

# Building Awareness on Religious Plurality

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## Abstrak

Pendidikan dilakukan sebagai stimulus untuk melahirkan proses berpikir kreatif dan kritis. Pada umumnya, pendidikan dilakukan dalam dua bentuk: transmisi dan sosialisasi. Kedua bentuk ini sama-sama menggunakan metode transformatif sebagai jalannya. Meneropong proses pendidikan di dunia, kita bisa menemukan kesamaan sekaligus perbedaan dalam setiap desain yang mengitarinya. Persamaan ini bisa dijumpai dalam materi-materi ajar yang diyakini sebagai pengetahuan dan prinsip-prinsip dasar dalam pendidikan, semisal matematika, biologi, fisika, sejarah, dan sebagainya. Persamaan ini juga bisa dijumpai dalam metodologi yang digunakan, seperti metode diskusi, *reward and punishment*, dan semacamnya. Artikel ini ingin menjelaskan bahwa beberapa institusi pendidikan (konteks) memberikan porsi dan ruang besar dalam mengenalkan persamaan, dan sebagian lain tidak. Perbedaan pendekatan dan metodologi yang diterapkan ini berdampak pada bagaimana agama diterima dan dikenalkan kepada masyarakat dan bagaimana agama mewujud—secara akademis ataupun praktis—dalam masyarakat.

**Kata kunci:** pendidikan, agama, masyarakat.

Principally, education is about learning many things intentionally that useful for people's life. Education tries out to stimulate critical thinking, creative, and openness also emancipation trough consciousness toward *das sein* and *das solen* sides of materials. Generally, education used to be in ways of transmission or socialization, however, both should be come into transformation as a way of learning which enable people to

redefine and reinterpret what had they learn<sup>1</sup>. So that, they were not stagnating but goes further and better than begin not from theory rather from reality that take reflective action followed with a critical and analytically thinking based on the core teaching, then resulting the alternative practical thing. Here, the education plays a role by contributing something positive and constructive within people's life.

Discussing education around the world we could find the similarity and the differences of each educational design. Starting with the similarity which takes place on some material's content that universally accepted and affirmed as a general and basic knowledge from subjects of education which are various such as logic, mathematics, biology, physics, sociology, history of world events, world religion, cultural ethnic, art and so on. Include the methods that could be chosen such as discussion, experiment, indoctrinate, reward and punishment and others. Hence, the similarity among education around the world is more general thing and not concern to particular thing.

On the other hand, each country and region in the world has its own special needs based on unique characteristic as the differences. There is a region or country with single major religion, single ethnic group and other single things, but there also a place with vast diversity, many cultures, islands, religions and so forth. As an impact, the needs of education whether the materials' content, methods, systems, designs and aims must be different depend on the needs.

Narrowing my paper into religious education, I realize that some places give much attention to it while other places are not. The situation brings impact into how the religion introduced to people, how is the role of religion performed in front of people whether academically or practically. Here, the need of religious education is up to the context.

Pertaining the context, Indonesia also has its own portrait which is known as plural. Plurality has touched every aspect like, culture; language; race; socio-economy until religion which becomes the sensitive one. Religious plurality itself exists before the August Independence

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: 2000), 19.

day followed by the reality where Indonesia is not a single picture of island than consist of more than thousands island. The reality of Indonesia requires special needs of educational design. The educational system must be embracing all of those pluralities. The educational design shall not put in merely certain part from big part of Indonesian reality, then; it should provide a balance opportunity for all parts to play such role within the educational process. Definitely, it pertains about the curriculum include the design and method of education.

In fact, the educational system of Indonesia seemed unbalance so far. The lack happened to many aspects such as gender, culture, race, exceptional, religion and some others instance. It is obviously seen that Javanese culture becomes the spirit behind the educational design. Using the name like Budi, Iwan in almost or all reading materials continued with affirmation that Budi's father as represent of men used to work at the office while Budi's mother as represent of women used to work at home. Moreover, the used of Javanese idiom "*Tut Wuri Handayani*" as an educational principal for all region in Indonesia without deeper considering and understanding well the background of Ki Hajar Dewantara's intention at that time was enough to show how the Indonesian educational system used to be a tool for pass on the unity -or unify- philosophy without balances it with philosophy of diversity. As a result, pretty obvious that educational system in Indonesia tends to have a "Javanese" color and not or less of other's colors.

In addition to that, religious education also seems unjust when the public even a private school did not provide all religious educators for all different students. For instance, it's hard to found Hindus and Buddhist's educator to teach that's religions for students who adhere to both religions, even sometimes they had followed for a while other religions education. Based on that, the problem is about the uniformity rather than teaching diversity in unity.

