

Cultivating Respect for Religious Diversity: A Case Study of Civic Education in Manado

Erica M. Larson
Dept. of Anthropology
Boston University
Boston, USA
emlarson@bu.edu

Sjamsi Pasandaran
Department of Pancasila and Civics
Education
Manado State University
Manado, Indonesia
spasandaran@unima.ac.id

Deitje Katuuk
Department of Elementary Teacher
Education
Manado State University
Manado, Indonesia
deitjekatuuk@unima.ac.id

Abstract— Civic education is often aptly considered an important arena for cultivating the character of youth and instilling the importance of respect for fellow citizens. To address a growing concern regarding religious intolerance, civic education programs in Indonesia have increasingly stressed material about respect for diversity and inter-religious tolerance. In order to understand how the topic of religious diversity is addressed in civic education courses at the high school level, ethnographic data were collected over the course of 16 months at three different high schools (*sekolah menengah atas*) in Manado: a public high school (*sekolah negeri*), public madrasah (*madrasah aliyah negeri*), and a private high school (*sekolah swasta*) with Catholic affiliation. Interviews were also conducted with teachers, students, and school administrators. This study espouses a multi-centered understanding of education, which the researchers have operationalized via their examination of the implementation of the civic education in the classroom in addition to school policies, extracurricular activities, informal interactions, and local and national political debates that also shape frameworks for understanding religious diversity. Two major findings emerge from the study. First, although each of the schools is implementing the same national curriculum, each holds a different understanding of the role of the school, of religious education, and of civic education, in contributing to respect for religious diversity. These differences ultimately shape the delivery of the curriculum in each school. Second, at all schools, discussions of religious diversity alternate between collective and individual understandings of tolerance, which has significant ramifications for how tolerance is understood and enacted.

Keywords: *civic education, religious diversity, character education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Schooling in general and civic education in particular are central in socializing and shaping understandings of national identity and citizenship. These frameworks which influence national belonging also necessarily encode perspectives on diversity within the national framework. As a result, education becomes a primary site for “transforming‘experiences of the everyday’...into categories

of social differentiation and identification” [1]. This observation reinforces the importance of studying civic education to gain a better understanding on how national perspectives on diversity are socialized, and how these perspectives are understood and operationalized by youth.

Indonesia represents a particularly interesting case study because of the significant religious and ethnic diversity across the archipelago, as well as the political evolution toward democracy and its impact on discussions of diversity in the public sphere. In Indonesia, civic education programs have continually considered the question of national diversity through lens of *Pancasila*, the national ideology. In light of the political shifts of the country since it declared independence in 1945, interpretations of the ideology have evolved over time in their emphasis on *Pancasila*, and, consequentially, treatment of the question of diversity. In contemporary Indonesia, civic educators have increasingly been called on by government actors to address the growing issue of intolerance in society through character education. Since the democratic transition began in 1998, rounds of curriculum overhaul to introduce democratic civic education and emphasize character building have been enacted with this goal in mind. Lessons about respect for fellow citizens and inter-religious tolerance are taught with an intent to instill a feeling of respect for fellow citizens and broadly reinforce national identity.

While an analysis of the curriculum can provide important insights into the intended goals of civic education programs, this study aims to examine the educational process of socializing attitudes toward diversity. Toward this end, the researchers designed an ethnographic study at several Indonesian high schools, collecting data through observation in civic education classrooms and interviews with educators, administrators, and students. The researchers argue that this approach is important in conceptualizing the role of civic education in conjunction with other important sites of socialization, such as the family, religious communities, and among peers. The approach also enables a potential investigation of how these values are understood and enacted by students.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Selection of Field Site

Manado, Indonesia, was selected as the main field site for this study to examine the process of socializing perspectives

toward diversity. Manado is the capital city of North Sulawesi, a majority-Protestant province with 423,357 inhabitants [2].

