

# Multicultural Perspectives in Indonesian Social Studies Education Curriculum

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**Abstract:** Multicultural education can be defined as educational policies and practices that recognize, accept and affirm human differences and similarities related to gender, race, handicap and class. Multicultural perspectives in Indonesian social studies may become a powerful element in the school curriculum to help create cultural harmony in Indonesian multicultural society. There are attitudes and strategies that teachers may display or use to promote multicultural perspectives in Indonesian social studies curricula, i.e. the integrity of all cultures across eras, the equivalence of cultures, the celebration of cultures, the selection of cultural heroes, and the inclusion of children's cultural values.

**Key words:** Multicultural education, social studies, diversity.

Multiculturalism can be defined as a social policy that is based on principles of cultural maintenance and equal respect between all cultural groups in a society. The essence of a multicultural society has been described by Dufty (1986:116) as an ideal society where groups would co-exist harmoniously, free to maintain many of their distinctive religious, linguistic or social customs, equal in their access to resources and services, civil rights and political power and sharing with the rest of

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society's particular concerns, which has national significance. There would be diversity, equality and interaction through sharing.

One important question which should be addressed in attempting to implement the ideology of multiculturalism in social education is "What is the impact of multiculturalism in building a spirit of national unity?" This question is important because critics of diversity claim that multiculturalism in education gives an emphasis to differences which divide rather than unite people and impede the quest for a national identity (Pang, Gay, & Stanley, 1995). In this context, there is a dilemma about the multicultural policies in social studies education. On one side, social studies education has a task to transmit the dominant culture of a society, while on the other, multicultural perspectives in social studies education emphasize the sense of the acceptability of a variety of cultural forms in a society.

How many cultural diversity and natural goals find a harmonic relationship in the social studies curriculum? What factors influence the implementation of the principle of unity in diversity in teaching multicultural content in social studies education? This paper examines possible ways to achieve the implementation of the policy of unity within diversity in the Indonesian primary school social studies curriculum. In it, some comparisons are made with multicultural society in Australia and the way multicultural elements are demonstrated in Australian social studies curricula.

## THE ESSENCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Sleeter and Grant (1988) define multicultural education as educational policies and practices that recognize, accept and affirm human differences and similarities related to gender, race, handicap and class. They claim that multicultural education can be integrated within all of the subject areas in the curriculum.

According to Gollnich (in Sleeter and Grant, 1988), there are five goals of multicultural education. They include the promotion of the strength and value of cultural diversity, the promotion of the human rights and respect for those who are different from oneself, the promotion of alternative life choices for people, the promotion of social justice and



equal opportunity for all people, and the promotion of equity in the distribution of power among different groups.

## **AUSTRALIA AND INDONESIA AS MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES**

It cannot be denied that the nature of Australian society is multicultural. Australian society has always been diverse in nature. In the first place even the original inhabitants in Australia were far from homogeneous. They had some physical differences and linguistic and cultural differences between dwellers in coastal, tropical and cool temperate areas.

The Aborigines who migrated to the continent approximately 50,000 years ago were not culturally homogeneous. They spoke over 250 languages of which 200 still survive and some 150 have a chance to be perpetuated (Smolicz, 1994). Secondly, the British immigrants established an outpost of British society in 1788. These immigrants were heterogeneous in nature, including those of Irish, Scottish, Cornish and Welsh ethnic backgrounds (Dufty, 1986). Immigrants from United Kingdom and Ireland comprised, however, half of the migrant intake in the 1950s and 1960s but with an ever expanding non-British migration program, accounted for less than one third in the 1980s (Faichney, 1994).

The Chinese came in large numbers during the gold rushes. The Greeks and Germans were amongst the early immigrants. After the Second World War, around four million migrants arrived from more than a hundred countries. For the period of 1947-1978, 45 per cent were British while 55 per cent were from non English speaking countries. By the mid 1970s some 30 per cent of the total population comprised postwar immigrants and their children (Dufty, 1986). Recently, there has been an increased flow of migrants from Vietnam and Lebanon (Smolicz, 1994).

