (1968) reminded us that a decision that occurs outside of a person’s awareness offers little but the illusion of deciding.

Identifying violence with power suggested that humans live in a command-obedience relationship, and in such relationship, it would not matter if one is a tyrant or a slave, as the ability to define oneself as a free person is submerged (Greene, 1973). Weiner (2007) elaborated that despite being furious about oppression, some might not push the need for equity as it might lead to their privilege being taken from them. “Struggle begins with men’s recognition that they
have been destroyed” (Freire, 1968, p. 55). Hereafter, the struggle of liberation should come from the oppressed and violence begins with the oppressor (Freire, 1968).

_Salim_ as an act is not the primary concern in this study, as it is an accessory to a deeper social issue of segregation, inequality, and forced obedience in education. The overarching obedience over authority opens the door for abuse, as another form of oppression. The cases of violence acted by students were triggered by the mistreatment by teachers. Without treating _salim_ as a means towards a meaningful conversation and effort to build relationship, this act demonstrates daily abuse of power that includes belittling and patronizing actions which are perceived as “harmless.” Freire (1968) predicted that despite being passive, “little by little, however, they tend to try out forms of rebellious action” (p. 51); thus, a critical society should promote dialogue for liberation and shout “let us carry out reforms before the people carry out a revolution” (p. 161).

**A Humanized Education**

Undoubtedly, “education is not neutral, but that does not mean it is merely a form of indoctrination” (Giroux, 2007, p. 2). Freire and Faundez (1989) revealed how the curiosity of students could shake the confidence of teachers, yet also enable teachers to see a new perspective and arrive at critical reflection themselves. Banking education serves as the barrier in the pursuit of liberation towards being fully human (Freire, 1968). Learning translates as a shared practice between teacher and student and may result in the development of students’ critical consciousness, where teachers abandon their role as a depositor and start to become the co-creator of knowledge (Freire, 1968; Hansman & Wright, 2009).

Education as praxis should function as problem-posing, which according to Freire (1968), is a situation that offers the development of the ability to critically perceive “the way they exist
in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world as not a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 71). Unfortunately, Freire and Faundez (1989) admitted that questions had been forgotten in the teaching process, both by teachers as well as students. On the contrary, pedantic teaching which reinforces and convinces learners what they have known and done prior to coming to the classroom would be seen as the opposite of critical teaching, not because no learning occurs, but because little unlearning is conducted (Weiner, 2007). The behaviour of teachers as oppressors was seen by Freire (1968) as prescribed and safe, thus only allowing for the width of content of knowledge within what has been prepared by teachers. For this reason, Freire (1968) explained how instead of communication, teachers prefer making deposits of knowledge and students accept the deposits. A banking approach largely avoids any elements of surprises in teaching.

Most often, teachers serve the system blindly and render learners into vain human beings without hope of achieving freedom and independent thinking (Greene, 1973). Taking this into account, teachers become objects of dehumanization, playing their roles as servants of a fallible system. Those in the banking approach of education view students as devoid of knowledge, and they do not realize that they teach to dehumanize, thus would never stimulate critical conscious of the world (Freire, 1968).

Teaching should be purposeful, and to be effective, teachers could not function according to predetermined rules (Greene, 1973). The attempt towards a humanized education should have faith that “no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught” (Freire, 1968, p. 67). The process of teaching and learning is then no longer owned by teachers; it is co-shared. The idea of a shared responsibility in teaching and learning allows equivalent power and mutual respect. Dialogue plays a vital role in humanizing education. Taylor (2009) posited that the sense of dialogue
builds trust that helps identify the transition towards knowing and meaning-making. True dialogue leading to critical reflection requires thinking which views reality as a process and transformation, instead of a static entity (Freire, 1968). Critical reflection serves to challenge hegemonic assumptions that are embraced unquestionably despite their poor impact, and its focus is always to analyze a shared value and practice in the degree of how “they perpetuate economic inequity, deny compassion, foster a culture of silence, and prevent people from realizing a sense of common connectedness” (Brookfield, 2009, p. 127).

Freire’s (1968) notion of problem-posing education towards humanizing could not serve the interest of the oppressor, as no oppressive situation would allow the oppressed to start asking questions leading to critical thinking. Human beings, if challenged to a certain degree, have the capability to reflect on their very existence and to discover themselves, even if their thinking is superficial and naïve (Freire, 1968). Dialogue substitutes authority and prescription with ambiguity and uncertainty (Freire, 1968); learners would then declare ownership of knowledge resulted from the raised questions and enter into dialogue. Freire (1968) emphasized the substantial value of the process of “producing and acting upon their ideas-not consuming those of others” (p. 100). Encouraging questioning and not having all the answers might disrupt the confidence of teachers who are used to become masters of knowing. Notwithstanding, doing the opposite negates knowledge as a process of inquiry, and the inequality that occurs from teacher as master and student as slave relationship offers little discovery of a fact that students actually educate the teacher (Freire, 1968).

The relation between the oppressed and the oppressor exists in the form of dialectical; without the oppressed, the oppressor could not exist (Freire, 1968). To understand this, teachers need to realize that they contribute highly to dehumanizing education. Teachers who believe in
developing the potential of learners would challenge “the inhumanity of credentialing systems” and the “depersonalization of a society that offers fewer and fewer opportunities for people to use their initiative” (Greene, 1973, p. 92). The idea that students should respect teachers in an absolute manner serves no purpose in education, particularly when teachers take for granted on this respect, put no effort to build relationships, and most of all do not reciprocate the respect. Hereafter, teachers who take a stand in humanizing education, should ask whether the view of students lining up to bow down and kiss hands without a meaningful dialogue involved would fall into their purpose of education. Equality of education would not occur in an atmosphere where one requires abundant respect from another yet give so little back. Without mutual respect departed from a conscious mind, schools remain as praxis of domination. Henceforward, despite teachers themselves have been prescribed in doing salim their entire life, it would be prevalent to start asking the question “why” to themselves and to learners, as “apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, men cannot be truly human” (Freire, 1968, p. 58). Reinforcing a culture to question despite teachers not having the answers, as opposed to a culture to blindly accept all knowledge given, is vital, since after all “there are no stupid questions or final answers” (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 37).

Social Conformity and Obedience

Obedience is defined as behaviour complying with explicit demands of authority (Santrock & Mitterer, 2004), as doing something demanded by another person with more power. For children, it would be explicitly stated that they have to do salim, and they are required to obey without question. As they grow older, the practice becomes conformity, as no explicit demand is given, but salim is anticipated and expected. The normative social influence is the effect that others have on us in the process of seeking approval and avoiding disapproval (Santrock & Mitterer, 2004). Conformity and obedience occur due to social pressure, and as
Santrock and Mitterer (2004) argued, a certain degree of conformity is required for society to function. However, Dewey (1966) cautioned the essence of education that mirrors obedience assimilation; that is, an education that relies on conformity rather than transformation.

Rousseau theorized how everyone was born free, yet is corrupted and made unnatural by the chains of society (Greene, 1973). Through the society, humans are used to the idea of obeying and disobeying. Even though obedience and conformity play a trivial function in society, Honigman (1954) argued that obedience and conformity represent a restriction of freedom, suppression of individuality, autonomy, and creativity. In this sense, there is a danger in excessive conformity, and that it would be mostly dangerous in the sense of subtle instead of the overt authority (Taba, 1962). In Riesman’s (1950) explanation of society, he categorized the adjusted, the anomic, and the autonomous. The adjusted are those conforming to the society’s demand and are deemed socially fit, while the anomic would not and could not conform. The autonomous are capable of conforming to society, yet have the freedom to choose whether to cooperate or deviate. It would be imperative to balance conformity and freedom without decaying society. Malinovsky (1944) concluded that freedom is the choice of purpose (as cited in Taba, 1962).

Most students (and society) in Indonesia do this practice of salim due to respect, yet without the freedom to think of the purpose or even the difference between respect and courtesy. Courtesy would be given, but respect must be earned. In addition, it is important to think of the purpose whether someone needs to lower oneself by bowing down and kissing someone’s hand to show respect as if not doing so would mean disrespect. Janis’s (1997) explanation of an approach to group decision-making is groupthink, which defined as the tendency for members of a certain group to be concerned with having consensus thus lacking an ability to think critically on an obvious matter. In moderately standardized communities, members function according to
general expectation, thus without profound thought (Greene, 1973). Further, Greene (1973) discussed how some may appear to conform while questioning the prevailing act yet would never risk inquiring. In the case of salim, the necessity to do it occurs from social pressure and norms. Nevid (2013) explained that though these norms do not carry a force of law, violating this would incur social disapproval. Social conformity would mean curving the I to fit the We (Nevid, 2013).

Conforming to and obeying this cultural practice, without justification or freedom of purpose, alerted the idea of blind obedience. Nevid (2013) cautioned us on the danger of obedience by reminding us of the Nazi regime, which raised questions on soldiers’ horrifying actions due to following orders and inspired Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram to conduct an experiment. Milgram’s groundbreaking research was controversial yet insightful as it revealed how the majority of participants in the study would dutifully administer electric shocks to strangers up to and including potentially lethal doses because an authority told them that pulling the levers was necessary and required (Milgram, 1965). This result from Milgram’s experiment taught that obedience could be disturbing, as people might bend principles just to satisfy the demands of the powerful, even when the actions are no longer in our best interest. Nevid (2013) illuminated how good people could commit bad deeds by blindly following authority. The demonstration of Milgram’s experiment triggered people to think whether obedience caused more harm than good (Ent & Baumeister, 2014). Though Milgram argued that blind obedience is human nature, Ent and Baumeister (2014) stated “there are reasons to doubt that people’s obedience to authority is typically blind and unwavering” (p. 581).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed the purpose of education and how my education served as the ultimate goal of learning. I have been exposed to believe how salim should be done, yet now I started to have my autonomy of thinking and question the purpose of salim. As I have been
taught my whole life about this practice and have done it my entire life, my new perspective in viewing salim is creating discomfort and dilemma. The question of the actual purpose of salim is accompanied with the question of: who am I to judge this lifelong practice?

The practice of freedom in Freire’s perspective referred to as individuals’ attempt to critically deal with reality and how to participate in transforming their own world (Duveskog & Friss-Hansen, 2009). Critical awareness is important in transformation of reality, and that humanizing the reality means humanizing people (Freire, 1968). Teachers with the purpose towards humanized education should ask whether maintaining the status quo of salim is the right way, particularly as this practice has become nothing but a spontaneous response done without awareness that has created further segregation and artificial student–teacher relationships. It is, however, fundamental to be “owner of one’s own labor” and that “a human being can neither be sold nor can he sell himself” (Freire, 1968, p. 185).