The city was chosen because of its continued recognition as a model city in Indonesia with respect to inter-religious harmony. For example, in 2017, Manado was designated the most tolerant city in Indonesia by the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace. Manado continues to build upon its identity of religious harmony, foregrounding this aspect in public events and initiatives [3]. At the same time, public debates questioning the terms of inter-religious relations often do take place, underscoring that the city's proclaimed embrace of diversity requires constant work and negotiation to maintain [4]. These public debates are important for the research described here because they also involve varying stances on diversity that may impact the delivery and reception of civic education material relevant to diversity in schools.

Three high schools (*sekolah menengah atas*) located in or near the city of Manado were selected as sites of analysis in order to add a comparative element to the study. These three schools include a public high school (*sekolah negeri*), public madrasah (*madrasah aliyah negeri*), and a private high school (*sekolah swasta*) with informal Catholic affiliation. Schools with different religious affiliation and public/private status were chosen in order to investigate a variety of school policies and different types of student populations. In addition, the larger study of which this is a part also paid attention to the religious education curricula and programs at the three schools.

B. Data Collection

Because the study aims to understand not only the intended aims or results of civic education programs, but the actual process of education, the researchers employed an ethnographic approach involving observation and interviews. Data were collected at the schools between January 2015 and June 2016.

The process of data collection consisted primarily of participant observation and interviews at each of the three schools. Observation took place during civic and religious education courses in the formal classroom setting, as well as during extracurricular activities and break times in more informal settings at the school, such as in the cafeteria or the school yard. This approach allowed the researcher engaged in data collection to build rapport with students and teachers to better understand their experiences. It was also critical in understanding how certain frameworks about diversity were put into action by teachers and students as different situations and circumstances arose.

Interviews with teachers and school administrators were also a significant part of data collection. These interviews gave a clearer understanding of school policies related to diversity and the reasoning behind them. They also elucidated aspects of curriculum delivery, teaching style, and philosophy of education that provided context for school and classroom observation. Interactions with students took place in the classroom and in school-sponsored extracurricular activities. Discussions with students remained primarily informal and served to better grasp student understandings of diversity and religious difference.

Because the approach described here espouses a multi-centered understanding of education (explained in detail in Section III), the researchers also extended their scope of inquiry beyond the school grounds. Interviews were conducted with local political and religious leaders in Manado in order to connect the local debates relevant to religious diversity to the discussions of diversity encountered in schools. This connection provides an important frame for the delivery of the curriculum taking place in the classroom. The research informing this article has been supported by the following sources of funding: a USINDO (United States-Indonesia) Society Travel Grant, a Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, and a Boston University Graduate Research Abroad Fellowship. Portions of the article were written with the support of a Pardee Graduate Summer Fellowship at Boston University.

III. MULTI-CENTERED EDUCATION

This section introduces an approach to the social scientific study of education that is fundamentally multi-centered in nature. As we have developed this perspective, we have also considered the best research methodology to serve as its complement. Rather than focusing exclusively on the intended goals of civic education programs or their outcomes, this approach seeks to better capture the processual nature of learning. This section summarizes the theoretical background informing the approach, and how it has shaped the methodology used in the study.

A. Where Does Civic Education Fit?

Civic education programs have a significant function in socializing youth into their roles and responsibilities as citizens. Therefore, in seeking to better understand the socialization of youth into perspectives on diversity within the national framework, civic education programs are a major focus of the study. At the same time, the researchers recognize that the outcomes of educational programs cannot be assumed as a simple internalization of the material. Furthermore, schooling is not the unique center of socialization, but one of many, including the family, religious community, and peers. Considering these important realities about the place of schooling within the broader ecosystem of socialization and the less than straightforward process that it entails, the researchers employed a multi-centered understanding of education.

Studies of educational programs which focus too heavily on their intended outcome can rely on an assumption of education as a process of internalization, or reproduction. Anthropologists of education have demonstrated the fundamentally contingent and uncertain characteristic of education [5], an important point when considering how educational programs impact the socialization of perspectives on diversity. While the discourses presented through the material do matter, those presented through the sanctioned curriculum are one of many inputs that might impact students' understandings of diversity. Fida Adely has described this reception process as "strategic compliance," where youth form their own viewpoints and perspectives within a range of frameworks they have acquired from multiple inputs [6]. These multiple sources of socialization must be taken into account, are not necessarily on a level playing field. Rather,

their influence must be assessed with respect to their linkage to institutions, and their ability to resonate with messages acquired from other sources, and with the experience of individuals.