Furthermore, considering that education is a strategic medium to disseminate certain notion and aim whether exclusives and pluralism, nationally and primordially, then the participation of political interest it's hard to anticipate. The education become worse and stagnate when educators only teach religions textually and literally as well as transmitted,

repeated and indoctrinated the dogmas and doctrines without renew their method and knowledge even apprehension about religions as wholly by contextualizing and interpreting. Furthermore, religious teaching within the school, tend to build up exclusivism with less or no openness to learn about other religions even realizing the religious plurality. The material, as I experienced is merely discuss about the history, golden era, darkness era, memorizing the verses, dogmas, doctrines belong to one religion that adhered. In brief, religious education is about touching more the cognitive and psychomotor, learning how to know and how to do or having knowledge and practices it.

Moreover, most of educational systems are wrapped in spirit of superiority. Looking through the reality of Indonesian educational system that based on my experience and observation, I found that the domination of educators plays such important role at the kindergarten until senior high school include part of university. Educators act as a powerful subject who knowledgeable and have rights to do and ask anything to student as a powerless object who depending their “fate” unto the educators. Within this system, students have no right or less to utter their thinking and argument. Students mostly sitting in the class with listening, and writing all what the educators teach, in simply, them repeating and adapting toward educators’ deed. Freire called it as a banking concept.

Practicing banking concept for education causes a stagnant process with no progress. What call as a progress is the extend capacity of students in receiving what the educators deposit. At the same time, it becomes worse when students are separated from their consciousness, directly, to get involve within the learning process. This banking concept is aim to transport the students into a “death”. It means that a call for experiencing the inquiry process for holding a meaning is annulled through the passive education.

In line to that, putting Banks’ theory into Indonesian educational context, I reflect that so far our education tends to use the first

contributions and the second additive approach<sup>2</sup>. Apparently, we could see any festive that celebrate in the school such as Kartini's day, Independence Day and so on. Besides that, in some levels of education like junior and senior high school include university there is an effort to broaden the curricula without change it, by adding several readings as an elective.

The curricula are seemingly same each academic year. The educational system that controlled by central government is become rigid and restrict the educators to modify it. In addition, most educators are less willingly to modify the curricula. As an impact, the curricula did not help the student to increase their ability in having knowledge holistically. The contributions and additive approach only create a superficial knowledge and does not provide a deeper explanation and does not demonstrate the interconnected also interrelated among the materials and activity that they learn. In brief, that approaches seriously weakening both the educators and student capacity to improve their sensitivity, critical, analytical thinking toward differences within Multicultural issues, also the ability to open and work together with other.

Response to problems above, I try to offer my thought begin with realizing the context of Indonesia in line to education. The reality of plurality especially religious plurality must be accepted and affirmed as a truly condition of Indonesia, that exist a long time before the Independence Day. It really means that Indonesia from the beginning is neither a single "color" of identity nor island. The history told us about the failure of any ideology -the assembly of BPUPKI around May until June 1945- that won't accept the plurality of Indonesia, includes some movements recently that still unable to erase the plurality and rewrite it with oneness. Using the spiritual lens, I do confess that the plurality of Indonesia is part of God's will. Realizing that's plurality, thus we need to stand on the principal that able to embrace these pluralities. "Unity in Diversity" as a motto of Indonesia usually takes for granted as a good, excellent appropriate principal that acknowledged be able to embrace the plurality. Indeed, it works and leaded Indonesia to Independence Day.

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<sup>2</sup> James Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (New York: 2001), 240.

However, the situation changed, Indonesia was not struggle anymore for an Independency, then endeavor to maintain it. In line to that, the matter is no longer about how to **unify** the diversity **under** the oneness of Indonesia (read. *Indonesia yang satu*) whether oneness of culture, religion etc. Moreover, it is about how to **nurture** the diversity **within** the various nuance of Indonesia (read. *Nuansa keragaman Indonesia*). Therefore, it is a time to renew our principal into “diversity in unity”.

As a consequence, to the last principal, the role of diversity must be empowered. Limited my explanation into educational aspect, I would like to begin with the educator. Educator is a subject who responsible more as an arranger, provider, motivator, and evaluator, systematically toward the materials which uses during the learning process. Educator were not superior and powerful person in the class, rather as a charismatic leader and modesty model who able to create a convenient nuance for learning, encourage student to speak up rationally, analytically, enable them to think critically, constructive, deed positive, able to create two ways discussion that enrich each partakers and could train the student to responsible toward their learning process. To be educator means are not passive, rigid and stagnate; than active, dynamic and creative.

Educator shall not inherit the same materials all over the academic years, built dictator relationship, oppressed student's potential includes give subjective judgment. Educators are neither the dominant “capitalist” of knowledge during the education<sup>3</sup> nor the evaluator. Educators were not bowing down toward any superior and major power as well they are not working for any selfish interests. Educator commit to transformation that increase more and more, not merely for those in the class, also reach them who are outside the class. Indeed, the transformation with a positive progress is a duty of educators; however, they were not the successor.