Critical awareness and reflection become the linchpin between critical pedagogy and transformative learning, which Hansman and Wright (2009) stated as a symbiotic relationship. Transformation starts with a dilemma, discomfort, and cognitive dissonance which happens through the never-ending questions on a familiar culture, and critical awareness occurs from these questions. Freire’s (1968) problem-posing questions confirm how knowledge results from co-invention between oppressed and oppressor, and for Freire, “education was not a means for sustaining the common good or upholding status quo, instead it is a context through which ideas about the common good should be, are developed and shared” (Rennick, 2015, p. 77).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Life is bursting of narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and everyone has a story to tell based on our lived experience, memories, positions, and the sociocultural context of ourselves (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009). This chapter explains the method of narrative inquiry used in this study, and the terms story or storytelling used here refer to the “narration of personal experience” (Tyler, 2009, p. 138). Despite being a personal experience, stories are not produced purely by the individual but are also cultural and ideological, related to our existence in social relations (Bell, 2003).

This self-narrative inquiry retells stories experienced by the researcher by taking into account interaction with others. These stories are reflections of what happened prior to the writing this study. Henceforth, there were no designated interviews and no recruitment of participants performed for the purpose of this study. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), people are basically storytellers as individuals or social persons, thus these stories reflect how I understand my cultural practice through my stories and stories of others. In the process of sharing parts of my life in this narrative and incidents related to the people I have met who helped shaped my understanding of this cultural practice and how my perception shifted, I have tried to eliminate any possible identifiers. Accordingly, names, age, gender, or venues of the people involved in the discussion are not identified. Some documented venues and job titles appearing in this study are not those involved directly with the researcher nor those gathered for this study; instead, they are already made public and learned through public sources.

Why Narrative

“Narrative research is the study of stories,” which are told by people about themselves or about others as parts of their lives (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 471). It is a way to connect
individuals with their awareness, meanings, and to understand experiences (Moustakas, 1990). The necessity for narratives in research arises from evidence showing that comprehending how people work and behave as they offer personal descriptions of life experiences could explain significant yet possibly neglected areas in the human realm; as such, treating narrative inquiry as research proposes the possibility to understand the unique world of people (Polkinghorne, 1998, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The need to understand narrative inquiry requires an understanding of what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called a grand narrative. The grand narrative in social science inquiry is perceived as those scripted, “taken for granted, as the only valid story” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxv). Narrating the description of salim and relating it to Indonesian cultural settings would be a grand narrative, as it holds one predicted story. Grand narrative would be best explained as “an analytical frame for reducing the stories to a set of understanding” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54), while studying the experiences related in the continuum of those two elements (the practice of salim and the education curriculum in Indonesia) becomes a narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry articulates the relationship between personal interests and sense of implication within a larger social concern and explores meanings of those experiences expressed through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative is not only about telling phenomena but is also a method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This study uses narrative inquiry as a research method due to the richness of unique stories in a specific time, place, and context. To understand what has been experienced, the experience itself should be narrated. Narrative inquiry conveys a sense of search and research of a general theme called the phenomenon, and the challenging part of narrative inquiry would be to define it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It would not be easy for me to answer the question:
What is your narrative inquiry about? To define it, I have to start with an exhaustive list to answer, starting with describing salim, its context in education settings, the history and purpose of education in Indonesia, and up to the point of my critical awareness. Despite the effort to explain, in the end, the person on the other end would not relate easily to the phenomenon. As such, to understand this phenomenon, there is no other method for this story to be heard and learned. The function of narrative would be to consider the potential of stories to give meaning to people’s lives—the treatment of data as stories to explore a research problem (Emden 1998).

**Stories to Build Narrative**

Stories and narrative do not mean the same thing, as stories are part of a narrative (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004), and these stories are not only those undergone personally but also stories of others that are observed and understood (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009). This narrative retells stories that I have personally experienced, witnessed, or told. As I have to explore deeper into my childhood, school years, to becoming an educator and parent, I have tried my best to be as true, clear, and precise as possible, yet I humbly admit the possibility of leaving out details. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe, “as difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change” (p. 71). Writing becomes the method in this study to retell and build stories, as writing helps to “address a limitation in making sense of reflection that which challenges learners to both recall from memory and verbally articulate reflective moments” (Taylor, 2009, p. 9).

**Inquiry**

Inquiry is crucial in the search of knowledge; as Freire and Faundez (1989) note, “knowledge begins with asking questions” (p. 35). Garrison, Neubert, and Reich (2012) described inquiry as “intelligent reflection and contemplation of experience in the quest for
conscious understanding, insight, and knowledge” (p. 57). The use of narrative inquiry is to study, comprehend, and recreate experiences, thus it starts not with theory but instead is heavily based on subjective emotions in perceiving events and situations (Conle, 2010).

Any effective inquiry would relate to culture, and the cultural distinction would be an inquiry that is informative or transformative, though it could also aim for both: one prior or after the other (Heron & Reason, 2001). Dewey defined inquiry as the controlled transformation of what is unknown to become known (as cited in Garrison et al., 2012). Further, proposing the phases of inquiry to reach reflective learning, Dewey reminded us how each phase could be entered anytime (Garrison et al., 2012):

- The first phase is the suggestion of a possible solution, ideas of what to do and ideas that burst into mind. Ideas are most times vague without clear direction, yet no action could be taken, and no data could be collected without these ideas. Though left uncertain of the idea to challenge my cultural practice, and whether I need to pursue this, this idea became the starting point to elaborate further.

- The second phase is the intellectualization. Dewey explained this as defining the problem. Once a problem surfaces, it appears as strange and unfamiliar. Naming the problem would offer some cognitive understanding. In this phase, I started to label salim as similar to oppressive education, despite not yet having a clear picture of it.

- The third phase involves constructing a hypothesis that facilitates inquiry. As the first phase of suggestion is a sporadic idea, the hypothesis is a more logical one which steers what knowledge to be built and what data to be collected. At this time, I had known what theories to build, which events to recall, and what stories to include.
• The fourth phase is reasoning. Dewey theorized that the course of reasoning means an ability to carry out from the obtained knowledge. Sound reasoning determined a valid conclusion. As a result of constructing the knowledge, reading cases in the newspaper, and recalling my experiences, I was able to justify my thinking, despite moving against social conformity.

• The fifth phase involves returning to empirical material to test the hypothesis and reasoning, and most of all, to validate the thinking. This phase in my inquiry would mean to write this study.

Room for Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry in qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach which tries to understand a specifically context-related phenomenon without an attempt to manipulate it (Patton, 2001, as cited in Golafshani, 2003), and its purpose is to understand something that would otherwise be confusing (Eisner, 1991, as cited in Golafshani, 2003). However, narrative is a broad term to define. Chapman’s (2004) review of related studies (e.g., Atleo, Chapman, Sork, & Sutherland, 2003; Brown, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Harper & Mira, 2000; Kennedy, 1990; Piirto, 2002; Pratt, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 2002; Shigezawa, 2000; Willis, 1977) sorts narrative inquiry as “life-writing,” “critically ethnographic,” “auto ethnographic,” “indigenously auto ethnographic,” “contact zone,” “creative or arts-based,” “critical,” “personal,” and as “critical personal narrative” (p. 98). This study follows the definition of a critical personal narrative which accentuates personal writing.

Critical personal narrative or self-narrative tells stories of one’s experiences as a learner or educator and how they understand the problem (Chapman, 2004). Here, the story is “told in the first person; storyteller and the story protagonist are one and the same” (Miller, Chen, &
Olivarez, 2014, p. 17), and the use of “I” is a vital yet fallible voice in the writing of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers need to be reminded of the danger of offering fake and false data, writing of fiction, or cheating the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Other dangers of narrative as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) include “the Hollywood plot” which plots how everything works well in the end, and “wellness” which corresponded with what Spence (1986) called “narrative smoothing” (as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10), not telling the whole story. Another shortcoming of a narrative is the difficulty of bringing the stories and experiences to justice. Ellis (2000) proved that many social scientists could not write adequate self-narrative (as cited in Chapman, 2004). Particularly demanding would be the self-questioning leading to emotional pain, and the vulnerability of revealing oneself without having control of how the readers would perceive and interpret it. Regardless of its drawbacks, there is room for narrative; as Basso (1996) stated, “the story is changing you now, making you want to live right” (p. 59).

Confirming knowledge in narrative research is more of an argumentative practice, rather than mechanical, whereas questions are asked whether the story represents what it intends to represent in order to convince the audience (Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative research focuses on whether the meaning experienced by people is described accurately, thus it emphasizes the “narrative truths” as opposed to the “historical truths” (Spence, 1982, as cited in Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479). A story reflects the perception of the storyteller and in this sense, the truth is what is perceived by the narrator. Further, Polkinghorne (2007) cautioned that threats in narrative inquiry come from four sources: (a) limitation of language used to describe the depth of experience; (b) limitation of reflection to disclose meanings presented outside of awareness; (c) resistance due to social desirability to reveal the overall complexities of felt meaning coming to their awareness; and (d) complexity triggered by co-creation of facts between interviewer and participant. As a self-narrative, the strength of this study focuses on the first three items listed
above, by offering the researcher’s best attempt to be as dependable and trustworthy in
describing the experiences, reflections, and awareness to achieve the narrative truth.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were mostly collected from books, scholarly journals, Indonesian newspapers
discussing events and cases of violence, curriculum documents, and reflection of my personal
experiences, in addition to experiences of others that I have witnessed or told. There were no
intentional interviews to collect data, and these stories and experiences of others were not
gathered for the purpose of this study and happened prior to writing this paper. These stories
were those I recall to serve as a part of the transformative learning in my understanding. In
addition to the experiences of growing up in an Indonesian culture and education system as well
as being a parent, my work as an educator in teaching students and training teachers also
provided me with rich stories to tell. Relating the personal recollection of events and critical
incidents with the theories, I determined the following themes for this study.

Education

The foci of this theme are the purpose of education and the role of culture. Elaborating on
Indonesian curriculum, which has gone through many reformations, this theme also explains
Indonesian culture and how the character building education is constructed in accordance to what
the society expects.

Social Conformity and Obedience

The explanation of culture and the Indonesian education system from the previous theme
leads to this second theme. Salim as an act of bowing down and kissing the hand of a teacher is
instilling obedience. This theme goes on discussing how despite the necessity to obey in society,
blind obedience is restrictive.
Dilemma, Dissonance, and Transformation

Inquiring on the purpose of salim performed in education settings and hypothesizing on its perceived need to introduce social conformation and obedience, the third theme represents the initial journey leading to transformative learning. The discomfort in challenging a practice that I have been programmed to do is similar to the dilemma and cognitive dissonance. Despite being emotionally burdening at first, a critical awareness appears at the other end of the tunnel.