In order to evaluate the contribution of civic education programs in socializing perspectives of diversity using a multi-centered understanding of education, the researchers started by observation of civic education courses at the three selected high schools near Manado. Instead of narrowing their focus to these courses, however, the researchers used these courses as a starting point for investigating other course subjects, spaces, and places of discussion where students might encounter or discuss issues related to diversity. Over time, data collection expanded to include religious education classes, an evaluation of school policies, various extracurricular activities, school-wide events, and local and national current events related to religious diversity. The following section provides examples of how expanding the scope of research in this way contributed to a more holistic understanding of how civic education fits into the broader ecosystem of socialization about religious diversity, as well as their potential impact.

B. Putting Civic Education in Context

Civic education is one of many sources of socialization for becoming a citizen to which youth are exposed. While it is not feasible to document and research all of the sources, here several examples are provided to demonstrate how this broadening gave important perspective that ultimately allowed for a better evaluation of the potential impact of civic education programs.

Evaluating the curriculum establishes the intended goals, in this case certain perspectives on diversity, of the educational project. However, anthropologists of education have demonstrated the ways in which the delivery of the curriculum and the school environment itself can also function as a “hidden curriculum” [7], whether intended or not. This environment can have significant impact on the delivery and reception of the actual curricular material. For example, school policies related to religious diversity can implicitly convey a certain perspective on diversity that frames student understanding of the curricular material on the subject. At the private high school which was studied, all students take Catholic religious education courses, although the student body is actually majority Protestant. Students in general are averse to differentiation, understood generally by them as any mention of difference in religious identities. Religious and civic education courses at the school do focus on and spend significant class time on the importance of non-differentiation and respect for religious diversity. At the same time, the policies of the school regarding religious education courses set an example and a precedent for managing religious diversity on the school’s campus.

Extracurricular activities are also an important domain of research relevant to discourses on diversity. In Indonesia, textbooks are typically government-approved, and are either produced by the Ministry of Education and Culture or by private corporations according to the curricular standards set by the ministry. While this guarantees a measure of uniformity, studies in Indonesia have shown that after-school

clubs are potential sites of influence from groups and organizations outside of the school [8]. They also represent arenas for peer-to-peer interaction where students can discuss and share their own ideas and experiences on different topics, including religious diversity. Also at the private high school near Manado, students taking part in an extracurricular club focused on charity made it part of their mission to serve people of all religious backgrounds. They raised money for and visited an orphanage with a Catholic affiliation, and another with Muslim affiliation. Students who took part in this extracurricular club were thus exposed to a particular understanding of how to navigate religious diversity. In this case, the focus was on uniting across religious lines to solve social issues and care for all people in need. Another example can be taken from the public madrasah in Manado, which chose to celebrate the anniversary of its founding by inviting volleyball teams from other nearby schools, including *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), public schools, and private schools with Christian affiliation. The focus on celebrating the school’s founding by inviting neighboring schools to celebrate created in practice an opportunity to model a mode of interaction with the surrounding community, which is religiously diverse.

As these examples demonstrate, a well-rounded examination of civic education and its contribution to perspectives on diversity should take into account not only the curriculum and its implementation, but the other aspects of socialization that shape student perspectives on religious diversity. The holistic approach of a multi-centered education has yielded results that reveal differences in how particular schools view their role in teaching about respect for religious diversity.

IV. RESULTS

Though each of the three high schools studied near Manado is implementing the same national curriculum, each holds a different understanding of the role of the school, of religious education, and of civic education. These differences ultimately shape the delivery of the curriculum in each school. Here, the researchers give a brief characterization of how the role of the school and civic education in terms of cultivating respect for religious diversity.

