

## ***The Development of Religious and Moral Values through Playing***

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to describe playing activities in the context of teaching religious and moral values in a kindergarten in Jember Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. This type of research is descriptive and qualitative. The data collection techniques include interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis uses an interactive model through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The method of checking the data's validity is through the source, technical, and time triangulation. This study's data sources were the board of teachers or educators and students aged 5 to 6 years in a kindergarten institution. This research focused on how educators develop religious and moral values through the play method using simple media, such as cards, balls, paper, and alphabet blocks.*

**Keywords:** *religious and moral values, playing, early childhood*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan aktivitas bermain dalam rangka penanaman nilai-nilai keagamaan dan nilai moral yang berlangsung di sebuah taman kanak-kanak di Kabupaten Jember, Provinsi Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Jenis penelitian ini adalah kualitatif deskriptif. Adapun teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, penarikan kesimpulan. Teknik pemeriksaan keabsahan data melalui triangulasi sumber, triangulasi teknik, dan triangulasi waktu. Sumber data pada penelitian ini adalah dewan guru atau pendidik dan peserta didik berusia 5 sampai 6 tahun pada sebuah lembaga taman kanak-kanak. Penelitian ini difokuskan pada bagaimana cara pendidik mengembangkan nilai agama dan moral melalui metode bermain dengan memanfaatkan media sederhana, seperti kartu, bola, kertas, dan balok abjad.

**Kata Kunci :** nilai agama dan moral, bermain, anak usia dini

### **A. Introduction**

In Indonesia, values education is a national policy priority for every level of education, including kindergarten and early childhood schools. As stated in the law on the Indonesian national education system number 20 of



2003, national education functions to develop the nation's ability, character, and civilization to increase its intellectual power. Indonesian education also aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God; who have morals and noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, and independent; and become democratic and responsible citizens. The law stated that increasing faith and holiness and an increasing noble character were essential considerations in developing the national curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

The Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 146 of 2014 concerning the 2013 Curriculum for Early Childhood Education stated that: "Early Childhood Education is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of 6 (six) years which is carried out through the provision of stimulation. Education to help physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are ready to enter further education."<sup>2</sup> Article 5 of the regulation explains that the early childhood education curriculum's structure contains development programs that include religious and moral values, physical-motor, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and art.

Based on the regulations, we can understand that the education system in Indonesia aims to form a generation of people who are not only intelligent and skilled but also have noble character and good attitude. That is, students' character becomes an essential value for success in addition to academic achievement. Therefore, to realize these national goals, the inculcation of values becomes the leading spirit in learning activities, starting from the level of early childhood education to the highest level of education. However, early childhood education is the first line in instilling values into the younger generation.

Early childhood education is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of six, which is carried out through educational stimuli to assist physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are ready to enter further education.<sup>3</sup> Education for early childhood is an education for children from newborn to eight years. The process focuses on physical, intellectual, emotional, and social education.<sup>4</sup>

Early childhood is a period in which the growth and development of children occur significantly. Education in this phase is the earliest level before children take primary education. Early childhood education is

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<sup>1</sup> "Act of the Republic of Indonesia on National Education System," Pub. L. No. 20 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture, "Regulation of Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture about the 2013 Curriculum of Early Childhood Education," Pub. L. No. 146 (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Novi Mulyani, *Perkembangan Dasar Anak Usia Dini*, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Gava Media, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Mursid, *Belajar Dan Pembelajaran PAUD*, 1st ed. (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2015).

essential as a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to six years so that children can learn to master specific skills and face new experiences.

An early childhood educator must have creative abilities in educating or developing the potential of their students because success at the level of early childhood education is the beginning of the success of children's education at the next level. The learning models to develop religious and moral values are varied. One of the models often used is the play method, which collaborates between learning and playing by internalizing religious and moral values.

According to Ginsburg, play activities are significant for children's development because they can positively contribute to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Play can also offer an ideal opportunity for parents to engage with their children. When children play, they use their creativity while developing their imagination, talent, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. That way, children and parents can engage each other in contextualized active interactions with their environment.<sup>5</sup> In line with that, Whitebread et al. stated that play should be an integral component of school engagement. School engagement can be achieved when the educational setting attends to children's social and emotional development and cognitive development. The challenge is to make each child feel competent in a school setting because the experience of success forms positive associations with school attendance.<sup>6</sup> Engagement could be the critical factor in making students easier to understand and practice in the correlation with religious and moral values development.

In line with that, Whitebread et al. state that plays should be an integral component of school student engagement.<sup>7</sup> School engagement comes when the educational environment pays attention to children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Concerning the development of religious and moral values, involvement can be a critical factor in making it easier for students to understand and practice them.