Critical Pedagogy

Central to this theme is theory from Freire’s (1968) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This theme discusses the oppressive situation surfacing from being required to do salim without making meaning of it. This act of salim becomes a symbol of a more crucial problem in education: the dehumanizing education, and escalating cases of violence performed by students against teachers, which mimic struggle from the oppressed.
CHAPTER FOUR: STORIES LIVED AND TOLD

Bruner (1996) stated how learning, talking, and imagining are all mental activities that are made possible by participating in a culture, and they can only be understood by taking into account the cultural setting. The stories offered by researchers are placed within our workplace, social lives, and where we live (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and this chapter reveals how I participated in my cultural setting; as Bruner (1996) reminded us, “it is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world” (p. xiv).

The following narratives recount events that I have witnessed, experienced, read, or told and are considered as critical incidents of my transformative learning. These stories have become pertinent in answering the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the student–teacher relationship gained from this practice of salim?
2. Is this tradition that I have practised my whole life creating detachment rather than building attachment and hindering the sincerity of the student–teacher relationship?
3. If salim was abolished, would the teachers work harder to build meaningful relations with students?
4. Is it the ultimate goal of Indonesian education to create a community of obedience?
5. Are the emerging cases of abusive students toward teachers a sign of struggle against oppression?

As salim is a cultural practice done in social, political, and educational settings, it is pertinent to provide a background of Indonesia. Therefore, before narrating stories related to the research questions, I begin this chapter by discussing Indonesia’s culture and Indonesian education.

Culture Defined

A basic anthropological concept that influences thinking in education is culture (Taba, 1962). Culture is “an abstract concept ascribed to some identified group” (Smith, 1954, p. 40),
and is indicated through shared regularities of expected behaviour, shared norms, and values (Taba, 1962). Culture influences learning as certain behaviours are practiced more often in some cultures than others (Santrock & Mitterer, 2004). Culture is cultivated and seasoned, as opposed to new and unpolished (Dewey, 1966), something which has been nourished in the society without recollection of an exact date when it officially started. Learning occurred through “associative” learning that emerged through conditioning (classical or operational), or “observational” learning that resulted from watching what other people do (Santrock & Mitterer, 2004). Salim is learned through both: observing what everyone is doing, and conditioned by praises and subtle reinforcement; as Santrock and Mitterer (2004) suggested, many psychologists agreed on classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning as universal and powerful acquisition in the cultural learning process. Culture is learned through living in a society and through interaction or imitation (Taba, 1962).

By relating to cultural selection and interpretation, human beings understand the real world; as Smith (1954) stated, “reality of the individual is defined by the premises of the culture in which he participates” (p. 52). The elements important in viewing culture seems to include a concept of the shared predisposition of behaviour and ways of thinking, and that culture is learned and transmitted socially rather than biological (Smith, 1954).

**Indonesian Culture**

Hofstede (1997) explored Indonesian culture through a 6-D model lens: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. The first two are relevant in explaining Indonesian culture in relation to salim; hence, the further elaboration below

**Power distance.** Power distance is a dimension that expresses the attitude of inequalities in society (Hostede, 1997). Indonesia’s score in this dimension indicated a characteristic of
hierarchy, unequal rights between power holders and non-power holders, in-accessible superiors, directive leaders, centralized power relying on the obedience of members with respect given to those in high positions (Hostede, 1997). Taking this into consideration, *salim* as a symbol of respect, yet also creating inequality, is embraced.

**Individualism/collectivism.** Hofstede (1997) explained this dimension of interdependence among members of society, which explains the “I” and “We” in society. The score in this dimension indicated a collectivist society in Indonesia with the expectation of conforming to the ideals of society, and a society that highly values obedience to authority (Hostede, 1997). This result proves how Indonesian people tend to conform to what society demands, rather than standing as a minority. Collectivist culture values obligation, tradition, dependence, harmony, obedience to authority, and proper action (Triandis, 1994). *Salim* is done for the sake of “what is perceived to be good” by most, not out of the freedom to choose. Students from collectivist culture are taught to agree, support, and obey teachers (Maulana, Helms-Rolenz, Irinidayanti, & Grillt, 2016).

Schooling has always focused on cultivating certain dispositions more than others, depending on what the culture deems valuable to be maintained and carry on (Greene, 1973). In Indonesian education, the overarching culture is to be respectful to the teacher as an authority. A study of education culture in Indonesia conducted by Lewis (1997) showed that

The teacher is seen to be a moral authority and students are expected to defer to all their superior, including teachers. Teachers are also viewed as the fountain of knowledge—while knowledge is viewed as more or less fixed sets of facts to be transmitted and digested by thirsty learners, later to be regurgitated in a test. (p. 14)

On the other hand, Eisner (1979) emphasized the necessity for a teacher to regard students as individuals and to build rapport in order to create a meaningful educational
experience. Nonetheless, Buchori (2001) illustrated Indonesian classrooms as a predominantly teacher-centred communication where students are instructed to listen, obey, memorize, and not encouraged to inquire. Questioning is deemed as challenging the authority of teachers and those who question might risk punishment or personal humiliation (Lewis, 1997).

**Indonesia Education Reform**

Since its independence in 1945, Indonesia has had many changes to its curriculum. In 2013, the latest curriculum was implemented with an emphasis on character building with thematic and integration of subjects. Seemingly, it focuses less on rote learning and memorization, yet the questions in the national examination conducted in Grades 6, 9, and 12 still require memorization of facts. The national examination is no longer the sole determinant for a student to graduate; however, it is still the decision-maker for admittance to some schools, especially public schools.

Indonesia has gone through 10 curriculum reforms since its independence in 1945. Wahyuni (2015) summarized changes in Indonesian curriculum starting in 1947 after independence from Dutch colonization, which was called “leer plan” or lesson plan, with the content of shaping attitude rather than thinking. As a newly independent country still finding its identity, within 5 years, the curriculum was changed in 1952 where the rising problem was the need to provide ready-to-work skills for pupils. Many pupils could not continue middle school, thus the movement of School for the People emerged to focus on practical life skills. In 1964, a new curriculum with nine subjects taught separately was created to satisfy the need to incorporate students’ moral, intellectual, emotional, art and craft, and physical development.

After the first president (Soekarno) was ousted by Soeharto in 1967, the government instilled the need for citizenship in curriculum 1968. Hereafter, the curriculum emphasized the country’s ideology, general knowledge, specific aptitude, and focused on building intellectual
capacity and transferring as many theories to learners. This traditional rote learning curriculum lasted for many years, with a slight change in 1975. The focus was still to transfer much knowledge to feed learners, but now with the additional content on history subject.

The era of traditional rote learning ended with curriculum 1984 which hinted the need to activate students’ own learning. Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif (CSBA; translated as Active Student Learning Method) was introduced as an approach that encouraged students to be active, to share an opinion, inquire, and discuss. However, students were used to being passive and not to speak if not asked or not in their turn, while at the same time, teachers were not equipped to facilitate this CBSA, due to the long years of an overarching one-way street pedagogy. Realizing the difficulties of teachers, this populist curriculum had one predominant curriculum for the whole country in 1994. This curriculum was heavily loaded with national and local materials, and the completion of those materials was a priority. Still emphasizing that knowledge can be deposited by teachers, another problem occurred related to the fact that many students did not graduate with the needed skills in the workforce. Therefore, the education reform in 2004 focused on competency-based curriculum emphasizing the achievement of competencies instead of completion of theoretical material. This curriculum also incorporated the need of an individual approach, which deepened or lightened curriculum based on students’ potential and interest.

With such individualized curriculum, in 2006, the curriculum was decentralized. Teachers were expected to develop their own syllabus and assessment. It was not heavily prescribed by the government and gave freedom to each school to modify their own syllabus. The idea of learning was how to know, how to do, how to be, and how to live together in harmony. However, Indonesian teachers’ competency was in question to be given such responsibility. In 2013, the government decided to become centralized again, and a thematic-integrated curriculum became the sole guideline. This centralized curriculum focuses on observational skills, inquiry, critical
thinking, presenting and communicating skills, as well as a new shift of focus towards character building and the process of learning instead of results. Critics regarding teachers’ training and the lack of competency to carry such curriculum, as well as complaints about the heavily prescribed curriculum that limits teachers’ creativity, resulted in a dual curriculum being implemented at the same time.

Taba (1962) pointed out how shaping curricula and teaching is done out mostly of urgency and is not prepared to deal with social, cultural, and intellectual heterogeneity. In Indonesia, people criticized the implementation of curriculum 2013 as “hasty.” Other problems occurred in its application due to the lack of teachers’ competencies and understanding of integrated subjects. Thus, not long after its launching, the government reverted to 2006, with choices that schools can use whichever curriculum they deemed fit: 2006 or 2013. Schools which are ready and capable can implement curriculum 2013, and others can revert to curriculum 2006 until they are ready. There were and are still schools with mixed curriculum: Grades 1 and 4 are using curriculum 2013, while other grades still use 2006. Supporting the argument of teachers’ lack of competencies, a report in 2016 from Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership (ACDP) Indonesia showed the result of teacher competency test revealing only 192 out of 1.5 million teachers in Indonesia obtained scores above 90, while the average score was 56 out of 100 (ACDP Indonesia, 2016).

Character Building Education in Curriculum 2013

Characters are born from demand in the culture; as Riesman (1950) posited, different types of cultures impose conformity and mould society in different way, and Taba (1962) expressed that “character is one aspect of personality; it is the social conscience” (p. 57). Burret and Rusnak (1993) claimed that the nature of character education relies heavily on ethics (right and wrong as defined in the philosophical tradition of culture); morality (personal behaviour and
concerns of the group related to responsibility and value-laden choices); values (general ideas held by the individual determining a choice of action); and characters (a set of beliefs and values influencing actions related to ethical decisions). Every country differs in viewing character education; for example, the United States' education implemented curricula emphasizing virtues such as self-control, reliability, and duty (Burret & Rusnak, 1993), while characters deemed as valuable by the Indonesia Heritage Foundation are listed in the following nine pillars (Andrianto, 2011, as cited in Haryati, 2017):

1. Pious to God and all His creations
2. Independence and responsibility
3. Honesty and wisdom
4. Respect and manner
5. Generosity, helpful, and cooperation
6. Confidence, creativity and hard work
7. Leadership and just
8. Kindness and modesty
9. Tolerance and unity

Schools are believed to be affecting more than academic learning, responsible for instilling moral standards and core values (Taba, 1962). Therefore, these pillars have been provisional in preschoolers’ character-building education since 2001, and in elementary schools level in 2003. Governed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 2003, the regulation of law number 20 was launched by Indonesia National Education stating the education purpose in developing potential of learners to become faithful and pious to God, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, skillful, creative, independent, and a democratic and responsible citizen (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2003).
In 2013, the new curriculum was launched with the focus on basic cognitive skills along with social, moral, and spiritual competencies which are parameters of character-building education. The National Department of Education explained that character education is defined as everything done by teachers to influence the character of learners, which includes: exemplary attitudes shown by teachers; how teachers talk and convey learning material; and teachers’ attempts to build the whole child (Depdiknas RI, 2010, as cited in Haryati, 2017). The new curriculum 2013 integrates subjects based on the belief that the responsibility of character building falls to all teachers, not just a teacher of religion, social studies, or citizenship subject. The Indonesian Ministry of Education translated the nine pillars into 18 characteristics as the focus on character-building education (Kepmendiknas RI, 2010, as cited in Haryati, 2017). See Table 1. Haryati (2017) summarized that the values in character building education comprised in curriculum 2013 are designed to alter learners’ attitudes to be more courteous and respectful.