A. Public High School

The public high school studied in Manado, referred to here as “SMA,” has a student body of over 2,000, and boasts a record of high academic achievement. The student body is ethnically and religiously diverse, as is the population of Manado. The majority of students are Protestant, mostly affiliated with the GMIM (*Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa*) church, but also representing numerous other denominations that have a presence in the region. There is a sizeable minority of Muslim students, and smaller groups of Catholic and Hindu students at SMA. As is required of public schools by law, the high school provides religious education for all students in their respective religions.

Overall, the administration and policies at SMA are highly supportive of religious clubs and activities as important avenues to give students moral grounding and character education. For example, on Friday afternoons, classes are suspended for one hour to accommodate time for religious

worship in the schedule. At this time, Muslim students gather together to walk to a nearby mosque, and Protestant students gather in the central courtyard of the school for worship. Catholic and Hindu students meet in different rooms on the school's campus.

The school's desire to support religious education in general is in tension with the strong influence of the majority-Protestant administration, faculty, and student body. The phenomenon of majoritarian religious influence in public schools has been documented elsewhere in Indonesia, such as in Java [9]. Such a religious influence in public schools is both impacted by a strong foregrounding of identity in the public sphere in Indonesia, as well as decentralization policies that have given provincial and local governments more control over school policies and events.

Students at SMA are readily able to discuss the importance of respecting and valuing difference. However, they also feel that their religious education has taught them to choose friends who can help them grow more deeply in their own faith, i.e., someone of the same religious background. Ultimately, students are left to navigate these teachings about both respecting difference and choosing friends of the same religion as a positive influence on one's life.

SMA's overall approach to religion, marked by an appeal to respect for religious diversity while remaining influenced by its majority-Protestant student body, impacts the delivery of the religious education curriculum. The Protestant religious education teachers often speak about the importance of inter-religious tolerance and respect as abstract values. At the same time, in practice, the school environment is subject to a majoritarian influence and a decidedly Protestant atmosphere

B. Public Muslim High School (Madrasah)

In Manado, the madrasah, the public Muslim high school referred to here as "MAN," is the largest Islamic school in Manado. The student body of more than 1,400 is ethnically diverse, based on its ability to attract students from across the province, and many from other provinces whose parents have been assigned to government posts in North Sulawesi.

All of the students at the school are Muslim, and the school takes pride in its emphasis on Muslim values and identity, as well as its increasing academic competitiveness. Because of the school's religious makeup, there are no policies at the school specifically addressing religious diversity. However, MAN remains clearly oriented toward interaction with other schools, both public and private with various religious affiliations. Because of the minority status of Muslims in the region, school administrators and faculty focus on creating an environment where students can gain religious knowledge and a uniquely Islamic moral foundation. While the administration recognizes the importance of teaching diversity and tolerance, they are primarily focused on teaching religious dogma that is assumed to lead to the enactment of respect and tolerance when correctly implemented outside the school.

Compared to the two other high schools studied, students at MAN spend significantly more time in religious education classes. However, this does not necessarily mean that more time is spent discussing concrete actions related to tolerance and diversity. Instead, the assumption is that students must learn Islamic principles to have a strong moral foundation,

which will then enable them to enact religious tolerance in their diverse communities outside the school. Sometimes, the space outside the school is presented as a space for learning, where students can implement the Islamic principles they have learned to guide their daily lives in interacting with different types of people. The outside environment is also sometimes discussed as a negative influence on students, where youth are susceptible to moral degradation. But there remains strong support and initiative from the administration to connect with other schools in the area through extracurricular activities such as sports, scouting, and academic competitions.

Teachers at MAN openly express pride in the city's designation as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. They are readily able to point to structural factors in society that contribute to the region's inter-religious harmony, as well as Islamic principles in support of coexistence for a plural society. While the teachers are interested and invested in the topic, in the classroom they often rely more closely on the formal curriculum and on abstract principles related to respect for diversity.

In its focus on teaching tolerance through instilling Islamic values, the madrasah's approach aligns with the overall logic present in the 2013 Curriculum directives, which define religion as the sole foundation or source of students' moral character. As in the previous example, the school's policies and assumptions about its role in moral education and teaching tolerance have an impact on the delivery of the curriculum, and in particular, the amount of time spent on discussing the topics of religious diversity and coexistence.