The importance of play is also related to children's brain development. As Frost said, in animal and human studies, infancy and early childhood were optimum periods for growth. The brain is most plastic during these periods and is highly influenced by environmental stimulation.<sup>8</sup> There are at least five linkages between brain development and playing activity in early childhood, all of which prove that play and brain development have a strong

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth R. Ginsburg, "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds," *Pediatrics* 119, no. 1 (2007): 182-91, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Miller and Joan Almon, *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* (College Park, Maryland: Alliance for Childhood, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> David Whitebread et al., *The Role of Play in Children's Development: A Review of the Evidence* (Billund: The LEGO Foundation, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Joe L. Frost, *Early Childhood Rediscovered* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

connection.<sup>9</sup> *First*, all healthy young mammals tend to play, including humans. Baby animals and humans first engage in fun play activities as soon as they are born into the world by activating innate neural mechanisms. *Second*, the range and complexity of play activities tend to increase as neurons link connections with movement speed quickly. Play helps program neural structures to become more complex, and neural systems influence how playing becomes increasingly complex. *Third*, early playing and carelessness of both animals and humans can equip them with the skills they will need later. Human infants and young children can practice motor skills, language, and negotiation. Every child, boy or girl, can be involved in situations that give them the task of dealing with them. And this can be mediated socio-culturally by problem-solving, negotiation, and the discourses that arise during their play. This process trains children's thinking skills and social skills. *Fourth*, play is essential for a healthy brain and physical development. There is strong evidence about how the human brain can develop and relate to better language skills, emotional development, gestures, social skills, and cognition. *Fifth*, play deprivation results in deviant behavior. Several cases show that children who lack play activities exhibit abnormal behavior.

That is why play is still essential in children's development and must be the most crucial element of children's early childhood activities. One example of applying this play method, especially in teaching moral values, can be found in an early childhood school in East Java, Indonesia. By playing, the teacher applies good behavior habits and the introduction of moral values and religious values to their students. It is interesting to practice the method of playing at the school, which made me bring up this topic.

## **B. Method**

The research was conducted from August to September 2021 in an early childhood school in the province of East Java, Indonesia. This type of research used a qualitative approach and the application of descriptive analysis. These approaches and techniques aim to describe the phenomena that occur in-depth and according to what they are. Two kinds of data sources are primary data and secondary data. Primary data comes from observations and interviews involving the early children's teachers and students. Observations aim to observe the learning process at the school and the behavior of the teacher and their children. After approximately two months, the researcher needed to take several approaches to observe

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<sup>9</sup> Joe L. Frost, "Neuroscience, Play, and Child Development," in *The International Play Association/USA Triennial National Conference* (Longmont, Colorado: International Play Association, 1998).

children's playing activities closely and interact with them. Besides, the secondary data was obtained through theory books and literature related to the research, along with documents and reports on the related topic. The data analysis uses an interactive model through data reduction and data presentation to conclude. The source and technique triangulation are two techniques for the data's validity checking.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **1. Internalizing Religious and Moral Values through Education**

Why are values teaching still a priority?

Age 4 to 6 years is a very strategic time to cultivate positive attitudes and behaviors in children. It is essential that later when a child grows up, he will have an upbeat personality and character following his environment's religious and moral values. Thus, they can establish good relations with the surrounding social environment. According to Shrivastava, values reflect an individual's personality, attitudes, behavior, mission, and vision.<sup>10</sup> By teaching values, we form the child's vision, attitude, and personality. To achieve this, every early childhood education institution is responsible for developing the positive character of its students.

According to Gulcan, education is a fundamental process for human life because education is an ethical effort.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, ethics is an important lesson that must include in it. In line with that, Marzuki et al. suggested that moral education for the younger generation can lead them to a dignified, respected, peaceful, prosperous, and prosperous nation. It is because good human behavior is influenced and determined not only by legal factors but also by ethical, moral, or moral factors.<sup>12</sup> The morals, in this case, can be sourced from religion or community culture.

Moral concepts are rules of behavior that have become habits for members of a culture. This ethical concept determines the behavior expected of each member of the group. The moral is always related to a particular society's customs, rules, or procedures. Thus, moral behavior is human behavior under a specific community group's expectations, regulations, and habits.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shailaj Kumar Shrivastava, "Promotion of Moral Values through Education," *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 7, no. 6 (2017): 103–8.

<sup>11</sup> Nur Yeliz Gülcan, "Discussing the Importance of Teaching Ethics in Education," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174 (2015): 2622–25, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.942>.