Assessment of moral values or character offers an eminent challenge since they are taught in conjunction with academic subjects and everyday lives. Nonetheless, it is crucial for a curriculum to have objectives which according to Eisner (1979) should be stated behaviourally to avoid ambiguity. In the attempt to cultivate the 18 moral values in pupils, a behavioural culture of 5S culture (Senyum: smile, Sapa: greetings, Salam: shake hand, Sopan: polite, and Santun: courteous) is fostered in most school settings (Pratiwi, 2017) and is believed to be a parameter of good character. The concept of salam (shake hand) becomes salim (kiss the hand), while some schools literally add another ‘S’ for salim, after salam (a culture of 6S), while other schools with 5S subtly encourage salam to be performed as salim. The culture of 5S is enforced in daily lives and is stated in the mission statement of many schools.
Table 1

*Eighteen Characteristics in Character Building Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religious</td>
<td>Complying to religious belief and value, being tolerant of other religions and living harmoniously with other religions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Honest</td>
<td>Being a trustworthy person in words, action, and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tolerant</td>
<td>Appreciating differences of religious belief, race, ethnic, opinion, attitude and action of others differ from oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Disciplined</td>
<td>Obeying to rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hardworking</td>
<td>Working hard to complete a task and showing rigorous work in the face of obstacles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Creative</td>
<td>Thinking and doing to create a new result.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Independent</td>
<td>Being competent to work and not depending on the presence of others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Democratic</td>
<td>Thinking, acting, and showing attitude which equally values rights and duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Curious</td>
<td>Acting and displaying an attitude that always wants to know more and to widen what one has learned, heard, and seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nationalist</td>
<td>Thinking, acting, and having knowledge that put the country as a priority above oneself or a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Love for the country</td>
<td>Showing attitude and behaviour as a proud citizen and giving the highest appreciation to the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Appreciation for achievement</td>
<td>Pushing oneself to the highest achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sociable and communicative</td>
<td>Being friendly and communicating politely to create a collaborative relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Harmonious</td>
<td>Acting and showing attitude towards peace, calmness, and the comfort of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. A fondness of reading</td>
<td>Showing a habit of reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Care for environment</td>
<td>Maintaining and preserving the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Care for social</td>
<td>Showing a caring attitude to others and those in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Responsible</td>
<td>Acting and showing attitude to do one’s duty and obligation in relation to oneself, social, community, religion, and country.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Rahayu, Wiyono, Degeng, and Bafadal (2017) explained how implementation of 5S in schools is needed to prevent declining morality, to achieve praiseworthy characters, and to build tolerance, respect, manners, and care for others. The National Curriculum Center explained steps for implementation of 18 characters through the “100 days program.” Pilot projects, conducted for 6 months in 2010, shared the result of successful implementation in detail. In describing the initiating step of character-building education in an exemplary public kindergarten, the project explained a chronological example: starting the day with two on-duty teachers greeting learners in the morning (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia [Indonesian Ministry of National Education], 2011). Though it did not explicitly state salim, the attached picture showed this practice was being practised throughout. Pahlewi, Hashim, and Yanzi (2018) led a survey in a high school with a questionnaire developed for learners to respond whether they thought the 5S program reinforced in their school curriculum helped them to be more compliant and obedient. As the alternative hypothesis was proven, the study suggested to continuously strengthen the habit of 5S (Pahlewi et al., 2018). Another study on character building education in a vocational high school indicated how the school focused on evaluating habituation of 5S and claimed that the exercise of 5S indicated students with good character (Sutarmi, Raharjo, & Pramono, 2016).

Character building education should be taken into serious consideration in the school curriculum. Lickona (1991) emphasized the necessity for character education for students to survive and develop. Character education is not mere training or indoctrination, because character cannot be developed by repetition (Davis, 2013). With this in mind, it would be relevant for educators to rethink the relation between 5S (Senyum [smile], Sapa [greeting], Salam [shake hand], Sopan [polite], and Santun [courteous]) and some of the nine pillars or 18 characters. While highly appropriate for learners to greet each other and teachers, smile and be polite as it is thought to generate a harmonious school society, the learners’ voices should be
taken into consideration, and the role of educators should inspire them to want to be respectful and polite. Greene (1973) spoke about morals as free choices made of an individual who is aware of available options and could think of more than one plausible action at a particular moment. According to Dewey (1943), morals related to education would lead to the development of shared power in social life and morality should be “responsive to the needs of democracy and education” (p. 26).

The problem with 5S is not only in its implementation if done without meaningful building relationships, but also in its validity. Is salim a valid method to measure and evaluate moral values? Take honesty and wisdom, confidence, creativity, and hard-work in nine pillars, or honest, curious, appreciation of achievement and love of reading in 18 characters. How could 5S become a parameter to measure good character as it only led to one obvious trait: respect and manners? Supported by the power imbalance which encouraged social inequality, and as stated in several studies in Indonesian schools (Haryati, 2017; Pahlevi et al., 2018), respect, adherence, and obedience are highly valued. These values dominate and control what happens at schools. Tripp (1993) stated that “good manners does not mean that everyone behaves in the same way” (p. 37), thus if students come in the morning and do not smile, would that mean they are ill-mannered? If they only shake the teacher’s hand without kissing it, is that being disrespectful? Is it immoral for not bowing down when students meet a teacher? Greene (1973) defined moral as the relation between a judgment of good–bad and right–wrong with action, regardless of most laymen equating the term with being compliant and abiding, while not complying would be judged as immoral. Society, however, easily adjudicates: if it is not black, it must be white.

Salim as behaviour is considered as an easy and obvious way to measure respect, which is then judged as a good character. This would embody Dewey’s (1966) notion of the problem in moral education which schools tend to secure knowledge related to impulses and habits. Taba
(1962) explained that developing a particular character structure is a way that culture ensures conformity to norms and values. Zurqoni, Retnawati, Arlinwibowo, and Apino’s (2018) study involving 108 teachers of all subjects from regular and vocational high schools in four provinces in Indonesia from schools that consistently implemented 5S, revealed that character education in Indonesia had not shown optimal results. From Dewey’s (1966) perspective, it is believed to be a result of separating teaching conscience with consciousness. In schools, morals are often taught as “an affair with which ordinary knowledge has nothing to do” (Dewey, 1966, p. 354), but as Burret and Rusnak (1993) caution,

above all, integrated character education must allow for active student involvement, for opportunity for personal growth through integrating the affective and cognitive development of self, and development of commitment to a set of values that lead to consistent behavior and actions. (p. 17)

It would be naïve to rely on achieving consistency of actions without activating personal awareness and knowledge.

Fantini and Weinstein (1968) explained that culture could either define or delimit a child on what and how he might know. However, we become accustomed to our own cultural spectacles that we fail to notice whether it benefits or distorts. One should be reminded that the most rewarding intellectual development is self-development (Whitehead, 1967), and it is germane to question a culture that fails to offer such an opportunity. Ent and Baumeister (2014) clarified that though obedience to an authority tends to be correlated with the success of a society, extremely rigid groups of society are unable to adapt to change. However, overly adhering by resisting innovation or change is found to be catastrophic for the society (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).
Nature of the Student–Teacher Relationship

How should a student–teacher relationship be? To answer this, I need to recall stories of how the culture of education in Indonesia shaped teachers and students.

How the System Shaped Educators

The education system in Indonesia relies heavily on the national examination, and despite being free of charge, not everyone can enroll in public schools; enrollment depends on the score achieved in the national examination. In summer 2018, someone borrowed money from me to enroll her younger sibling in a private high school since her sibling’s national examination score was not sufficient for her to be admitted to public school. Anas (2017) illustrated education practice in Indonesia in his book by telling the story of a father who failed to get admittance for his son to a public school within his catchment area. This father was thrilled when the school had first been built years ago, and he watched how the school started and grew, believing his children would go there. When the time came, his son’s grade did not allow him to be admitted to a public school within walking distance of his house. Education is a survival-of-the-fittest business, and the overarching foci are on academic content and competition. Unfortunately, this does not only happen in middle and high schools.

There were several inspections from the representatives of the Ministry of Education done in my school. One day, two representatives came to visit the school with their checklist. They were impressed with the Montessori apparatus and way of teaching, despite the limited space that we had. While discussing the limited space, one of them suggested that in future, I should test enrolling children to decide who would get in or not, to select the best children. I responded to how we had trial class as an observation where teachers could observe whether the incoming learners needed special treatment, and parents could see whether the child would fit
in. This was preschoolers and kindergarteners; if we rejected them because they were “not the best” children, how would that define us as educators? Why should children compete just to be admitted to a preschool and kindergarten?

My view has always mirrored what Fantini and Weistein (1968) stated: “a good teacher is a good teacher, no matter who she may have to teach” (p. 304). I reminded my teachers that their “not-so-good” students are the ones who bring out the best in them. If they could not handle the not-so-good pupils, maybe they are not such good teachers after all. Trained teachers might be good in a good-comfortable environment, but Fantini and Weinstein (1968) argued that these teachers might have culture shock when put in a not so good school. They expected good pupils because these pupils have learned the right hidden curriculum—that the teachers are right (Fantini & Weinstein, 1968).

I was involved in a committee to train teachers to understand the new curriculum 2013 better, and I was sent to three provinces. The project was to train selected teachers and choose them to be trainers to train more teachers. The target was to reach 1,000 teachers. One of the volunteer master trainers in the committee was a mathematics teacher whom I considered having a genuine heart for teaching. She taught Math by problematizing questions, to get students to think it through and find their own solution, quite a different style of teaching from the mathematics teachers that I knew. Most of all, she taught for the sake of teaching. On weekends, her house was full of students, those who needed help with mathematics, those who came from well-off families and who did not. She did not ask for money because she was still working in a public school; however, some people paid her voluntarily. For a brief period, I sent my daughters to her on the weekend to stimulate their problem-solving skills, which I deemed was not enhanced properly at their school. I paid her because I wanted to, and because I noticed how
she had broadened my daughter’s sense of thinking. She was reaching retirement age, and I asked her whether she had thought about teaching new teachers to teach like her. She claimed she had asked several young teachers to help her teach at her house. These teachers asked the same thing before starting: “How much do I get paid?”