From an historical standpoint, Australia has always been a country of migrants. As the sources of modern immigration to Australia have developed since 1788, there has been a shift in the culture an ethnology of those coming to live in the country. Australia may have a variety of different cultural backgrounds such as Aboriginal, British, Turkish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Italian and so on. Within the variety of cultural

and language backgrounds, Anglo-Celtic culture can be seen as the dominant culture.

Indonesian society consists of groups from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The main ones are Batak, Jawa, Minang, Irian, Madura, Bugis, Makasar, Banjar, and Aceh. Every ethnic group has a different set of traditions, art and culture, and also uses a different language. So Indonesia has a complicated multiethnic structure and more than 250 ethnic languages. In addition, Indonesian people live on more than 3000 islands, including five large islands, namely Jawa, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Irian.

In general, Indonesian past cultural history was influenced by many cultural values from other regions. It included the cultures of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Western civilization. In order to build national unity within such a multiethnic and multicultural society, Indonesia has adopted a basic national philosophy entitled the 'Pancasila' (Five Foundations). Those foundations are Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa (Belief in God); Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab (Fairness to all humanity); Persatuan Indonesia (Indonesian national unity); Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh Hikmah Kebijaksanaan dan Permusyawaratan Perwakilan (People's democracy); and Keadilan Sosial bagi Seluruh Rakyat Indonesia (Social Justice for all Indonesian People). The Pancasila as Indonesia's way of life and philosophy of life can be seen as a basis for developing multiculturalism in the area of Indonesia's multiethnic society. The uniqueness of every Indonesian ethnic group is seen in the context of the third foundation of Pancasila, Persatuan Indonesia (Indonesian national unity). This multicultural foundation is important for Indonesian people to achieve the great purpose or 'sacred mission', of the Indonesian nation, Keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia (Social justice for all Indonesian people).

In order to build national unity in the context of Indonesian multicultural society, the Indonesian government does not reject or eliminate the development of diverse local ethnic cultures. It has a responsibility to develop uniqueness of diverse ethnic cultures. As an asset for developing a national identity and culture, the Undang Undang Dasar 1945 (1945 National constitution) states that national culture is the peak of the development of local ethnic cultures. Put more simply, a national culture is developed by the accumulation of the development of local



ethnic cultures. The development of every local ethnic culture can enrich the national culture as it becomes the identity of the Indonesian nation.

The Indonesian government and society has been developing its unique multicultural society as a basis foundation for enriching national identity. It has provided the means to encourage the development of art, traditions, culture, and language of every local ethnic group. Although Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language) is a lingua franca or official language for the Indonesian people, the Indonesian government still considers itself to have a duty to teach local ethnic languages in the educational system.

So, while Australian culture may now be considered multicultural, it was built upon a majority Anglo-Celtic culture and population. The same cannot be said for Indonesia which did not have a majority culture or dominant ethnic group upon which national identity could be built. Australia was built upon a single dominant culture while Indonesia culture was built upon a mixture of cultures but with a strong unifying ideology and national language. Australia has a cultural heritage largely based upon a rejection of the colonial past. These historical differences may have an impact upon the purpose and outcomes of multicultural education in the two countries.

### **Multicultural Perspectives in Australian Social Studies Curriculum**

Multicultural perspectives in Australian social studies attempt to prepare students for living in a society which has a variety of cultural backgrounds. The objectives of the perspective have been described as follows: First is to understand the process of immigration and to be aware of the relevant push and pull factors affecting people who have come to the country; Second is to understand the customs, values, and beliefs of the main cultures represented in the country; Third is to increase self esteem of students from different ethnic background; Fourth is to be able to detect stereotyping and scapegoating; Fifth is to be able to evaluate one's own culture objectively; Sixth is to be able to accept differences without feeling threatened; Seventh is to recognize that Australia always has been and always will be a multicultural nation; Eight

is to recognize the existence of discrimination and prejudice and to commit oneself to working towards their elimination (McLean, 1991).

