

Hangouts Indonesia: KEC Meets Three Non-Degree Schools

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Jakarta Biennale 2021, Krabstadt Education Center, KUNCI's School of Improper Education, Jatiwangi Art Factory, Gudskul

In 2021, Krabstadt Education Center was invited to take part in Jakarta Biennale 2021: ESOK and thus became visible for the first time. One of the Biennale's curators, Grace Samboh, initiated an exchange between KEC and members of three educational programs in Indonesia: Gudskul (Jakarta), Jatiwangi Art Factory, and KUNCI's School of Improper Education (Yogyakarta). The two online meetings took place on June 15 and July 6, 2021, at 7am CET/1pm WIB. Grace Samboh started the conversation with a question to all of us: When we talk about education, who are we making this education for, who are you thinking about when you're running, or planning, a non-degree school? The question highlights the fact that all programs are at different stages of building, maintaining, or imagining a place for education and thus address different audiences. The following text collects some of the answers on themes such as land, admissions, fiction, anxiety, institutions, breaks, and the different needs for engaging in education. The three non-degree schools have each produced a short video walkthrough to show us their premises in Indonesia.

The Schools

KUNCI's School of Improper Education

School of Improper Education is one of the main programs of the KUNCI Study Forum and Collective. We want to create a space that we can all take part in as members of KUNCI, together with other people. We look at pedagogies that allow us to disrupt the hierarchical structures present in normal educational institutions and approach our social environment in new ways. Rather than focusing only on teachers and students, we also acknowledge other figures that take part in education, such as parents, society, or art. Every student who joins our school will learn specific things that they love the most. We teach certain methods, but what you want to learn is up to you.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Video walkthrough, 6 min.

Gudskul

We need to look back at the three collectives in Jakarta that built Gudskul ruangrupa, Serrum, and Grafis Huru Hara which have each had their own programs for a specific public. Today there's also RURU kids (which includes children from kindergarten up to elementary school), a course that focuses on high school students, and another for university students. There are curatorial and artistic workshops for curious minds who want to know more about art and criticism. We are also dedicated to what some people call the meta collective, or the collective of collectives, which comes out of twenty years of experience with pedagogical programs. We don't necessarily think of it as a school because our projects are driven by intuition.

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Video walkthrough, 9 min.

Jatiwangi Art Factory

Jatiwangi Art Factory is currently building a vocational school, but for a long time it operated as a place for informal education. While we want to organize an education system that offers some guarantees, we also want our teaching to be based on what we experience. As such, we are dipping our toes in both fields. In fact, the Akademi Komunitas (Community Academy) is something that we can experiment with for a few years. If it turns out that the academy is not what is needed in the community, we can change the subjects taught according to the needs of the community. Therefore, we are together in the uncertainty and the learning.

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Video walkthrough, 3 min

Land

KEC: Our first question is about land, since many of you have mentioned property and land in relation to your school's location and place. This interests us because Krabstadt is located on fictional, animated land.

Gudskul: It's a different context in each city. Land is always a trouble and an obstacle for every art collective in Jakarta because it's really expensive. Throughout many of our programs, we've seen this city as our playground, as our school. But in the end, we always need a home, we need a place for us to convene and do practical things. So that was the basic necessity, to buy land when rent became unaffordable. As a collective, we have shared ownership.

Jatiwangi Art Factory: For what we are calling Akademi Komunitas, we have set aside a plot from the land that the Jatiwangi Art Factory will be using in collaboration with Politeknik Negeri Bandung (Polban) and ITB (Institut Teknologi Bandung/Bandung Institute of Technology), which will have a satellite school in Majalengka, in Jatiwangi.

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: The question of land is also a question of communities. For us, in Yogyakarta, where we see a lot of forced displacement and agrarian conflicts, we don't believe that owning land would help the social construction of the city. We don't see the sustainability of our institution in private property, inheritance, and the generational cycle. We think about it in more irregular terms, such as maintaining critical knowledge collectively and in rhizomatic ways.