The concept of teacher tutoring for a fee was also seen in a friend’s situation. She shared her concern about her son’s problem following school material, an issue that had been going on for some time. It started in the very first report meeting when her son was in the first grade. Though it was the first semester, the teacher already warned her that her son was in jeopardy of failing. This meant staying in first grade for another year while his friends moved on to second grade. The teacher offered herself as a private tutor for a fee. Her son managed to improve the grades in regular tests, homework, and assignments; however, a few months ago, she told me that her son had failed the final annual government test, but she was hopeful the daily tests would save him from failing the class.

This has not changed much since my school days. I was never really good at biology, yet in my report card, I got a high mark in biology despite not understanding a single piece of the material. Those who studied in Indonesian public schools would relate to this—“ask the teacher to tutor you, and you will definitely pass.” The extra hours are used to tutor students outside the school, but instead of ensuring these learners really understand, teachers cut corners by having as many learners as possible beyond their capability to handle, and most of the time they only give away the answers for tomorrow’s tests, while the students’ thinking is not being improved. Since the aim of education is to achieve high test marks, teachers manufactured students to become such products. Teachers are molding students according to what is expected by the system, and thus as long as the students get good marks on their tests, nothing else matters. With
extraordinary grades on daily tests, the failure in annual government tests would not impact as much, unless they are students who prepare for the national examination in Grades 6, 9, and 12. According to Fantini and Weinstein (1968), teachers’ low salaries are an impediment to good teaching and to teachers becoming good. Many teachers, therefore, discard sincerity in working hard for the sake of teaching and start to teach only to make ends meet. Unfortunately, despite the improvement in public school teachers’ salaries which are now above minimum wage as opposed to during my school days when they were under minimum wage, this culture is still maintained.

This is where problems in education started. Most people believed that the worst result of education is getting poor grades which indicated failure to learn something, despite whether learning actually takes place or not. Tripp (1993) pointed out that “children do not simply fail to learn something: every time learning or ‘not learning’ occurs, they learn something about learning or not learning” (p. 134). In Indonesia, where many teachers tutor outside of the schools, the students’ grades are above average, but no learning occurs.

The Power of the Teacher

As the student Andre Bryant asks his teacher in the 2007 film Freedom Writers, “Why should I give you my respect to you? Because you’re a teacher? I don’t know you.” Such a question resonated deeply with me, as I could not count how many teachers I have done salim to, yet I could not name a single teacher whom I sincerely respect. Some of the teachers I did salim to those I hardly knew. Reflecting on this, I asked myself how many of my students genuinely respected me?

A 13-year old girl in Indonesia just started middle school. When my daughters and I were talking to her and her family through video chat, we were discussing her new school, and how
we were adapting to Ontario’s education. My daughters talked about how they did not have to memorize many lessons, and that school started at 9:00 a.m. This girl said that since Jakarta’s traffic had worsened, she had to leave home by 5:00 a.m. to arrive in school at 6:30 a.m. She casually said that a friend of hers came to school at 6:00 a.m. just to avoid lining up to do salim to teachers. She laughed about it. I asked what she thought of her friend’s action. She hesitated and reasoned: “Maybe she just got tired of it.” I asked why she did salim, and she said it was to respect the teachers. Our conversation moved on to another point that made me question her “respect” to teachers. She complained that some of her teachers in public school did not come to class often or only came for a short period, but suddenly it was time for a test.

Anas (2017) discussed in his book how two things accompany students when entering a school in Indonesia: rules and order. Order dictates students’ lives at school: students are not allowed to leave the classroom without permission; students are not allowed to bring cell phones; students are not allowed to fight; students should be respectful; and in the end, students should obey all rules in the school. Schools play an important part in disciplining people “beyond threats from teachers or visits to principals’ office” (Wotherspoon, 2018, p. 129). However, in many cases and particularly in this following story, rules are to discipline students, not teachers.

A colleague whose job was to maintain schools’ building and facilities complained about the difficulties of telling teachers to preserve schools’ properties. When new benches to put shoes underneath and bags on top arrived in the school, a sign was put as a reminder not to sit on the bench. None of the students sat on it, but a teacher did. When reminded, the teacher said: “the writing is in the middle of the bench, I am sitting on the edge of the bench.”

Order and rules have the same meaning, to limit students’ thinking (Anas, 2017). Students are not allowed to sit on the bench, but teachers can. Students are not allowed to bring
cell phones, but the teachers are texting during teaching. When I was in high school, teachers would ask male students to buy cigarettes for them, but the sign of no smoking in schools was explicit. Anas (2017) told the same stories in his findings on how rules are made for students not to smoke, but teachers smoke and asked students to buy for them. These are the teachers whose hands are kissed in the morning with tremendous respect. Bruner (1996) noted how the process of teaching and learning is never innocent, as it serves as a medium to carry a message. The message is clear: teachers make and bend the rules, while students obey without question. Salim widens this gap between student and teachers.

When I came to Ontario, I met an Indonesian girl who had just graduated from her bachelor’s degree program in Ontario with a high GPA. She never thought she would be awarded for an almost-perfect GPA considering she almost failed middle school. As she has spent her elementary school abroad, adjusting to middle school in Indonesia was difficult.

She told me her lack of Indonesian language at the time when she came back resulted in her low score in all subjects. She remembered she told many of her teachers that she could not understand the context, and she remembered a reply from one teacher saying “You don’t have to understand it, you just have to memorize it!”

While most teachers gave her low score and assumed she was not smart, there was one teacher who helped her. This particular teacher believed in her ability and gave her Indonesian language tutoring every Saturday. To this date, she and her mother still keep in touch with the teacher. “Without her, I would have to repeat middle school.”

Greene (1973) reminded us how a teacher should remember that a child is more capable than one can define. When the teacher perceived a student as weak, the teacher restricted her potential. A study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1977) explained teachers’ expectations of
students, which are believed to be linked to students’ improvement (as cited in Sadovnik, Cookson, Semel, & Coughlan, 2018). Sadovnik et al. (2018) expressed that an effective teacher needs to have sensitivity towards students’ needs. This sensitivity requires observation and trust for the students to open up and let the teacher see them for who they are. Such a relationship requires more than a physical ritual such as salim. If only more teachers had tried to get to know this girl beyond those morning greetings and salim, maybe they could also help her. Maybe, just maybe, there is a better chance for a humanized education if salim, as the symbol of a barrier, is eradicated.

**Salim: Creating Detachment or Building Attachment?**

My work with children under age 6 has provided me with an opportunity to closely observe them. I realized that one of the problems of children today is the lack of problem-solving skills. With this in mind, I prepared a seminar to discuss this matter, focusing on the likelihood of parents being the “saviour” of their children, to rescue them when things get difficult; the presence of nannies surely does not help. Having nannies is very common in Indonesia, especially in a big city such as Jakarta. The nannies take care of the children and help them do every little thing that they are actually capable to do themselves. I discussed giving children a chance to discover and resolve problems by themselves.

I remembered during the question and answer session when a member of the audience asked me about encouraging creativity and critical thinking by letting the children figure things out themselves. However, their question led to “What happens if they are forced to do things because it is a tradition?” The parents started to share how their boy was forced to do salim to grandparents and extended family when they visited them out of town for a celebration. This boy was 3 years old, a sensitive child who did not like being touched or even cuddled. However, the
parents were lectured by the grandparents about the importance of teaching the boy to respect them. The parents were scrutinized and labelled as not being good parents. In front of their extended family, they forced the boy to do salim, who then cried miserably. The parents felt humiliated of having a “bad” boy. In the end, they claimed it was always hard to get him to go out of town to meet the grandparents.

My answer at the time did not comply with the popular cultural belief that salim should be enforced. After the seminar, I had a discussion with two of my school teachers who assisted me at the time. They admitted they would have answered that the parents must teach their children to do salim and make a habit out of it. In short, force the children to do it. I have never thought I would disagree with it, but I raised questions: Why would we need to enforce such tradition which in the end would traumatize a young boy? Whatever happened to grandparents making contact with him, playing together, and earning his love? To summarize, whatever happened to building a relationship which in the end creates that mutual respect? Reflecting on my responses helped me realize where I stand on this matter. This incident fell in Tripp’s (1993) idea of atypical incident that becomes critical because something does not fit and triggers an inquiry. I have always believed that salim should emerge from a true respect; that is, we do it to those we think deserve it.

For 1 year, I volunteered to be a counsellor for exchange students. One of my exchange students was a 16-year old boy from a country in which English is not spoken. One day, he texted me saying that he had been verbally bullied by his classmates as they made fun of his name. He asked his friends to stop and tried to tell the teachers, but it was useless.

When I came to the school to talk about this issue with the vice principal, administration officer, and the teacher, I encountered steps of denial and blame. First, they stated how the boys
who bullied him were good boys and that the act was nothing but them joking around and being silly. I pointed out that a joke became bullying when the victim said no; they took another direction: blaming the victim. They blamed this on the exchange student who did not hang out with friends, who did not greet the teacher, and most of all, who did not do salim to them. “Everybody does salim, so he should have done it too. If he does not want to follow this tradition, why is he here?” They complained about him playing with his phone in the class, about him standing in the door to the library, and the teacher yelled to me, “He should have known not to stand in front of the door because he is blocking the way. He is rude.” After more than 1 hour, I settled by saying I would try to talk to him. Before I went home, the vice principal asked me to remind him to do salim to the teachers in the morning. The vice principal had enough complaints from many teachers about him being disrespectful. I reminded the exchange student to do salim to teachers, and I could not answer when he asked why he needed to do it. I answered, “Just do it to keep you out of trouble.” A month later, when I visited the school to check on him, the exchange student still felt uncomfortable and wanted to go home. On the contrary, when I asked the teachers and vice principal, they all gave him glowing praises, “He has adjusted well! He is doing salim every time he meets a teacher!”

In Indonesia, salim is expected, and perceived as “a must.” This taken-for-granted assumption is so powerful and not debatable. The teachers commended him for adjusting well as he became one of them, though there was no effort to make him feel welcome. For the exchange student to survive, he needed to do salim despite disliking the teachers. I shaped that exchange student to be fraudulent, or as illustrated by Fantini and Weinstein (1968) as “phoniness” (p. 124). Fantini and Weinstein (1968) explained that in viewing culture, we tend not to see the fog
in front of our eyes, yet children, before they are blinded and become immersed in a culture, are critical thinkers to question what we have taken for granted.