<sup>12</sup> Ismail Marzuki et al., *Filsafat Ilmu Di Era Milenial*, ed. Muhammad Asdar, Sry Gusti, and Sri Adrianti Muin (Makassar: Fakultas Teknik Universitas Fajar, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Mhd. Habibu Rahman, Rita Kencana, and Nur Faizah, *Pengembangan Nilai Moral Dan Agama Anak Usia Dini: Panduan Bagi Orang Tua, Guru, Mahasiswa Dan Praktisi PAUD* (Tasikmalaya: Edu Publisher, 2020).

According to Syamsurrijal, inculcating an education or value should be done early because, in those times, there were what we called golden ages when the child's brain absorbs something like a sponge. In addition, early age is a period where growth and development begin and is ongoing, whether in physiological, language, cognitive, or motor development.<sup>14</sup>

In line with that, Suryana stated that moral values as an ideal ideology must be instilled in every student in kindergarten so that one day the life of a nation that upholds moral values can be realized.<sup>15</sup> So, moral values are one of the main assets to realize an ideal community life. Early childhood education is the first in preparing a virtuous nation's generation, and it should play a role in the education of moral and ethical values.

Susanto, in his research, mentioned that moral development in early childhood is still at a low level because children's intellectual development has not yet reached the point where they can learn or apply abstract principles of right and wrong.<sup>16</sup> It shows that in practice, educating moral and ethical values in early childhood still faces challenges. Therefore, specific techniques and approaches early childhood teachers need in their application.

Jalaluddin Rakhmat advises parents and teachers by giving ten tips for developing Spiritual Values<sup>17</sup> as follows:

a) Be a good “spiritual shepherd” for children

In this case, parents and teachers are the first to give understanding to the children about the meaning and significance of everything. Children are good imitators.

b) Help the child to formulate his life mission

The primary mission for children is to be pious children who are devout in the true sense of a good child who carries out God's commands and leaves his prohibitions.

c) Read the holy book together and explain its meaning

Reading the Quran together is essential in introducing children to the Creator of their world. Before being born on earth, children who are still in the womb can feel when the verses of the Quran are recited. If the child has started to understand something, it is necessary to explain the meaning contained in the reading

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<sup>14</sup> Arif Syamsurrijal, “Bermain Sambil Belajar: Permainan Tradisional Sebagai Media Penanaman Nilai Pendidikan Karakter,” *ZAHRA: Research and Thought Elementary School of Islam Journal* 1, no. 2 (2020): 1–14, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37812/zahra.v1i2.116>.

<sup>15</sup> Dadan Suryana, *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini: Teori Dan Praktik Pembelajaran*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Kencana, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad Susanto, *Perkembangan Anak Usia Dini: Pengantar Dalam Berbagai Aspeknya*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Kencana, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Imas Kurniasih, *Mendidik SQ Anak Menurut Nabi Muhammad SAW* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Marwa, 2010).

d) Tell the great stories of spiritual figures

Children are happier when a story is read, especially about the characteristics of a heroic hero. Therefore it is perfect for telling passionate stories like the Story of the Prophets and Apostles.

e) Read spiritual and inspirational poems or songs

Reading poetry or playing songs to children will complete their knowledge and hone artistic talents or potential in them.

Building morals in early childhood requires the synergy of all education elements, the environment, family, school, or community. At a young age, habituation of good behavior is one way to strengthen their moral values. In essence, every child who is born carries the potential for intelligence. The level of intelligence that varies in children can affect their abilities and moral development. Supported by intelligence, children can easily understand the concept of right and wrong. The approach used in educating children on values, morals, and ethics must consider the aspect of inclusiveness to the diversity of children's potential, including intelligence. And everyone involved should be equally aware of the importance of such a considerate approach.

## **2. Religious and Moral Values Development through Playing**

The inculcation of religious and moral values in the school includes several aspects, including the importance of faith, worship practices, and morals. The method of planting faith values is applied through learning activities with the theme of faith. To make it easier, the teacher invites the children to play together while singing songs and adjusting the topics teacher determined. Songs can mean divinity, the pillars of faith and Islam, or ethics of daily behavior. In this way, children can know who the creator is, growing confidence in themselves about their faith in God.