C. Private High School with a Catholic Identity

A private Catholic boarding school located outside of Manado boasts an expansive, well-groomed campus and a prestigious academic reputation. The school is not a formal Catholic institution, although it has many informal connections to the Catholic Church and makes an effort to build a Catholic identity and implement Catholic rituals. The student body is made up of approximately 400 students, the majority of whom are Protestant, but there is a sizeable Catholic minority and several non-Christian students. The students are ethnically diverse and come from many different provinces in Indonesia. The administration foregrounds the ethnic and religious diversity of the student body as a positive quality of the school that will serve to educate the future generations of Indonesia in the values of tolerance and respect for diversity. In addition, the administration characterizes the Catholic identity of the school as a response to national concerns about strong character education.

The multicultural project of the school is ultimately based on a Catholic perspective, which positions Catholic principles as universal and able to provide a foundation for inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. A co-founder of the school takes inspiration from John Dewey's principles of democratic education (including its multicultural aspects), but rejects its secular humanist foundation for a Catholic one.

All students who attend the school, regardless of their professed religion, are required to take Catholic religious education courses and attend daily prayers and a weekly mass. This is a common requirement at private Catholic schools in

Indonesia, though such requirements have been a source of controversy and debate for decades due to concerns about proselytization through religious education [10]. The school positions itself as a multicultural educational program based on its acceptance of students of varied religious and ethnic backgrounds. The projected multicultural goals of the school are premised on Catholic principles, evident through the school's policies and in the delivery of the religious education curricula.

At the private high school, the Catholic religious education teachers recognize that their students are religiously diverse. They teach students about Catholicism through a discussion of universal values that are relevant to people of all religious (e.g. love, peace, justice). In their delivery of the curricula, they often touch on the importance of respect for diversity. While religious difference is homogenized to some extent as all students participate in the same course, students' religious backgrounds still form the basis of their public identities inside and outside the classroom.

In civic education and Catholic religious education courses, religious tolerance is commonly stressed through the discourse that one must not differentiate or discriminate based on difference. This approach notably diverges from the that of the two other schools, where differentiation itself is not discouraged. In terms of religious education, this was facilitated at the private school by the fact that all students took the same religious education course. This made religious differentiation less obvious. However, ethnic differentiation at the school did appear prominently, and did present some issues for the school's multicultural approach and student body integration.

Overall, the school's multicultural vision shaped the delivery of the curriculum and the attempt to shape a Catholic environment committed to non-differentiation as a method of respect for diversity.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Varied Implementations

As demonstrated by the examples above from high schools in North Sulawesi, on-the-ground implementations of new educational policies and curricula indicate highly varied interpretations of the role of religion within the nation and enacting citizenship. In addition, ideas about the best way to manage diversity and teach youth to enact tolerance inside and outside the school differ among the three schools.

The private high school implements a vision of multiculturalism grounded in Catholic values, where religious difference is somewhat homogenized on a surface level, although students' religious, ethnic, and class identities still form the basis of their public identities. At the public high school, there is tension between an official policy of religious neutrality in a state institution and policies that create a majoritarian Protestant influence. The approach of the madrasah reflects one of the major assumptions of the revised curriculum: that a strong grounding in religious teachings will provide the moral foundation necessary for students to enact tolerance in the broader society.

The approach of examining education as a multi-centered phenomenon enabled a perspective that combined an

understanding of the broader political situation, national changes in curricula in conjunction with local policies and everyday experiences at the school. It also sheds light on how national policies and curricular directives may be applied differently based on school environments and assumptions about the role of the school in moral education and in promoting respect for religious diversity.

B. Different Understandings of Tolerance

The varied implementations of civic and religious education curricula in particular school environments shows how these environments can give shape to, and also provide conflicting messages about how to be a pious citizen. In all three schools researched, discussions of tolerance tended to vacillate between reliance on individual enactment of tolerance versus a collective enactment of tolerance. In this individualized understanding, religious coexistence is thought to be the result of individual actions and individual qualities that allow one to be respectful and tolerant toward others. By contrast, in a more collective understanding, recognition depends on individuals being recognized as members of a specific religious community.