*Salim* positioned teachers as the one with higher caste, as students are the ones bowing down; the teachers as those to be respected, but not always acting in ways worthy of respect. Bruner (1965) indicated how teachers should understand the dignity of their calling: “that he is the social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth” (p. 114). Greene (1973) explained how detached teachers are vulnerable to not seeing students for who they are, and as such, the process of meeting students every morning to do *salim* becomes a superficial act when no conversation takes place.

**Abolishing Salim for Meaningful Relations?**

A qualitative study conducted by Rachmadiana (2004) to describe the process of *salim* in Indonesia was done through interviews and observations. An elementary private school teacher in Jogjakarta, Central Java, explained why he stood every morning in front of the school gate and expected students to bow down and kiss his hand. He explained that most students bowed down, but not all students did *salim*; however, he expected that if one student saw another student did *salim*, he would follow. In the end, he was hopeful more students, if not the entire school, would bow down and do *salim*. Despite his statement that he understood *salim* was not an indicator of good behaviour and morals, he implemented this habit to his children at home and his students at school, because that was how he had been brought up.

*Salim* characterizes schools as cultural conveyor belts, whereby students line up to kiss hands and bow down. As if it is not enough to enforce respect to teachers through *salim*, Abidin (2018) wrote an article reporting events during celebration of national Teacher’s Day on November 25, 2018 in two public high schools in one of the Indonesian provinces: Jambi,
Central Sumatra. The principals were interviewed and said that they had encouraged students to celebrate Teacher’s Day through an event of washing the feet of teachers as a sign of respect, love, and care for their teachers. This could be seen in other schools as well, where the event of washing teachers’ feet are done to celebrate Teachers’ Day. Figures 3 and 4 show how Teacher’s Day are celebrated in different schools, areas, and levels.

For many of us in Indonesia, our principals were mostly good, pleasant people while few might have appeared as frightening as a result of being too strict. In Indonesia, several students from different schools told me how principals were rarely seen. They saw the principal during flag ceremonies. This was not different from my school days. In many events, the principal would take over a class when our teacher was not available, and during those occasions, the principal would give a task. Despite the close encounters of having to do salim whenever we met the principal, they might only recognize our face without actually learning our names and not knowing who we really are.

A student in Ontario public school told me that the principal was visible on a daily basis. Another student told me how the principal would come to them in recess to chat, would ask to be taught the new trends, and would joke with the student. Throughout my school days, I have never once had a teacher or a principal ask me how to teach them something. The idea that a principal would ask to be taught, regardless of how meaningless the knowledge might seem, would be rewarding.

An example from Fantini and Weinstein (1968) was shown when a teacher demonstrated “Teach-Me” time with topics ranging from the latest dance-step, to the street game, to pupil’s expression. This would be an effective way for a teacher to learn a pupil’s language, culture, and, moreover, build mutual respect in relationships.
Figure 3. High school students in Mojolegi, Mojoagung Jombang celebrating national Teacher’s Day washing teachers’ feet. Source: Nugroho (2015).

Figure 4. Kindergarten students in Demak, Central Java washing the feet of teachers with flowery water to celebrate national Teachers’ Day. Source: pastinyus.blogspot.com (2012).
Obedience: Is This the Purpose of Education?

“Learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting” (Bruner, 1996, p. 4), thus in order to understand how learning happens in the Indonesian educational setting, it is necessary to look at what happens in the culture. Out of the six intercultural dimensions measured by Hofstede (1997), the score on power distance dimension in Indonesian culture indicates Indonesian people tend to accept segregation occurs due to power, position, and authority levels. Endorsing this cultural belief, Lewis’s (1997) study in an Indonesian education setting revealed how teachers are perceived as authority figures, superior, and a source of knowledge.

A student of mine graduated from kindergarten to move to a public elementary school. I remembered her as one of the outspoken students, who dared to ask questions and share her voice. After 4 months in elementary school, the child’s mother stopped by our school. Soon enough, she was telling us how her daughter was asked to stay after school. The mother met with the teacher only to discover that her daughter kept on raising her hand, excited to share her opinion, yet was cut by the teacher. “It was not the time for question and answer,” the teacher reasoned to the mother. “She needed to understand the rules in the class.” I remembered feeling stunned and shocked to realize that this girl who had been with me, who had been taught that her voice mattered, was now being shut down.

Freire (1968) argued that without inquiry, men cannot be truly human; thus, he proposed problem posing for a humanized education. Everyone employs different ways of understanding knowledge, and in order to understand, they needed to be given various opportunities to express ideas (Eisner, 1979). In the case of this former student of mine, the teacher was not encouraging
students to inquire and state opinions. For teachers to comprehend what the students had learned, the students should not be restricted in expressing themselves.

When I was in elementary school, my art lesson would include drawing a landscape. How would someone define a landscape? A child under 10 years old might draw mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, and so on. Not for us. The teacher would draw two mountains, a path, and paddy field on the blackboard, and students were given a paper to follow such drawing. Repetitively in art classes, the teacher would do the same and students would be required to follow. Instilling this idea repetitively had given us the belief that landscape should be like that. Some of us might add a house in the middle of the paddy field; others might add an animal, birds, or a smiling sun (see Figure 5). However, in the students’ perspectives, landscape was two mountains with a path in the middle. No one drew a river, lakes, or forest.

In 2016, I was giving a parenting seminar to demonstrate ways to stimulate problem-solving in children. One of my ice-breaking activities was asking the incoming parents to draw a landscape. I hypothesized that since these parents were the same as me, they would have experienced the same education as I had. The hypothesis was correct. Not one parent drew anything aside from two mountains with a path and paddy field.

The restricted requirement to draw landscape would correspond with Dewey’s concern that progress needs a two-way street and freedom in a milieu where one’s choice and desire count for something (Greene, 1973). With no intention to discuss what was perceived as landscape by students, teachers tacitly assumed all students in the city or in the suburb village understood the same about landscape. Bruner (1996) claimed how this bias sees students from a “third person perspective” instead of trying to “enter his thoughts” (p. 56).
Figure 5. Samples of landscape drawing in Indonesian schools. Source: Nanulaitta (2014).
Dewey (1943) claimed that education’s greatest waste would be the failure in relating knowledge and experiences that learners have gained outside of schooling. Teaching happens when a person freely chooses to find answers to question that they themselves posed (Greene, 1973). We dared not to ask whether a landscape could mean one mountain, many mountains, or no mountain at all. Teacher demanded conformity of what was deemed as a landscape. Therefore, we sat there in our chairs, drawing exactly as exemplified in the blackboard, and submitted the same drawings. After years of being molded into such thinking of a landscape, we became a one-size-fits-all product. This is the same as salim. After being habituated to do salim every day, we stop asking questions and just did it.

In The Disadvantaged, Fantini and Weinstein (1968) elaborated that culturally deprived children are not limited to those poor or minority in culture, but also to those whose experiences are ignored and undermined. Students are asked to obey and do as the teacher requests; students do not have a voice, particularly those who are different from the teacher. This act of forcing convergent thinking in viewing what is a “landscape” resulted in a block of creativity. Nevid (2013) defined creativity as “thinking that leads to original, practical, and meaningful solutions to problems or that generates new ideas or artistic expressions” (p. 248). These following stories are examples of how students need not think; they are required to obey.

*There was this student who was very smart in English. In one of the English reading comprehension tests with essay questions, this student was surprised to get 70 out of 100. The parents tested the student’s reading in online tests and the student scored above 90. Later the parents figured out that the school’s English test’s questions were ambiguous and might lead to many possible answers. In this case, the student might just have the right answers.*

*The story was about Peter Rabbit. One of the most memorable questions was “how many family members in the Rabbit family?” When the student answered six, the teacher said it should
be five since the father had passed away. The parents came to meet to teacher and argued how in order to prepare an essay question, the teacher needed to be ready for other correct answers aside from teacher’s expected ones. One of the arguments was regarding the belief that when a family member passed away, are they no longer a part of the family? This student was not allowed to think differently than the teacher. The student was required to follow what the teacher expected.

Hansman and Wright (2009) believed that the purpose of education is to provide people with the opportunity to see themselves and their world differently, thus transforming their perspectives. The idea that the right answers belonged only to the teachers exemplifies oppressive education. Viewing a child’s mind as passive and waiting to be filled is the bias from a didactic perspective that teaching is done by telling the child (Bruner, 1996). Taba (1962) argued that in learning how to think, one needs to go through a series of inquiring, analyzing, and concluding, instead of familiarizing oneself with a conclusion from others. With this in mind, it would be pertinent to allow mistake and wrong answers to occur, responses different from those in the mind of teachers. Unfortunately, based on a study conducted by Hughes et al. (1959) indicated that more than 40% of teaching acts are mostly controlling than freeing (as cited in Taba, 1962).

The next story is about my own daughter who was required to do homework on roles of family members. Despite my full-time job and the presence of her 24-hour nanny, she put the role of mothers as someone who cooks, cleans, and does the grocery shopping. Her nanny was the one who did all these activities, but her textbook showed pictures of mothers doing these routines. It was useless for me to discuss this with her; she preferred not to be truthful in her homework than to write differently from what was shown in the textbook.
Such type of learning assumed that knowledge is something to look up in a book or something that is in the mind of the teacher, thus to be listened to (Bruner, 1996). Experiences in learning according to Dewey can either be educational, noneducational, or miseducational (Eisner, 1979), and as my daughter preferred to write something that she believed her teacher would agree with, instead of writing what was the truth, I would categorize her learning as miseducational. She was being taught to tolerate being untruthful, illustrating what Fantini and Weinstein (1968) argued as the antiseptic curriculum, in which reality is ignored and in the long run damages any child.

What happened on October 28th, 1928? It was the day of Indonesian Youth Pledge declaration. When my friend shared how her daughter’s textbook in second grade discussed this event for 3 months, and how she struggled to help her daughter remember details of dates, names, and locations of the event, I was interested in looking at the material which was too much for a second grader. Starting with the meaning of Youth Pledge, initiating organizations with dates and names of founders, the process, the meeting, the Congress, the history of each founder, the value of the event, and expected attitude of students after learning this. My friend sent me a picture of the questions: Who was the founder of a certain organization, who led the first congress, and one of the questions that I found interesting was:

Our attitude when reading the text of the Youth Pledge declaration should be:

a. Sad
b. Happy
c. Proud
d. Calm

Investigating further, I looked into a question from Indonesian examination test about
feelings. Students were asked to fill in the blanks: “When my mother goes to the supermarket without me, I feel…..” Though many children did not want to go with their mothers to the supermarket, the right answer would be “sad.”

“Thinking about thinking” should be the main idea of education practice (Bruner, 1996, p. 19). The stories above proved the opposite. John Holt described how schools are similar to a jail, by forcing children through coercion by adults, and he saw how children in schools are “withdrawing the most intelligent and creative parts of their minds” (as cited in Greene, 1973, p. 62).