Through learning about the process of immigration, students can understand the role of immigration in forming Australian society. Students explore the history of migration to Australia and recognize that people of many cultures have come together as one nation. Australia's current population reflects a great diversity of nationalities and backgrounds. By learning the customs, values, and beliefs of the cultures in Australia, students can develop a cross cultural understanding. In multicultural perspective, students learn to develop skills for living in a multicultural society and to view other cultural groups without a sense of prejudice and discrimination.

In order to achieve these purposes, three ways of organizing multicultural studies are suggested. The first is to provide specialized multicultural unit within a course. In this plan, students' attention is focused on issues which can give them more opportunity to gain a more comprehensive picture about contemporary issues in their multicultural society. The second is to provide a separate course as an alternative or an additional subject to existing programs. The third method is to provide integrated courses as follows:

In broadest sense, an integrated perspective to multicultural studies would encompass all subject areas. Music, maths, art, science, and literature would all acknowledge the contribution made to their fields by people from many different cultures, thus replacing an ethnocentric perspective with the global one (McLean, 1991: 300).

This third method is highly desirable for teaching multicultural perspectives. Both Indonesian and Australian social studies education programs appear to be teaching multicultural perspectives at this level.

### **The Curriculum of Social Studies in Indonesia**

Social studies occupies an important place as an integral part of the Indonesian primary school curriculum. Indonesian social studies is a course about social life based on the subjects of geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, politics, and history. Specifically, social studies consists of the elements of 'social knowledge' and 'history'. It is taught



in an integrated course with the language curriculum until grade 3 and then it becomes a separate subject. It is taught around three hours a week in grade 3, and around five hours in grades 4 to 6 (Departemen P & K, 1994).

In general, Indonesian social studies has the objective of developing students' social capabilities within their social environment. This objective is appropriate to one of the Indonesian education objectives expressed in Undang-Undang no 2 1989 (Education act no. 2 1989) about the national education system. The objective, *inter alia*, can be described as follows:

The social competencies include: behaviour which demonstrates a duty to God within society with different religious backgrounds; behaviour which supports *a spirit of national unity within a multicultural society*; behaviour which supports efforts to achieve Indonesian social justice (Departemen P & K, 1993: 2, emphasis added).

In order to build comprehensive social capabilities in dealing with the social world, it cannot be denied that Indonesian social education must teach the knowledge of its multicultural environment. In facing the problems of building students' cultural understanding, teachers can use and develop multicultural perspectives within social studies curriculum. As a new generation in a global world, Indonesian students must have a strategy of adaptation in resolving a variety of problems in their social environment (Hanurawan, 1994).

## MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Within the models of multicultural perspectives described above, teachers who are committed to the concept of a truly multicultural republic will want to adapt their formal and informal teaching to allow for a multicultural way of thinking to emerge in their students. Such thinking would be characterized by an acceptance of the validity and acceptability of all cultures within Indonesia, including those of the most prominent and least prominent social groups. Some suggestions will be provided based on the 1994 social studies education curriculum. These suggestions merely illustrate the attitudes teachers may display or strate-

gies they may use to promote multicultural perspectives (Waterworth & Hanurawan, 1997).

- The integrity of all cultures across eras. Teachers should recognize that the dominant cultures in Indonesia should not be considered as the final refinement in cultural evolution after long periods of cultural vacillation and uncertainty. Cultures are constantly changing and elements within them diminish or revive according to the pressure of a vast array of cultural influences both internal and external to cultural groups. The present day cultural forms of Indonesia are to be regarded as the most acceptable cultural forms for today's students but these cultural forms must be expected to change as time goes by just as cultural forms did in the past. When teaching about the Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic Kingdoms in Indonesia in the grade 4 curriculum, for example, teachers should not suggest that the earlier kingdoms were successively replaced by superior or more desirable kingdoms. The legitimacy of the cultures of the past, which may also be strongly reflected in the culture of some people in the present, should be accepted.
- The equivalence of cultures. The study of minority should be carried out in such a way as to encourage students to hold a high level of respect for those cultures. The cultures of some groups within Indonesia may be based upon what may seem to be highly unusual practices and customs, especially those cultures of isolated groups which experienced little or no contact with other cultural groups. The temptation for teachers to concentrate attention upon seemingly quaint or bizarre may be very strong, but the resultant characterizations of cultural forms may be very misleading to students and evoke notions of cultural superiority or inferiority. In the study of the cultural diversity of people throughout the archipelago in grade 5, care should be taken to study isolated and seemingly different cultures with sensitivity and respect. This is not to say that the true nature of human cultures should be denied but that the qualities of community life and human cooperation provide more dominant lessons to be learnt from the study of different cultures.
- The celebration of cultures. The curriculum should allow the children to recognize the celebration and festivals of different cultures not just those of dominant cultures of Indonesia. Tolerance of cultural differ-