Art

KEC: We'd like to know more about your relation to art. Do you produce art? Do you teach art, or is the school itself an art project that teaches other things? Is the art context helpful in achieving something, or is it more of an obstacle and difficult to deal with?

Gudskul: Do we make art? We want to believe so! These are artist-driven projects and programs. In many instances, art becomes the device, the reason for us to just mingle. Initially, our idea has been built around *nongkrong* or "hangout culture," where art becomes the reason for us to convene. We have dealt with finished and unfinished artworks, with art that we like, art we don't like. It doesn't matter, because the main thing is how we can gather and allow other people to have space to do that. We have two programs: firstly, the collective study and contemporary art ecosystem that has been running for three years, specifically dedicated to anyone who wants to learn about collective practice, which could be artists who already have a collective practice, or someone who studies business, for example. The second is the short course program, where the commitment is not as long. We often say it's for those who want "to cheat" on their existing profession, such as architecture or finance, but want to learn more about art.

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: There has always been a tendency to see KUNCI as an in-between creature. We do research, we write, we are a collective and active in both the field of art and within the university. We've recently talked a lot about tools and tooling. To perceive our work as art offers more freedom to create our own ways of looking, seeing, being, and attuning to our environment. Some of the methods we have tried to exercise and reflect on came from left-wing praxis, such as "turba," an acronym for "turun ke bawah," which means "going down below." It's about bringing intellectuals (activists, artists, etc.) to live, eat, and work with the people (farmers, etc.), confronting their day-to-day problems. Therefore, there is a whole ambience around the idea that the artist should go to the grassroots to grasp the spirit of the people. That's one of the pedagogies that is implemented in our school.

Intake

KEC: A frequent question KEC gets asked is: Who can be part of KEC? The answer might be: Are you unwanted? Then you can enter Krabstadt. The issue of accessibility is layered, as in: How does one get into a fictional place and then become a student in the Education Center? What's your admissions policy?

Gudskul: There are people from different age groups and backgrounds, established and emerging artists. They always come as a friend or as a friend of a friend, so they at least know the nature of the collective and its programs. There's always a fluidity, an organic nature in what we do that is very different from institutionalized curriculums. For example, in the short course or collective studies program we often encounter participants who want assignments, but we say "this is a space, feel free to do anything." Sometimes it takes a process of unlearning for those who are not used to a hangout-based curriculum.

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: "Commitment" is one term that keeps us together, commitment to the participants' goals. In terms of admissions, it's about countering discrimination in the sense that you don't have to prove a certain knowledge or skill. Instead, it is about studying togetherness itself. We learn how to learn, and for some of us that's quite confusing without guidance or a fixed curriculum. We are used to structures in school or university, and here we have to get used to the condition of uncertainty. Most of the educational institutions in Indonesia obsessively do compulsive testing, which is a form of discrimination considering that their testing rests on the meritocratic and ableist concept of "ability." What we can offer is getting to know each other instead of comparing oneself to another. There's a different attitude toward public institutions in the way that we create our school. I cannot speak for the whole Indonesian experience, but in general we are skeptical of the bureaucracy in institutions. Many of us prefer to just stay out of the university system, not because interventions could not be made there but for some people it's impossible to even enter such a system. We see universities as resources that we can take from as we produce imaginations, critical knowledge.

Jatiwangi Art Factory: Jatiwangi is known as the industrial area. People don't have much time to study but want to hang out. If they wanted to go to school, they would go to Yogya, Jakarta, or Bandung. That's why we were thinking of making a proper school here. We've been negotiating with the government but also smuggling in our ideas based on our needs and life. Considering that many of us fail in normal schools, we are experts in failure. At the same time, we don't want to rely on the certainty of education because the way we learn is very speculative.

Breaks

KEC: Your approaches seem different from very structured education models in which you get a schedule, and you understand "this is the place where I focus and that's where I have my lunch." When we meet to learn in a group, it's a particular form of being together, whereas the break is often seen as going back to normal life. On the other hand, what students talk about during breaks and what they learn from their fellow students is important too. It's not always the teachers who we learn from the most. Can you say something about that?

