



# Promoting Peace Education Through Multicultural Education in Aceh

Lessons Learned from the U.S. Context

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## **Prologue**

Aceh has been in an armed conflict for more than 30 years between the Free Aceh Movement and the Government of Indonesia until eventually the peace accord took place in Helsinki, Finland, on August 15, 2005. Barron (from Conciliation Resources website) states that the conflict has killed an estimated of 15,000 life, displaced over 100,000 people and caused a widespread trauma to conflict survivors. Until the first half of 2003 when the martial law was in effect, an estimated of 880 schools and education facilities were closed due to damage. In addition, other important facilities such as village health clinics, water and electricity infrastructures and transportation were also directly damaged by the conflict.

Conflict is also claimed as the main caused to increase poverty rates in the region. According the Barron, the poverty rates increased significantly from 14.8 per cent in 1998 to 28.4 per cent in 2004, and by 2005, the poverty rates in rural areas of Aceh have achieved 36.2 per cent. Aceh is one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia despite its large natural resources including oil and gas reserves. Conflict and poverty have become

the causal factor in reducing the educational opportunity of children in Aceh Province (Thalal, 155).

Efforts to promote peace education in Aceh has been started as early as 2002 where a group of academics and activists created a peace curriculum grounded in the Islamic core peace beliefs and rooted in the Acehnese social and cultural values. The curriculum is targeted mainly those under-educated rural Acehnese who experienced violence, inequity and trauma during the conflict. Six basic principles form the foundation for the curriculum were also employed namely: introspection and sincerity, rights and responsibilities, conflict and Violence, democracy and justice, plurality of creation, and paths to peace (Wells, 2002).

Aceh Province is a multi-ethnic province since it is inhabited by people of different backgrounds and spoken languages. Although the majority of population is Acehnese and main religion is Islam, other population is also occupying the rural areas of Aceh Province such as Gayo, Javanese, Alas, Singkil, Tamiang, Simeulue and Chinese (Thalal, 151). Hence, it is essential that the promotion of peace education in Aceh Province regard the background differences of all its inhabitants.

Despite the current effort to promote peace education by integrating local values and religious beliefs (e.g. Wells, 2002), this paper is intended to seek the possibility of promoting peace education in Aceh Province by employing the multicultural education concept as it was applied before in the United States. The concept reviewed is based on James Banks' Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education published in 2004. The discussion is also supported by other relevant references in multicultural education.

### **The concept of multicultural education: bringing concept into practice**

The purpose of multicultural education is to reform educational domains so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds and also gender will achieve an equal opportunity in education (Banks, 2004, 3). This reform includes institutional changes in the curriculum, the teaching materials, teaching and learning styles, the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and the goals, norms and culture of the school.

Banks (2004, 22) also conceptualizes five multicultural education dimensions which are (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) equity pedagogy, and (5) empowering school culture and social culture. These dimensions are essential concepts to explain better understanding about multicultural education theories. In addition, Banks emphasized at the end of his research review that practice is the most important action to be taken after its theories were conceptualized and formulated. Multicultural education should be implemented broadly in order to make meaningful change within the educational institutions.

In his other work, Banks (2002) states that multicultural education is a reform movement to do some changes within educational institutions to achieve acquaintance and understanding that will reduce pain and discrimination faced by students of color (in the U.S. context) due to their racial, physical and cultural differences. Similar to Banks, Cumming-McCann (2003, 11) agrees that bringing multicultural education into practice is very important to students so they will feel more confident during the educational process. Implementing multicultural education effectively will consume time, energy and a lot of work, but this task will result in providing an opportunity for students of color to see the world as a fair and equitable place.

It is clear that schools should be reformed in terms of emphasizing multicultural education within the curriculum, teaching materials and behaviors. It seems easy in concepts and theories, but when we are going to implement these in the real life situation, practice will be very difficult. Teaching in a multicultural class consisting a variety of ethnics and colors is complicated, especially if teachers are not aware about multicultural education issues. For instance, are they going to say during the teaching and learning process that White is good and Black is evil? This will be very painful to non-white students and will develop prejudice and hatred among students.

Ladson-Billings (2004, 53) comes with some forms of multiculturalism such as conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, and left-liberal multiculturalism. By using the works of McClaren (1994) and King

(2001), she points out that all forms are intended at different agendas. For instance, although various ethnic groups have been represented in school text and curriculum, the way people being represented may be conservative or marginalizing without eliminating the privilege enjoyed by the dominant class.