ences is likely to be enhanced by increasing the knowledge children have of joyful and colourful aspects of different cultures. For example, the grade 4 and 5 studies of local provinces should permit the examination of the festivities, including customs, dance, music, costumes and celebratory foods of minority Indonesian cultures. A sensitivity participation by children in appropriate aspects of ceremonies may be worth considering. Where possible, adult members of ethnic communities could be consulted and, if appropriate, involved in the presentation of these studies.

- The selection of cultural heroes. Teachers should draw examples of Indonesian citizenship from the heroes of a variety of cultures and not just from dominant cultures. There is strong inclination for teachers to demonstrate acceptable citizenship by drawing attention to heroes of dominant cultures and, to make examples of poor citizenship by pointing out villains from non-mainstream cultures. People who exemplify loyalty, courage, honesty, compassion and all the other traits which derive from the Pancasila come from all cultural backgrounds. Goodness is not culturally bound. Similarly, the villains of literature and history should not be drawn from particularly dislike groups. Studies in grades 4 and 6 which focus on prominent people and events should use a variety of Indonesian examples which show the breadth of the contribution to the nation of a variety of cultural groups.
- The inclusion of children's cultural values. Teachers should recognize the intrinsic value of the cultures represented by the children in their classes. All children bring with them a range of cultural preconception and assumptions and it is important that the authenticity and acceptability of all children's culture be affirmed by teachers. Teachers themselves should recognize that they have their own cultural roots which may affect their approach to children of their own or other groups. But they should be broad minded in their interrelationship with children from other cultures. It is easy to favour one culture above others in attitudes expressed or language used. But it is important that teachers affirm the value and worth of each child and show respect for each one's cultural background. For example, the class itself may be regarded as a valuable resources when studying the grade 3 topic of local community. The topic would provide an excellent opportunity to focus attention upon the variety of cultures represented

in the class. The affirmation given to each child's culture would probably result in an improvement in self-esteem for each child. In addition, the increased knowledge the whole class would have of the cultures of all members of the class would lay a strong foundation for a decrease in cultural prejudice.

## CONCLUSION

Multicultural perspectives may become a powerful element in the school curriculum to help create cultural harmony in societies which are culturally diverse. Such perspectives are encouraged in the primary school curriculum in Australia and Indonesia both within the social studies education curriculum and throughout other curriculum areas where appropriate. Teachers can reflect the attitudes of an enlightened multicultural society in their actions as well as in their lessons. They may even adopt teaching strategies such as co-operative learning which will promote a sense of cultural respect and harmony (Waterworth, 1994).

It should be argued that it is impossible to maintain cultural distinctiveness or cultural 'purity' within a culturally diverse society. As children grow up in modern Indonesia, they will witness cultural change on a massive scale as old cultural forms disappear and newer ones emerge. The developing cultural forms of the twenty-first century may be quite unlike those of the latter part of the twentieth century which those of the current older generation (including their teachers) hold dear. Multicultural education should give students a respect and tolerance for all cultures (including their own) and a belief in the intrinsic worth of all of them. This will make it more possible for us to build a fairer and more equal society. While the Indonesian curriculum allows and encourages for the development of multicultural perspectives in students, there is a need for curriculum material and resources to be created which make these purposes more explicit and which will help teachers in nurturing attitudes of cultural tolerance and respect.

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