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: Our notion of time is different from schools that offer degrees. For us, time is fluid. Most people who join have a certain amount of time to share and learn together. When we meet, it's often for two or three hours, and if the discussion goes on we continue. The duration is always based on agreement between the participants. We usually stop at dinner time, because it's easiest to combine the break with our biological time when we are hungry, we stop the meeting because we can't think when we are hungry. The idea of non-productiveness is interesting for us because we don't think in terms of goals, such as learning certain skills. Our school is literally improper because you can't drop out. Even if you didn't show up for six months, you'd still be accepted back.

Jatiwangi Art Factory: You asked about places and seating; for many years, we would always sit on mats

during our monthly discussions. Recently, we started using chairs more often, and it has impacted our way of eating. We used to all eat together from the banana leaf, now it's like a buffet. Perhaps we use chairs just to practice for the development of Majalengka City. We are making propaganda for the terracotta city, but in a slow way, not too fast!

Imagination

KEC: Fiction allows us to make little mental jumps and go to very different places. The question is how do you use it in a real situation? The Education Center is still in the making, so we need to find out how that works. We can say how we've used it in Krabstadt before. We tested the logic of what was possible in an animated world. For example, our first film deals with the discussion about the veil in Europe around 2004/06. It was a very polarizing issue, erupting everywhere, and laws were being changed so that wearing a veil would be criminalized. We were asking: Why is this piece of clothing causing such an uproar? Fiction allowed us, first, to bring in both sides, and second, to make composite characters. It would have been a lot more difficult to have real people playing them. Violence works very differently in animation. When you make a world, you need to think about how people come into it, how people die in it. How plumbing works in Krabstadt. All these details in our society that we get to imagine and make jokes about. Humor is an important part when the situation becomes absurd.

Jakarta Biennale: This is also how I think of Jatiwangi Art Factory. Their role within their living environment is to be this fiction, to be *the* imaginative agent that mixes realities and builds new cultures. If you don't like the culture that currently exists, you make new ones. They started with having a playgroup for kids and providing daycare for children of factory workers, which in fact is meant to build a future for the next generation. For me that has become the spectacle that allows them to do things differently. The arts came later. Now they are making a school, which you could see as the extension of this mix between the reality as the world wants to acknowledge it and the possible reality that at certain points you call imagination, or fiction.

Jatiwangi Art Factory: When you talk about humor... humor is our religion. One could almost say that we use fun and humor as a trigger, to make people come to Majalengka. Starting from the idea of a lifestyle, we can then build something up together, a way of life.

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: At KUNCI we often use what we call "confabulation" or fabrication, something that is not yet real enough. The encounter with reality and learning from it can be difficult at times, therefore we asked whether it is strategically more useful to use fabrication and imaginary places to help face that which is difficult. Other than KUNCI, the School of Improper Education doesn't follow a particular idea on how to use imagination as a way of learning. However, there is a playfulness in our methods. For example, we are using Post-its excessively to develop a theme that arises from our different interests and needs. We are in the phase of connecting the dots! When we talk about "role-playing" in relation to positions such as student, teacher, or moderator, there is an emphasis on "play." Another point about humor is that we try not to individualize certain emotions, like "that person is so funny, it's their habitus." Humor and comical moments happen in a socialized context. We tell jokes to make people happy and not to show our skills as comedians. That's one way to respond to an industry, where being funny is a surplus for job interviews. The last point is that we use humor in our meetings because they tend to be very long! Humor creates a break. So aside from the pause at mealtime, we have the pause created by a joke, when everyone can relax a bit.