It is imperative to take into account five approaches in multicultural education based on Sleeter and Grant's classification which are: 1) teaching the exceptional and the culturally different; 2) human relations; 3) single-group studies to acquire knowledge, awareness, respect, and acceptance of one group at a time; 4) multicultural education and; 5) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionists (Gay, 2004, 42-43). Gay (2004, 44) also states that the emphasis on critical analysis, knowledge reconstruction, social transformation, and personal empowerment are common themes in all approaches to multicultural education. She concludes that multicultural education should be as interdisciplinary, integrative, inclusive, comprehensive, transformative, liberative, and celebratory enterprise. On the other hand, Bennett (2001, 175) describes a conceptual framework illustrating the rich field of multicultural education in which she categorizes 12 genres of research within four clusters: curriculum reform, equity pedagogy, societal equity, and multicultural competence.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT): Learning from the cases in the United States**

Banks (2004, 57-58) explains that one of the theoretical frameworks in the field of multicultural education is Critical Race Theory (CRT). In this theory, one is not necessarily privileging race over class, gender or other identity category. CRT includes some concepts: 1) the proposition that racism is normal, ordinary, and natural; 2) the use of storytelling to challenge racial oppression and; 3) the concept of interest convergence. CRT has created a new way to analyze current practices in education by connecting issues like school funding and school desegregation. Ladson-Billings (2004, 61) emphasizes that CRT can be used as a theoretical tool for revealing many types of inequity and social injustice.

Banks (1995, 391) also underlines that multiculturalism and

multicultural education have different meanings. Multiculturalism is “a term often used by the critics of diversity to describe a set of educational practices they oppose. Whereas multicultural education is an idea, educational reform and a continuing process that never ends within a democratic and pluralistic society. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been utilized by Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) as a framework to examine the racial *microaggressions* [subtle forms of racism] and how they influence the campus racial climate. The study reveals that racial microaggressions exist in both academic and social spaces in the campus environment and have a negative impact on the campus racial climate.

### **Awareness of language differences in multicultural education**

Minami and Ovando (2004, 576) describe that children of many bilingual and multilingual communities have experienced a shift to English as the dominant language of the United States. The language shift is so rapid that people of color cannot maintain informal communication in their heritage languages even within the scopes of the family and their children start to lose their native tongues or use the languages in the diglossic situations.

In addition, Minami and Ovando (2004, 580-583) also stress the importance of preservation of students of color’s languages and cultures by empowering students of color, their parents, and their community. Empowering students of color through bilingual education plays a crucial role in supporting students of color maintain their ethnic identity while at the same time introducing White students to languages and cultures of students of color. In addition, parental and community participation in students of color’s education will promote their achievement.

In supporting the above, Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults (2002) find in their research that as of 1990, the rates of only English for the third generation immigrants of a number of groups suggest that Anglicization occurred almost similarly for Asians as it did for the Europeans who came to the U.S. in the early twentieth century. However, the Anglicization is slower among the descendants of Spanish speakers. Their research also shows that the

majority of third-and later-generation children speak only English at home, which means that they will grow up to be English monolinguals with little or no knowledge of their mother tongues.

### **Realizing the threat of stereotype in classroom diversity**

Besides taking into account the language differences, stereotype is a very important term to be regarded in multicultural education. It is a threat and so dangerous to peace education. Steele (2004, 686) asserts stereotype threat as a situational threat that can affect the members of any group about whom negative or bad stereotype exists. In addition, the threat of stereotypes can be sharply felt and hampers the academic achievement of group members (p. 683). Steele's definition of stereotype threat is as follows: "the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self definition."

For instance, Steele explains stereotype threats experienced by women in performing Math and African Americans on standardized tests. His findings show that the gender difference conditions did not reduce women's performance in math (p. 689). On African American standardized tests, he finds strong evidence of stereotype threat that Black greatly underperformed White in the diagnostic condition but equaled them in the nondiagnostic condition (p. 690). Therefore, stereotype threat is assumed to have an everlasting effect on their academic achievement. As a support to Steele, Aronson (2004) emphasizes that everyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat. Studies indicate similar effects for women on math tests, Latinos on verbal tests, and elderly on tests of short-term memory. He adds that even groups who carry no historical stigma of inferiority can be impaired if one arranges the situation to their disadvantage.

Schools, colleges, and universities in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse due to the growth of people of color. Students come from various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds create a big challenge for schools in providing equitable classrooms. Diverse students

with different previous academic achievement make it very likely that they will form a social ranking and once this status has formed, it has negative consequences for behavior and learning (Cohen and Lotan, 2004, 737-738).