The play method's application is straightforward but more directed to children taking roles and showing initiative. The teacher only gives the initial feedback, and the students are immediately asked to practice what the teacher exemplified. The stages include the following:

- a) The teacher provides a morning greeting to the students. While welcoming, the teacher invites the children to stand up, move their hands, and say a sentence of encouragement.
- b) After giving each other greetings, the teacher invites the children to say a prayer together. The children showed a neat sitting posture and read a prayer with reverence.
- c) The teacher shows a card with an example of behavior or a picture of a written activity. In learning religious values, the teacher can replace writing on the card with something else, for example, the names of God's attributes, the names of prophets, or other keywords related to religious teachings. If the material taught is related to

moral values from community culture, then the teacher can include keywords related to commendable attitudes and ethics in society.

- d) The teacher and the children can apply various games with cards as the medium. An example of the application found in a kindergarten shows an activity in which the teacher asks the children to close their eyes while singing to memorize the names of Allah's attributes. Then the teacher keeps the cards in different places. The children are challenged to collect the cards and put them in order according to God's attribute names.
- e) Children are allowed to demonstrate their work in front of their friends and say what they remember.

Based on the observations, when playing activities took place in class, the children were very enthusiastic about learning activities while playing. It appears that the playing method makes lessons more enjoyable but still contains elements of values education in it. The designed games are simple but provide a different experience and can encourage children to participate actively. Students not only try to answer but also try to ask questions. Teachers also often use this method to introduce children to polite attitudes and correct behavior in everyday life. The most important thing to be achieved is the ability of children to distinguish between good and evil and to know the principles and teachings of their religion well from an early age in an exciting and fun way.

The method of playing can be applied by using the type of game that changes daily. Before starting and ending activities in and outside the class, the children always pray together with the right attitude. They read a prayer for their goodness and their parents' happiness. The theme in play activities can also change every day according to what has been determined in the children's one-year learning theme plan and semester learning plan. There are also themes about worship practices such as prayer, ablution and fasting, love for nature and the environment, respect for friends and relatives, and the culture of helping each other.

Activities after playing can be in the form of joint exercises accompanied by music. Sometimes they make a big circle or sit in a circle while inviting the children to say the words of monotheism, prayer sentences, or get to know things related to their god and all his greatness. These things can provide the first stimulus or stimulation to students early. Sometimes the teacher also invites children to know the values of nationalism and love for their homeland by telling the history of national heroes and singing the national anthem and songs of independence. The teacher can use the playing method to invite children to become good citizens and valuable future individuals.

The teachers said these activities could encourage students to learn moral and religious values more actively. Interestingly, it is easier for



students to memorize prayers and verses of the Quran by playing. So that feels prayers such as the prayer for eating, the prayer of both parents, and the prayer before and after studying are easier to remember, it is necessary to do it by playing. It is the play method's usefulness. Students can memorize the alphabet and hijaiyah letters by playing with the help of paper, balls, ice cream sticks, balloons, or pictures in every corner of the room.

Learning values through play activities still uses simple materials that they found around. Activities can be in the form of guessing words, guessing pictures, shuffling cards, catching the ball, or other games. The point is to try incorporating moral and religious values into the game.

We found from this research is part of an effort to internalize morals and religion under the curriculum for childhood education regulated in the regulation of the minister of education and culture. On the other hand, the benefits of these play activities are the formation of ethical and religious thinking in children.

Ethical thinking is thinking that is not only focused on how to follow the code of ethics and existing rules. According to Schrier, ethical thinking is the ability to judge something is right to do, accompanied by reason, reflection, and empathy.<sup>18</sup> So, the owner tends to behave under his reflection and thoughts.

Meanwhile, religious reasoning is the ability to think based on thoughts about divinity and all its intricacies. This thought comes from a person's knowledge of the teachings of his religion. According to Goldman, religious belief is thinking directed at God's nature.<sup>19</sup>

In the Quran, the pattern of instilling values into children from an early age is found in Surah Luqman, verses 13<sup>20</sup> : *"And (remember) when Lukman said to his son, when he taught him, "O my son! Do not associate partners with Allah. Indeed associating partners with (Allah) is a great injustice."* The verse is about a person named Luqman who reminded his son not to associate partners with his God. It is a form of knowing God from childhood.

An educator has a responsibility to help children build the thinking skills needed to know and understand the right way to act. However, he also needs an approach that can deliver these goals so that they are as expected. In other words, an educator needs a way or method to provide teaching or direction that students can happily accept. Learning through playing could be one of the suitable ways. Besides being fun for students,

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<sup>18</sup> Karen Schrier, "No Title Designing and Using Games to Teach Ethics and Ethical Thinking," in *Learning, Education and Games Volume One: Curricular and Design Considerations*, ed. Karen Schrier (Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Goldman, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (Routledge, 2022).

<sup>20</sup>Al Quran Terjemah Al-Hufaz, (Bandung : Cordoba, 2020), 412

the playing method can also respond quickly to what is taught by educators.