Pertained about educator is connected to writers who produce books as a prime media in learning process. Academic writers who

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<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: 2000), 53.

provide and share knowledge through books can be called as educator who also commit to transformation of people.

In line to it, educator needs partners. The partner administratively, is the government who connecting to education according to the bureaucracy's lines. The function or role of the government is to protect and regulate the educational system that fair unto people who deserve to get education. Explicitly, the government responsible to support the educational system by provides the scholarship, educational infrastructures, supportive laws that guarantee the fairness of educational system. Besides that, educators together with minister of education, organize a guideline or blue print of national curriculum in order to direct each local education into a certain development.

Second partner of educator is student. Academically, students have responsibility to reach the aim of education and together with educators create a progressive learning process. Students' due to their academic tasks, test, give evaluation toward the educator and learning process, give suggestion in order to arrange a better learning design and method. In addition, they have rights to speak, share their experiences, and utter their thoughts also remind the educator of their task or weaknesses.

Last partner of educator is parents or family. Parents have an obligation to help and guide even teaches their children in continuing the learning process at home. They have to give further explanation, information, comprehension and able to share their experiences which connected to the learning process. They do responsible also to the progressiveness of their children in attempt to understand and complete the knowledge of school materials. Parents and family are responsible to evaluate their children's learning process and evaluate the educators until the whole process of education.

Good Corporation between educator, government, students and family-parents really could make a better process of education, holistically. Four subjects of education are not separated, then united as a one system that have different task in order to reach one similar aim. If,

one of four subjects become paralyze then the educational process would disturb.

A further step is recreating the curriculum of religious education. So far, as I mentioned before, the religious curriculum is too narrow and unbalance by emphasis more on single religion education and too dogmatic less practical even abstract and less contextual. Here, conscious or unconsciously, the segregation among student nurtured. They become people with ability even skill of their religion matter; excellent on memorizing the holy verses, practice the ritual and able to repeat the doctrines, however these is good but incomplete because they tend or less capacity on meaning-making. Further they could find difficulty relating to living with others who are different. Response to that, it is better if the curriculum deepening trough interpreting the materials by discussion, brain storming, sharing, presenting and many methods which aim to help student become critical in understand better and able to grasp the meaning of what they learn, be responsible to what they confessed, holistically. The curriculum must be extended also by including the introduction of others religions consist of general lessons such as the prophet, holy house, holy book, holy day etc., also the special lessons such as the believe, the core principal, values and so on that are able to taught to others. That way could make students become aware to other existences and tries to build relationship that full of willingness to respect each other, tolerance and openness to have a dialogue that enrich one another. More, the socio issue around the society, for instance the disaster, national-international human tragedy, religious tragedy and so forth, also put into the religious curriculum in order to maintain their empathy of humanity. A set of curriculum that put into the plurality of religions and socio humanistic matters is helpful for the educational partakers to see the real context and able to interpret the materials of religious education appropriate to the context.

Through all the steps above, religious education is present in balance between abstract dogmatic and contextual meaning; theoretical values and beneficial practical; cognitive-knowing and affective-feeling empathy; personal-how to be an Indonesian educator, student and people with social- how to live together with other Indonesians who are

different. Here, religious education is no longer theological lessons but also sociological which covers socio and humanity matters that happened within all religions.

By this paper, I prefer to treat religion together with its education not as a hereafter lessons talking about something that we cannot exactly predict or describe even clearly explain what it is, how is it look like, when, where, why it like this or that and many questions. For me, religion contains a great thing that function as guidance for human in order to settle their life better and better. Religion is not an aim itself, than the content which more precious to seek. Religion is the cover of living precious values that must keep as well so that the values or content would not contaminated by harmful things. In brief, religion is touching the mundane matters.

Based on it, then religious education is teaching about what life is and how people should live within it. Religious education does not make people imprisoned by a heavy abstract dogma and blind exclusivism, more, set them free to look at the reality and connected themselves to others living being so that they can learn who are them and others then live their life holistically.

Eventually, Indonesian religious education makes people learning how to be a better human according to the Indonesian context that is plural stand on living precious teaching within each religion. It is about how to be a human that able to survive in the midst of plurality; how to be educational partakers that sincerely celebrate the diversity; how to be human with blended identity that is primordial-each race (*suku bangsa*) and Nationalist-Indonesia. Furthermore, learning how to live together with others God's creation who different based on religious values which is humanistic. It is about knowing self-trough knowing other. Indeed, Indonesian religious education must educate people become truly religious person that also truly Indonesian.

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