Comparable to conducting salim without the opportunity to think about it, students, therefore, fulfil Goodman’s critique on education where children are “brainwashed by a social machine not interested in persons “(Greene, 1973, p. 62). I remembered being told to do it because I had to; I recalled telling my children and my students the same. There was a picture of salim in our textbooks or schools’ walls, and just like any other learning concepts that we were given, we assumed salim was just another learning material to be memorized and done with no question asked, and in the end we believed we had to do it. Though classrooms are no match for law, what happens in the classroom can have long-lasting influence (Bruner, 1996), and as such, salim is done by students without being told, and students are programmed not to have different thought that authority figures. Eisner (1979) explained that

By the time the student has graduated from secondary school, he or she has spent approximately 40 weeks or 12,000 hours, in school. During this time, the student has been immersed in a culture that is so natural a part of our way of life that it is almost taken for granted. (p. 74)

After being conditioned and programmed to adapt in society, children no longer questioned things that should have been questioned. As Freire (1968) illustrated, students
discovered that they achieve satisfaction by following the given principles; one of them is not to think. If they answer questions exactly as expected by teachers, perform their tasks accurately as instructed, do salim as prescribed by teachers, they are considered or deemed as well-adjusted students.

**Abusive Cases: A Sign of Struggle?**

As cases of abuse performed by students to teachers emerged in Indonesia, many agreed that students are to be blamed. Nonetheless, the violent act did not just happen out of thin air, as Freire (1968) reminded that “violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, and who fail to recognize others as persons, not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized” (p. 41). To understand the whole story, it would be biased to focus only what the student did. It is also important to ask: what did the teacher do?

* A student in middle public school in Indonesia told me how the music teacher was a nightmare. This teacher would hit students’ fingers with a wooden ruler if they hit the wrong note on the flute. Another teacher would throw a blackboard eraser at students who were talking, or hit our legs with a wooden ruler. None of the students would say anything to their parents. This was the same as my school days. I experienced some physical, psychological, and verbal abuse, which some would think as minor. Regardless, I never said anything to my parents.

A fundamental aspect of teaching is exercising control (Sadovnik et al., 2018), and many teachers during my school days exerted control over pupils and classrooms by ensuring everyone did exactly as instructed. Freire (1968) pointed out how oppressors subdue people to keep them passive. The physical, emotional, and psychological demeaning acts were not seen as abuse at that time unless real marks of wounds were seen. Throwing erasers, twisting ears, and hitting
fingers or legs fell under disciplinary acts required to educate student; they were not abused. Moreover, emotional or psychological abuse was not taken into account.

*Indonesian schools require students to wear uniforms. When I was in school, teachers used to check the length of skirts. I remember being called to the front of the class with other girls, with our backs facing the boys. We had to bend down, and if our skirt moved up to the point when we felt humiliated, it was considered too short. I remember feeling scared, humiliated, and frustrated, even though my skirt was never too short.*

The statistics of violence in Indonesian schools still rank high compared to other countries in Asia (Setiawan, 2017), despite my understanding that it has reduced significantly compared to my school days. With today’s technology, teachers are cautious. Many videos became viral when a teacher was found hitting a student, and many perceived teachers in this generation as being weak towards the students.

*In an online discussion forum “Kaskus” where Indonesian people talk about news, interests, and events, I came across a posting on salim. Pang5biru (2018) posted that today’s student did not do salim properly, which has resulted in a lack of morals. Pictures were inserted showing middle school students smoking, or doing salim in what was argued as the wrong way (that is, putting the hand to the cheek, instead of nose). The following argument concluded how today’s learners are disrespectful and demonstrate low morality and disobedience. Today’s learners were also perceived as “less tough” and spoiled. Learners immediately reported teachers to authority if teachers twisted a learner’s ear or hit with a folder. Concluding statement in the forum was contradicting it with teaching practices in the old days when learners were hit with a wooden ruler or blackboard eraser to realize they did something wrong, yet teachers were never reported. All contributors in the forum supported this argument: how the*
education system had weakened learners and agreed that it would be wrong to prohibit teachers in punishing learners. The general idea discussed in this forum started from enforcing salim for respectful outcome in learners’ attitude, and how these learners needed punishment to toughen up. To sum up, the argument was that children should be brought up as they had in the past.

It is true that in Indonesia, teachers are now more careful not to conduct physical punishment freely. During my work to train teachers on the new curriculum, the Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI) administered a 1-hour session to talk about its effort of protecting teachers, discussing how teachers nowadays are easily sued for wrongdoings, and how teachers are too cautious about going about their daily teaching. One of my responsibilities in the committee was to interview teachers to be selected as trainers for other teachers; I found the same doubts and anxiety in teachers when it came to physical punishment.

One of the teachers, especially being a young teacher, revealed difficulties in dealing with a crowd of tough fifth graders. Due to the location in a red district area, this teacher mentioned that some of the students were those whose fathers were not working or mothers were prostitutes. There were students who disrupted the class deliberately. One day, she asked students to go outside the classroom for creating a disturbance. The student stood up and walked out. Before stepping outside, he threw everything on the teacher’s desk to the floor. The teacher talked about her patience for not punishing him. When I asked if the teacher tried to do anything, she said she tried to call the parents several times, but nothing changed.

Another teacher during my interview sessions shared a different story when he was assigned in a poor public school where students did not have time to do their homework because these elementary students had to work on the streets. The students were pessimistic about education, especially as the previous teacher had punished them by isolating them, calling them
names, or giving more homework. This teacher rode his motorcycle to some students' houses at night to help them with homework and ensure they understand. This teacher said, “Some students are too shy to ask in the class, thus I made one-on-one time in the safest area that they know.”

According to Lieberman and Miller (1984), the difficulty of teaching relies on having to deal with students of different backgrounds individually, while teaching them the same; the missions of teachers would then be cognitive as well as affective. We need more like the second teacher who thrives to approach a difficult student without threat, punishment, or worse, abuse. Sadovnik et al. (2018) listed a few rules that build a good teacher, and on top of the list is genuinely liking their students. Students, despite the difficult ones, are sources of learning for teachers where empathy, patience, and curiosity will become the outcome (Anas, 2017).

An article in TribunManado considers four recent cases of students acting violently to teachers (“Tak Berhenti,” 2018). The first in February 2018 involved an art teacher in Sampang, Central Java, who died of nerve damage as a result of being hit by the student. The student was not paying attention during the teaching session, and the teacher warned him by marking his cheek with a paint brush. In the second case, reported in June 2017 in West Kalimantan, a student hit a teacher with a chair. Having found that the teacher gave him a poor grade in a test that would result in him failing the class and redoing a whole year, this high school student picked up a chair and slammed it against the teacher and punched the teacher in the forehead. In 2016, an elementary student threatened and insulted a teacher in a heated argument. The teacher walked away yelling that the student should be educated in the jungle.

The stories in the article illustrated the behaviour of what are seen as “difficult” students. Sadovnik et al. (2018) confirmed how being a teacher requires a great deal of emotional energy,
especially as classrooms are a community with many diverse needs. In the first case, when the student did not pay attention, instead of humiliating him by painting his cheek, a question of whether the classroom could be made interesting should be raised. According to Sadovnik et al. (2018), “a great teacher can make a mundane lesson into an exciting voyage, and a poor teacher can make students reject learning altogether” (p. 239). The second case demonstrated a form of emotional and psychological abuse due to teachers following a fallible system blindly while the third case should discuss whether a teacher should be in a heated argument with an elementary student, who was underage and immature.

When I heard about these cases, I corresponded with a colleague who worked in the Ministry of Education. Having worked with him on socializing the curriculum, I have always admired his humanistic way of viewing education. I asked him what drove these students. He responded, “What have these teachers done?” He had travelled throughout Indonesia to introduce, train, supervise and check on the implementation of curriculum, and though he admitted the quality of teaching was poor, the one thing that saddened him the most was how teachers were teaching without using their hearts; as he put it, “Teaching was just a job; it should be a calling.”

**Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the Indonesian education reform that has taken place as an attempt to solve problems in culture and society. As it is salient to incorporate character building in education, the latest curriculum in Indonesia also concentrated on this idea. Defining character building is strongly related to the moral values of society. The overarching focus on the idea of respect in Indonesian education settings is seen through the acculturation of 5S, leading to questions of instilling obedience and particularly with teachers’ needs to be bowed down to, while no dialogue occurred in the process of lining up to do salim.
According to Anas (2017), the Indonesian government should stop reforming the curriculum, as the problem is in the implementation and teaching style. When teachers enforce rules for students to obey while they themselves are seemingly above the rules, or when students are expected to bow down, kiss their hands, and even wash the feet of teachers while these are the same teachers who do not take their ideas and opinion into account, the teachers should realize that these acts constitute oppressive education. By humiliating students in front of their friends, punishing them by threatening to repeat a year, or asking them to answer an open-ended question through a one-situation answer, are these not signs of abuse? Hiding behind *salim* which assumes a good student–teacher relationship is not ideal, particularly when students still have to do whatever the teachers ask, express themselves only to whatever the teachers deem fit, and are not allowed to think for themselves. When teachers start seeing students as persons who should be free, true solidarity would be achieved (Freire, 1968), and then *salim* would serve a different purpose: to strengthen the bond achieved from mutual respect.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I present my concluding thoughts on how I perceive the cultural practice in which I have been immersed my whole life. This narrative discussed my transformative learning through reflection of critical incidents, a disorienting dilemma, and cognitive dissonance. It started with one question leading to another. I was concerned and uneasy at first to share parts of my life and my stories as related to others, and most of all, in writing how I questioned a prescribed and taken-for-granted cultural practice. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) pointed out how sharing details in the narrative can provide a particular context for readers to connect to their own experience. I hope that readers of this narrative can relate these stories to one aspect of their lives. Through my constant questions and reflections, I started to see how I was given little choice in deciding whether I need to do salim. In a broader sense, I reflected on whether I was given much choice throughout my schooling. In the end, Freire’s (1968) Pedagogy of the Oppressed helped me put things into perspective. This chapter, therefore, will discuss the stories related to Indonesian education and culture, my transformative learning, and lastly, my proposition regarding this practice.

Indonesian Education and Culture

Someone once asked me while I was starting to write this paper how I could separate culture from education. I must admit that it would be a difficult task, as Bruner (1996) reminded me that “school is a culture itself” (p. 98). Culture has many definitions, but those within the culture understand it. Hofstede (1991) pointed out how some aspects of culture are “physically visible, their meaning is invisible” (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 4). Culture is a means to understand the world you live in; as such, those from another culture may find seeing students line up to kiss the hands of teachers strange. Salim is a cultural practice to teach respect, and
thus, Indonesian people are proud of this practice. This study is not intended to detach culture from education, but an attempt to understand the purpose of a specific cultural practice within education.