The play initially departed from Froebel's theory of children. He agrees with Pestalozzi that children are born with unique abilities. Froebel is known for his child-centered approach. He is also known for his ideas, including playing or learning through games and activities. Froebel also emphasizes the importance of outdoor fun and natural play equipment from the surrounding environment.

Even in Froebel's view, ideally, children's development should pursue learning and welfare through play and creativity activities initiated by children.<sup>21</sup> It shows that each child must be respected and considered to be unique. Play can be used as a medium to improve specific skills and abilities in children. The term play is defined as an activity carried out using or without using tools that generate understanding, provide information, provide fun, and can develop children's imaginations. Playing, according to Froebel, is "the way children learn" or "children learn by doing". This role can appear in several ways, including : playing, singing, drawing, and caring for plants or small animals.



Img 1. The Teacher is Giving Instructions



Img 2. Playing in a Circle

Play should be voluntary, and there should be no coercion, external pressure, or obligation. Playing doesn't care about results either. Play is a natural method that provides children with experiences that will be useful in real life. Children learn to use tools, develop skills, avoid danger, and cooperate with others through play. In addition to learning to socialize, be sporty, and tolerant, by playing, children can also explore and experiment with what they meet around them to increase their knowledge. So, playing is an entertaining method for students. How to play also allows students to become more familiar with what they are doing.

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<sup>21</sup> Sue Smedley and Kate Hoskins, "Finding a Place for Froebel's Theories: Early Years Practitioners' Understanding and Enactment of Learning through Play," *EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CARE*, 2018, 1-13, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1525706>.

According to Piaget, as quoted by DeVries and Zan, there are two types of morality relations between children and adults: heteronomous morality and autonomous morality. Heteronomous morality is the morality of obedience. The term heteronomous is given by Piaget, which means "following the rules made by others".<sup>22</sup> For this reason, someone with this character usually follows the moral rules given by others for obedience to the authority of someone who has coercive power. The heteronomous stage starts in childhood (early age) and ends in early adolescence. In this phase, children believe morality in obedience, and moral righteousness rules are seen with the function of authority. So the effect is to accept without asking any questions with total compliance.

Meanwhile, the second type is the autonomous morality type, which means automated.<sup>23</sup> A child's personality constructs several moral rules or principles in this type. Usually, with this character, children can follow their inner awareness of the importance of respecting others. They prefer to start a moral act based on their inner consciousness, which believes that a particular principle is true and must be followed. They can already see the moral status as an entity separate from the authority that enforces it.

If we relate it to Piaget's theory, the game activities carried out in the kindergarten where this research took place help children build heteronomous morality. As mentioned, in Piaget's view, early childhood tends to be classified as a heteronomous phase. Children believe in a moral and religious value they receive based on the principle of obedience to the owner of authority, both the source of spiritual and moral values.

However, the application of play activities has not put into practice what Froebel said about the concept of child development through play activities. Compared with Froebel's thought, the play activities in the kindergarten were not carried out on the children's pure will and initiative but still through the educators' instructions.

Ideally, in playing activities, children set their own game rules; as musfiroh said, even though these rules are the result of being adopted by other people, at least the children decide which rules of the game to follow.<sup>24</sup> After that the game's rules become guidelines that all other participants follow. The play characteristics are outlined in the following chart:

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<sup>22</sup> Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan, *Moral Classrooms, Moral Children: Creating a Constructivist Atmosphere in Early Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> DeVries and Zan.

<sup>24</sup> Tadzkiroatun Musfiroh, *Bermain Dan Permainan Anak* (Tangerang: Universitas Terbuka, 2015).



Img. 3. Musfiroh's Play Characteristics<sup>25</sup>

Musfiroh's view on the characteristics of playing activities seems to be inspired by Froebel's opinion about playing. Play activities initiated by children independently and independently show more of the freedom of a child's rights. It is closely related to Froebel's view that students are not passive vessels who take what is given to them for granted but take part in their education.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Through this research, we can conclude that playing activities can be an effective method teacher can use in kindergarten to teach moral and religious values. Although the play activities carried out in learning are still not ideally carried out to prioritize children's initiative, it is constructive in making learning activities more fun. The point is that teaching values and religion must continue to be a priority in the early childhood education curriculum. Need to be considered for further research to focus on patterns of play in the classroom that can be used as examples in learning values for early childhood.

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<sup>25</sup> Tadzkiroatun Musfiroh, *Cerdas Melalui Bermain: Cara Mengasah Multiple Intelligences Pada Anak Sejak Usia Dini* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2008).

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