These two different perspectives on tolerance have significant consequences for how religious difference is understood and enacted. At all three schools, these understandings about tolerance are often used interchangeably in discussions about respecting diversity as a citizen and as a pious individual. These understandings of tolerance are linked to different frameworks for coexistence that are called upon to justify responses to the contemporary social and political situation.

In this way, schools, and civic education classes in particular are important places where students are navigating these numerous messages and frameworks for respecting diversity. Students then attempt to make sense of the messages encountered regarding diversity in light of their broader socialization experiences in their families, religious congregations, and among their peers. They are then coming to their own conclusions about religious difference and respect for religious diversity. As youth at the schools often proclaim that one cannot differentiate or discriminate against others, they also readily call on the common discourse about the need to recognize and value difference. While these discourses are not necessarily conflicting, they do depend on certain understandings of how to ensure and enact religious coexistence, which are not necessarily the same.

C. Conclusion

As public debates continue to engage potential frameworks for incorporating diversity in the nation, the realm of education is clearly impacted on a number of fronts. The revised curriculum, influenced by the state as well as a number of interest groups (including religious organizations) means that students are exposed to a variety of messages about religion and diversity within the educational system that do not always neatly reinforce one another. Indonesian youth then attempt to make sense of these directives through the context of the particular school environment and the local context. This highlights the importance of school policies on religion and religious diversity, as well as the broader socialization experience of youth at home and in their

respective religious communities. This case study elucidates the presence of the political within the realm of education, and their impact on how youth think about religious identity, the accommodation of difference, and how best to address these issues in a religiously and ethnically diverse nation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers are thankful for the collaboration and assistance from colleagues at Boston University and Manado State University.

E.M.L would like to thank the principals, teachers, students, and staff at each of the high schools where she collected data. Although individuals are not named here in order to protect their identities, their kind hospitality and willingness to participate in the research project made the study possible and will not be forgotten. E.M.L. is also grateful for the support of her former advisor at Boston University, Robert Hefner, and dissertation committee member, Nancy Smith-Hefner. In addition, E.M.L would like to thank Prof. Dr. Sjamsi Pasandaran for his collaboration as a local research counterpart, in addition to other faculty members at Manado State University who assisted with this research project.

REFERENCES

- [1] Stambach, A. "Revising a four-square model of a complicated whole: on the cultural politics of religion and education." *Social Analysis* 50(3):1-18, 2006.
- [2] Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Manado. "Banyaknya desa, rumah tangga, penduduk dan penduduk per rumah tangga tahun 2014." 2014. <https://manadokota.bps.go.id/statictable/2015/04/21/3/banyaknya-desa-rumah-tangga-penduduk-dan-penduduk-per-rumah-tangga-tahun-2014.html>.
- [3] Swazey, K. "A place for harmonious difference: Christianity and the mediation of Minahasan identity in the North Sulawesi public." PhD Diss, University of Hawai'i, 2013.
- [4] Larson, E.M. "What does it take to remain brothers?" Pp. 50-92 in *Indonesian Pluralities: Social Recognition and Citizenship in a Muslim Democracy*. R.W. Hefner and Z.A. Bagir, eds. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, in press.
- [5] Varenne, H. "Culture, education, anthropology." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 39(4):356-68, 2008.
- [6] Adely, F. *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- [7] Willis, P.E. *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977.
- [8] Salim, H.H.S., N. Kailani, and N. Azekiyah. *Politik Ruang Publik Sekolah: Negosiasi Dan Resistensi Di SMUN Di Yogyakarta*. Yogyakarta: Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies-Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2011.
- [9] Kwok, Y. "Public Schools in Indonesia Feel Islamic Pressure." *New York Times*, June 15, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/world/asia/public-schools-in-indonesia-feel-islamic-pressure.html>.
- [10] Crouch, M. *Law and Religion in Indonesia: Conflict and the Courts in West Java*. Milton Park: Routledge, 2014.