A recent article proudly reported how Indonesia ranked in the top five countries where students are most respectful to teachers (Sari, 2019). On the contrary, an article for the National Commission for Children Protection (KPAI) published on February 22, 2017 revealed 84% of students experienced violence in school, with 45% of male students and 22% female students admitting the perpetrators were teachers and staff (Setiawan, 2017). In addition, cases of violence perpetrated by students against teachers have begun to emerge. My predominant question would be: Are these the teachers that we have to respect? How could Indonesian education students be the in top five category of most respectful students, given the statistics of highest in experiencing violence? If students were respectful, would they hit a teacher? Mainly, I inquired about the purpose of salim.

Indonesian culture embraces hierarchy and is highly collectivist and conformist, as seen from Hofstede’s (1997) 6D model. In this sense, salim which symbolizes respect is valued. Triandis (1994) added that collectivist cultures highly value tradition, harmony, obedience, and what is considered “proper.” Culture is closely related to power in society (McLaren, 1998), and in Indonesian schools, teachers are seen as being at a higher level and possessing authority; teachers should be respected, and students are required to comply (Lewis, 1997). Moreover, studies revealed that students in a collectivist culture are being trained to agree and obey teachers; thus, in most Indonesian classrooms one observes one-way communication where students should listen and are not encouraged to ask, and posing questions might risk punishment or humiliation (Buchori, 2001; Lewis, 1997; Maulana et al., 2016). With such culture in
Indonesia, when performing salim as trained and habituated, no one has ever asked or argued if there were another option. Foucault (1977) elucidated how schools are representative of the disciplinary institution in society, along with factories, prisons, or other institutions in relation to power (as cited in Wotherspoon, 2018). Salim is enforced in both educational and social settings.

Indonesian curriculum launched in 2013 incorporates character building with 18 characteristics with the goal of educating more courteous, respectful, good students. Evaluation and assessment of what is perceived as “good” and “moral” students require a behavioural practice in the form of 5S (Senyum [smile], Sapa [greetings], Salam [shake hand], Sopan [polite], and Santun [courteous]). Despite originally stated as salam, which means to shake hands, the practice is actually salim, and on many occasions, people use both terms interchangeably. Good and moral students are those who smile, shake hand and salim, and are polite and courteous. This hidden message to instill respect is then tacitly accepted by students.

Transformative Learning

It was not an easy journey for me to decide to write this narrative. While writing and after several chapters, I still stopped and wondered whether it was appropriate for me to question a practice that I have been immersed in. Reflecting on incidents I have witnessed and stories others have told is crucial in transformative learning. These incidents and stories appeared as normal, common, and typical, but as Tripp (1993) reminded us these unnoticed and daily incidents become critical incidents if reflected upon afterwards from a critical perspective. My transformative learning started with an unsettling and disorienting dilemma from my daughter’s sentence that she did salim to her principal and then she walked away without building conversation. It was the first time I ever asked someone, “Did you have a conversation?” More questions and more dilemmas arose when I attempted to build a connection between emerging
cases of abuse performed by students and the comments from authority regarding the lack of respect as the cause. The more I reflected on the conversation, incidents, and events, the more I asked: “Why did I do it?”

**Provisional Attempt at My New Role: A New View on Salim**

The eighth phase of Mezirow’s transformative is trying a new role, in this sense, my new perspective on this cultural practice. *Salim* as a cultural practice is not governed by law, nor written literally in the curriculum. *Salim* is socially expected, and no punishment awaits if we do not do it; however, we all do *salim* because we have been trained to, or we fear the social judgment. There were times when a cognitive dissonance occurred when I did *salim* or asked others to do it, but I could not understand why. In most cases, it was performed by default as a spontaneous response for me to do it or to ask my children and students to do it. At several family gathering events, I did *salim* to many elderly family members, and I did it to a niece just because she was in the line. There was no thinking that happened while doing it. Similarly, when I asked my children and students to do it, they might be wondering; “Who are these people?”

I am not here to criticize the practice. I cannot stress this enough; I am here to question the underlying purpose. I am not arguing that *salim* has to be eliminated from Indonesian culture, nor I am advocating for *salim* to be separated from education setting. I am reflecting on all the incidents and events in my life when I did *salim* to those people I had just met, and when I asked my children and students to do it to those they hardly knew. I am reflecting on whether I did it because I sincerely respected those people or because I was afraid of being judged. An array of social forces can be more powerful than corporal punishment.

I believe that respect should be afforded others, but not without thought. Particularly when children are required to line up in the morning to bow down and kiss the hands of teachers
like robots. Some of the teachers we may know very well, like, and respect while others may be those who make rules for us and break the rules themselves. One of these teachers was the one who asked girls to stand up in front of the class and touch our feet to check whether the length of our skirts was inappropriate. Another one was a teacher who argued that the rule not to sit on the bench did not apply if they sit on the edge. Many of these teachers taught in the era when drawing landscape could only mean two mountains, a path, and paddy field. Another one would be those who rejected answers outside of the ones they had prepared. Most of these teachers required students to sit still, listen, and raise hands if they wanted to speak. These teachers asked us to conform, and these are the teachers who mass produced us.

In many Indonesian schools, students wear uniforms, start schools by lining up to do *salim*, come to class, and sit down nicely. Students are asked the same questions in tests and are expected to come up with the same answers as required by teachers. They are given the same standardized national examination test, and their future is determined by the same tool. This depersonalized schooling required obedience and routine, with predictable results. Many teachers provided us with all the information and refused to realize that we came to class, bringing our understanding. Holt portrayed schools as prisons as they coerce students to fit into a mould teachers deem as fit (as cited in Greene, 1973). Freire (1968) reminded us that teachers could not think for the students, yet these are the teachers who asked us to think through their lenses. This relationship of student–teacher offers little room for students to think and many opportunities to instill obedience. Is this why *salim* existed? Is *salim* a means of ensuring that students highly regard teachers that they fear to raise questions? *Salim* becomes a reminder for students to accept what they are told, to follow given rules blindly, to draw landscapes as shown on the blackboard, and to realize that in essay questions there is only one true answer—the answer that the teacher
has told you before. Adding to this, when many schools celebrate National Teacher’s Day by washing the feet of teachers, this reminded students of who they are and where their place is.

For years, I was trained to do salim without asking or being asked, and I trained others to do it too. I was not given the freedom to do it or not do it, and as such, I did not offer options for my children and students. None of us were asked, “Do you want to shake their hands instead?” We are instructed: “Do salim to them.” I did and received salim because I was expected to, and not doing so would jeopardize being labelled as “not good.” Greene (1973) explained that when children were expected to adopt a certain rule, they may be told if they want to be good, they need to follow the rule with no question asked. However, the term good or moral is not necessarily related to compliance as most laymen would assume, and instead the opposite of moral which is immoral is argued by Greene (1973) as a “behavior that demands no conscious choosing, that is wholly automatic, determined, coerced, or routine” (p. 214). In this sense, does this sound like salim? When students have no awareness of whether they have options, or when students are socially compelled to kiss teachers’ hands, should this then be identified as immoral?

Are We Dehumanized?

Though the concept of culture is not easily defined, it is pertinent in understanding critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1998). Freire (1968) believed that education should be the practice of freedom instead of domination and that education should see humans as individuals with a personalized voice. I was starting to see how I was the oppressed and oppressor at the same time, how being socially forced to do salim meant taking away my humanity and my right to choose and how I have taken away my children’s and my students’ humanity as well.

If the power to decide and to choose was taken from us, we become objects (Freire, 1968). When I received complaints over an exchange student under my care who did not do
In an Indonesian public school, this student was judged as rude and a bad student. When this exchange student asked me, I merely told him to do it without giving him a reason. After years of being the oppressed, my voice to speak whether I want to respect someone or not being taken away, I became one with the oppressor. Freire (1968) cautioned us about the duality experienced by the oppressed, in having to choose between “following prescriptions or having choices” (p. 33). As I followed the prescriptions, I was the oppressed and the oppressor at the same time. Freire (1968) alluded to how the oppressed would want to be the oppressors; however, instead of achieving the freedom to think, they achieve a lack of consciousness in conducting the oppressive act—a similar act when I told the exchange student to do salim, to conform, to blend, and most of all, not to ask. He then did it to teachers, to everyone, and to me. I became the hand on top to be kissed; yet again, I did not know why I forced them to do it. When we do something because we are trained to, we are being educated like an animal instead of a human being (Dewey, 1966), with both the educator and the animal dehumanized. Students may comply with the social expectation to do salim as trained, yet without full awareness of it. The exchange student stayed for 1 year, and he had adjusted to do salim to the teachers he had no conversations with; he treated salim as routine, and he survived his school year but until he returned to his home country, he never understood why.

What Now?

This study does not aim for a dichotomy to either choose to eliminate or maintain salim. It is also not intended to bash teachers or praise students. As a believer of critical pedagogy, my intention is to contend that education should provide an opportunity for critical thinking and creating one’s own meanings (Greene, 1973), including an awareness that we can choose whether or not we want to do salim to teachers. I believe that students would willingly and
voluntarily kiss the hand of teachers if these teachers truly deserved it. Some stories in Chapter 4 disclosed a teacher who believed in a girl while other teachers judged and underestimated her, a mathematics teacher who challenged students’ creative and critical thinking, or a teacher who went the extra mile by visiting students at their homes. These are the teachers who deserve respect and appreciation. If I were their students, I would gladly do salim to them, and I believe many others would, too. These teachers made connections, built relations, and most of all believed in their students. They do not put their concern in students to be disciplined or to obey, but in students to thrive.

If salim is abolished as a predetermined practice, there may be possibilities for teachers to start seeing students as individuals. If salim becomes an option, then students would do salim because they have a choice and because they truly respect the teachers. In this sense, salim does not become a means to create mere obedience. Bruner (1996) believed that when the mind is treated through habit formation, it follows a drill pedagogy, while activating the mind through reflection and discourse follows a pedagogy of dialogue. Dialogue is crucial in building a relationship. Teachers should take time to get to know students and build conversation while doing salim instead of treating salim as a ceremony. When the dialogue becomes the priority, salim becomes the means to have the opportunity. As the dialogue starts, relationships are built in the classroom, and students may feel welcomed to ask questions whether a landscape can be a river, a forest, or a calming beach. A student may inquire whether they can imagine different roles of mothers as opposed to those examples given in the textbook, and they can freely answer essay questions with their own understanding of knowledge. With dialogue, students are included in the classroom society as activators of their learning. Subsequently, a more humanized education may be imminent.
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