

# The sanctity of multicultural education in teaching and learning

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The Joko “Jokowi” Widodo-Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama victory in the Jakarta gubernatorial election last year demonstrates that Indonesia’s democracy has progressed to a higher level.

The rigid notion about how a particular group should lead the government has started fading. The tough “ethnicity” wall also appears to be crumbling.

But is it true that intolerance has disappeared altogether? Or is the Jokowi-Ahok phenomenon just a superficially attractive delusion for what we call multicultural tolerance?

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Christians a merry Christmas, do not follow the same path as our previous euphoria. Indeed, our multicultural tolerance still has a long way to go.

Some aspects might cause intolerance. They might be personal experiences, parental issues, environmental or educational. The latter, especially formal education, plays a significant role in shaping the understanding of multiculturalism. Therefore, we should pay attention to the school element, particularly the teachers. Teachers must be able to prepare students as part of a multicultural society.

Teachers hold a responsibility to create teaching and learning environments that promote a democratic exchange of ideas. By doing this, there will be strong multicultural education in our education system. According to Bannet et al, multicultural education is a democratic approach to teaching and learning that seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world. In the US, more than 63 percent of American universities require multicultural diversity in their core course for teachers' education.

Multicultural education focuses on students' performance, both academically and socially. Nowadays, often as educators, teachers perceive teaching and learning as processes that solely concern the academic achievement of their students. In Indonesia, for example, most schools employ the results of academic tests as the primary measurement of being a "successful student". This must change since it focuses more on cognition than preparing students to be responsible citizens of a multicultural world.

Helping students to develop positive attitudes and become responsible individuals is extremely essential in a classroom. Teachers should encourage students to be active learners.

To do this, teachers must lead students to know each other as individuals, regard each other as equals and be able to work together on common interests and goals in a safe and supportive classroom environment. Creating such a classroom climate that promotes the internalization of these shared values through multicultural education will help students actively develop as learners, as people and as citizens.

Multicultural education will prepare students to be responsible members of society. Students must be aware that they are a part of society.

As Pacino eloquently says, teaching and learning in the context of community is truly a moral, spiritual and ethical journey. The concept of ethical and moral values

and actions in society should be integrated in their classroom.

Hence, educators should acknowledge and address students’ need to carry on the

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students now to actively participate and contribute to their society. By acquiring moral and ethical values from school, students will understand the dos and don’ts within a participatory democratic society. In order to achieve this, teachers should place themselves as the facilitators of information, not as dictators of information. This kind of active classroom setting enables students to experience the feelings of respect and self-autonomy.

There are specific methods that teachers can implement to achieve multicultural education. One example is implementing activities and discussions that focus on the positive aspects of cultural identity, heritage and differences, such as involving students in developing personally relevant multicultural stories, books or even autobiographies. Teachers can ask students to actively present and discuss their own story.

One of the purposes of inviting students to share their stories is to better understand how the students can use their background knowledge to gain access to curricular content. This will also include an understanding of cross-cultural differences and social challenges.

Teachers can reinforce the importance of multicultural education by involving students in community service/learning activities. This gives students the opportunity to be more responsible, knowledgeable and sensitive to their own surroundings.

This sensitivity is essential for the students’ personal moral development, their sense of community and increased tolerance, acceptance and respect for others.

To realize multicultural education, a Herculean effort from all education stakeholders is mandatory. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding. Hence, let’s keep up the spirit of multicultural tolerance in Indonesia once and for all.

*The writer is pursuing a PhD degree at the Ohio State University, in the US.*

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