Caruthers (n.d.) suggests some action steps to improve the quality of teacher and student interactions that range from exploring, understanding, and acting. During the exploring phase, the teacher should emphasize the belief that all students can learn. In understanding phase, the teacher uses curriculum development skills to help students acquire and use knowledge for instance by incorporating multicultural contents. Finally, in the acting phase, the teacher focuses on learning, application, and assessment strategies that provide opportunities to students to demonstrate their skills in multiple settings.

### **Employing multicultural education to promote peace education in Aceh Province**

Meirio (2007) argues that peace education is urgent to be implemented in Aceh Province especially after a 30 year of conflict in order to guarantee the true peace. He targets the peace education into three community segments namely ex-combatants, government officers especially military officers, and civilian. He divides civilian into children and adult. Peace education for adults can be held in non formal education premises such as *meunasah* (prayer hall) and village halls. However, Meirio does not indicate further the way to build peace education for children on schools. Therefore, it opens the path in this section to employ multicultural education in promoting peace education in Aceh Province especially to school students.

Based on Gay's description and Bennett's framework, multicultural education can be viewed as a rich field of study that still requires many researches and works that are not limited in the U.S. scope as it was reviewed earlier in this paper, but in the whole world. As for teacher in a multicultural nation of Indonesia, especially the Aceh Province, there is a necessity to learn from the U.S. multicultural education practices in order to maintain tolerance and intergroup harmony in Aceh Province after a long term of armed conflict.

Teacher in Aceh Province will need a tool to address ethnicity and ethnic differences in classroom. It is possible that by utilizing the Critical Race Theory (CRT), a teacher will be able to create a dynamic classroom that challenges the old canon, stereotypes and dogmas. CRT will help teacher to understand the multiple intersections of inequality and ethnicity and improve a critical awareness in teacher and eventually in students. It will result in the rise of awareness to respect other human being regardless their looking as a member of specific ethnic group such as Aceh, Gayo or Singkil.

As a matter of fact, Steele (2004) seems to be right when he stated that stereotypes are widely disseminated throughout the society. Stereotypes are not also labeled to specific ethnicity but also to specific gender. Based on own experience during high school time in Aceh, a male teacher always tells classroom that female could not assume leadership in the society such as governor, president and so forth because they are inferior to male. Before the 2004 presidential election in Indonesia, some politicians postulated religious verses from the Quran to deny a female presidential candidate. When the writer was studying at Texas A&M University in the U.S. a male teacher used to say that if Hillary Clinton is elected president, he will move to Canada because the U.S. will be a weak country. It is not sure whether his statement based on his doubt on Hillary's capacity as professional or because of Hillary's gender. Anyway, based on the multicultural education concept it is imperative to reduce the threats caused by stereotyping because stereotype threats affect one's performance.

From the need to reduce or if possible to eliminate stereotypes, peace education must also take into account the maintenance of vernacular. Maintaining the vernacular or first language is essential in multicultural education. The shift to a dominant language is occurring in Aceh Province since Bahasa Indonesia was pronounced as the only official and educational language for the whole nation. The fact shows that Acehnese children started to switch to the Bahasa Indonesia in their daily communication. Frankly, most Acehnese of the old days are bilingual by nature since they speak both Acehnese and Bahasa Indonesia. But currently, the vast majority of Acehnese children start to maintain only the national language and the



vernacular is soon will be forgotten. The loose of vernacular is a sign to a loose of self-identity which will lead to another conflict in the future.

Cohen and Lotan (2004, 742-746) suggest two ways of “status treatment” to create equal-status interaction in the classrooms and minimize the problem of unequal access and learning for low-status students. This status treatment seems appropriate to be applied in Aceh as well. The first way is changing expectations for competence by utilizing multiple ability treatment that highlights specific skills and abilities students need for their particular tasks rather than assuming that all students can be ranked along a single dimension of intelligence, and by assigning competence to low-status students. Both methods will enhance the frequency of activity of low-status students in their groups. The second way is transforming the classroom by fostering cooperative learning among students, broadening the curriculum, utilizing multiple intellectual abilities, and conducting group and individual performance assessment.

### **Epilogue**

As diversity is on the rise in Aceh Province, a school classroom is a reflection of its population. Building peace education without taking into account the diversity of current population in Aceh is likely to succeed slowly. It should be agreed with Cohen and Lotan (2004) that classroom is a powerful social system that can create status order much stronger than race in affecting behavior in groups. Teachers should not assume that specific students have low social status among their classmates since this assumption will lower teacher's expectations on their academic success and will not help in sustaining the peace education in Aceh Province.

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