Needs

KEC: Is there a need to make these non-degree schools? At KEC we first had to acknowledge the anger and anxiety that is related to working institutionally, because to be ironic or to be funny about it one has to know the insanity of these real institutions very well. For example, it's amazing to hear about friendship admissions, because one of the first things you are told at Scandinavian art schools is, that you need to be very unbiased, and that positive discrimination is also discrimination. So when we admit students, we cannot talk about their race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, but only about the quality of their portfolio. All these attempts to be unbiased institutionally are absurd because those schools with all their "objectivity" manage to be snow-white. Of course, society is having an impact, but Scandinavian societies have not been snow-white for a while. So this raises two questions: How much of the need to establish one's own non-degree program happens in response to the existing institution? And how much is it about an alternative educational strategy and creating platforms for thinking together in a community?

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: While we live in a social and political context in which we cannot always rely on the state, we also live within a social context that is constantly on the move; there are lots of frictions but also the desire to do something. Traditionally and conceptually, it is always imagined that younger generations in Indonesia have to find a specific mode of contributing to society. There is a lot of indirect pressure on young people, which creates specific anxieties. Everyone joined KUNCI at different times, so we acknowledge different problems and political memories. For example, we are trying to implement the *Taman Siswa* or "Garden of Students." The name is taken from an education system devised by Suwardi Suryaningrat in 1922, who developed his ideas on education when Indonesia was still under Dutch occupation. He challenged the kinds of schools set up by the Dutch colonial state that only catered for the elite. The School of Improper Education wants to connect to those historical legacies but also tries to twist them. We put our thoughts in boxes that are already messy.

Jatiwangi Art Factory: Maybe young people in Jatiwangi need the school because they need something cool to be part of. It's as simple as that. As a young person in high school, you often don't think about the future but want to be part of the coolness. When you live in Yogya or Jakarta, you already have that just by living in the big city. The infrastructure has an impact on what it means for people to go to school or get involved in culture. In Majalengka we have a strategy on how to build it up despite a lot of bureaucracy. This is not only about setting up the curriculum. We have had many talks with the local government and got the opportunity to advise them on the provincial planning process that concerns the development of the school.

Jakarta Biennale: Gudskul, would you say that what you are doing is not only a model for teaching or giving workshops, but it's also about learning of the day-to-day or the evolving challenges of being a collective?

Gudskul: Right now, it's only collectives that are part of the regular program. We can't show them much that they wouldn't already know, but it's good to raise awareness of certain things. They often just want to use the space, it's not that pedagogical. From the first bachelor in 2018 up until the third bachelor, which is finalizing right now, I think we've played with different models. It's still an ongoing experiment, made by individuals. We also asked people to contribute financially and usually it's "pay as you wish," but right now [since the pandemic] we've given up on that model, so everything's for free and everything's online.

Does It Work?

KEC: You said that people come in and find out what is ultimately important for them. If one succeeds in that, it's

a huge achievement in all education contexts, because it's what motivates them the most. So, does it work? Not in terms of just getting something out of it but the process itself.

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: We have some parallel lines with National Education at universities, but we want to offer an alternative. A system that is based on maximum performance leads to burnouts. Our school "works" as an option; it works when it doesn't lead to an ableist idea of learning. That's why we talk about tools as a new currency, a knowledge that could help some individual or collective when it is applied in other places. They may have encountered similar problems but couldn't see any solutions, which led to hopelessness. This occasion is where the tools situate themselves: It's a way to distribute imagination.

Participants at the two online meetings on June 15 and July 6, 2021:

KUNCI's School of Improper Education: Eliesta Handitya, Hilman Fathoni, Rifki Akbar Pratama (AP), Brigitta Isabella, Nuraini Juliastuti, Prapti Alpandi

Jatiwangi Art Factory: Alghorie (Arie Syariefuddin), Ginggi Syarif Hasyim, Arief Yudi Rahman

Gudskul: Farid Rakun, Daniella F Praptono (Kunil), Gesyada Siregar

Jakarta Biennale 2021: Akmalia Rizqita, Grace Samboh, Rachel K. Surijata

Krabstadt Education Center: Ewa Einhorn, Jeuno JE Kim, Karolin Meunier