

Cultural Values in Educational Contexts in Indonesia and the US*

Asih Nurakhir¹

¹Instructor at the Department of Nursing, Diponegoro University; Student at the State University of Semarang,

Education functions not only to transmit knowledge from teachers as educators to students as subjects of learning, but also to instill norms and moral values so that students may behave accordingly in the society. In this context, schools, colleges and universities are leading sectors which play their important roles to achieve this goal. It is not easy to realize the goal of education wherever it is as there are many concerns and values of educational practices which always emerge and need to be taken into consideration by all.

In this paper, I would like to discuss some values of educational practices in Indonesia and the United States (US) dealing with the high-stake tests, parents' choice of schools, and teachers' behavioral problems encountered. Some book references, journal articles, and class discussions are subjects in the accomplishment of this paper.

It is always interesting to explore more on how government and private educational institutions or agencies should measure their achievement in educating the people. A national standardized test, high-stakes test, is assumed to be best matching with this idea. In the US, under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the government requires every state to test students annually in grade three through eight in reading and mathematics. Reading and mathematics are two subjects within the NCLB goal. In this

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case, the information derived from tests can be extremely valuable if the test is valid and reliable. The results can show what students have learned, what they have not learned and where they need to improve (Ravitch, D, 2010). Supposing students in a school take the test, after the score is announced, it will then be easy for school teachers, parents and also the students themselves to identify students' ability within the subjects tested. They may also identify on which parts students are considered weak so that advancement may be carried out accordingly to meet the average yearly progress required by the government.

In relation to the test, Spring (2008) also stated that for students, high-stakes test might determine promotion between graders or graduation, and for teachers and schools administrators, the results of students test score can be used to measure their performance or determine their salary increases. This implies how significant the test is which affects not only the students but also the schools' existence. Improved and satisfactory scores that students make on high-stakes test will significantly determine students' promotion and graduation. Besides, the scores also influence the public's view and stigma towards the schools particularly academic quality, which is closely related to parents' choice in sending their children to school, as well as bonuses the school teachers, administrators and principals obtain from the government.

Similarly in Indonesia, the government test known as National Examination (*Ujian Nasional / UN* – previously named as *Evaluasi Belajar Tahap Akhir Nasional / Ebtanas*) organized by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) becomes a part of the school education system that always gives much pressure to the schools and their communities. The MONE gives students national examination once in grade 6, 9 and 12

to measure their achievement in the subjects taught in schools. Whether a student is stated to graduate from school or not will mostly rely on the test results. Though pro and contra always colors this national policy in which each side argues the significances and the effects, the government keeps carrying out the test to its targets. It is then becoming a challenge for the schools to work hard to improve their academic quality so that their students' scores meet the minimum standard applied and receive public trust to send their children to the schools.

Considering the significant influences of high-stakes test in the US, some cheatings in the execution of the test emerge. W. James Popham, an emeritus professor in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA (Spring, 2008) identifies some forms of cheating in the US within the test, i.e. school administrators erase incorrect responses on students' answers and substituting correct answers, teachers allow more time than test the instructions require, teachers supply students with hints about which answers are correct, and test preparation sessions using actual test items. Given the important of test score, it is not surprising that teachers and school officials have devised various ways of gamming the test system that is by doing tricks and shortcuts to get the desired results without improving education (Ravitch, 2010). This is of course ridiculous as what the schools expect to get does not match the efforts they make. What they believe to be a shortcut in getting high score will destroy the school educational values which forward the high norm of accountability and honesty. If this keeps in presence, noble values of education may decrease from time to time that spoils the function of education to instill moral values and lead people to behave accordingly.

Similar with that in the US, the case of cheating also occurs in Indonesia. In every organization of the UN, cheatings are always reported in various forms besides

those found in the US. Delegating clever student in class to distribute his answers to all his friends in test is common to happen. That a teacher gives her students a small note of test answer is also another method occurred. All are aimed to help students gain good scores in the test that will significantly affect the school status in public and the government's view. The question is now why cheatings are common to happen both in Indonesia and the US? This issue has emerged towards the educational practices across the globe. High influences of test results to school status, public's view towards the school, parents' choice for their children education, teachers' bonuses, school financial supports from government, and less-observed test organization seem to be the matters which drive cheatings to frequently occur. Moral awareness in balancing the demand to obtain improved scores in the test has to be emphasized and implanted to students and schools officials, in addition to the strict regulation in the test administration and the given sanctions if violations are occurred.

Parents' choice in sending their children to study at schools is another interesting matter to discuss. Mostly, parents will think of school's status (private or public), tuition, academic quality, and the religious values taught in schools as their basic considerations. In Indonesia, public school is highly preferable for most parents for some concerns. In his study in Malang, Bjork (2005) states that private institutions tended to be back-up choices for students who were not accepted at the public schools of their choice. This is currently true as public schools are cheaper than the private ones and offer better academic quality in common. Though some elite private schools occupy high academic excellence, particularly those which are connected to religious foundation, they charge tuition that may not be affordable for public in general. Thus,

only parents who are economically established may send their children to study at those schools.

Similarly, the US parents will also consider academic quality, particularly the test scores of high-stakes test in sending their children to school. Whether the school is public or private is not really a matter, I think, for parents with high income. Even, for years, many Americans have thought that private schools are generally superior to public schools and that this superiority is confirmed by studies showing the higher achievement of students who attend the former (Berliner, 1995). Though some reasons from study such as that private schools are able to select students whom they enroll and expel, and their focus and efforts on core subjects answer the public curiosity, but many still believe that private schools are better than the public ones. To my understanding, this is an interesting trend of education nowadays that happens not only in the US but also Indonesia. What the public are seeking for is academic excellence that schools offer to their children. Tuition will not be such a big matter for parents as long as schools can meet and satisfy their demands. Parents, particularly those the educated ones, will mostly seek for high quality schools that may guarantee excellent education to their children, no matter how high the tuition is. Private schools, the elite ones, seem to provide an answer to parent's demands for these current and coming times.

Teachers are subjects to the better quality of education. Many assume that professional teachers would bring prosperity to public and nation in terms of education excellence. Since the past until current times, policy makers and teachers educators have been consistent with the formulation that teaching requires basic skills, content knowledge, and general pedagogical skills (Shulman, 1987). This implies that teacher as profession needs not only cognitive but also pedagogical skills that deal with how to

teach and teaching attitudes. Teachers are to be the role model of students. A Javanese popular proverb “*Guru: Digugu lan Ditiru* /Teacher: to be trusted and imitated” leads into an understanding whatever acts teachers do will be taken into consideration by students. Hence, becoming a teacher really needs high quality of personnel in terms of cognitive, pedagogical and interpersonal aspects.

Unfortunately, dealing with the value of professionalism, many Indonesian teachers in general still show some unprofessional acts in their daily basis. From the class discussion, we learned that coming late to teach, ending the class earlier than schedule, talking about unimportant things in office during spare times, less concern in marking and returning students’ worksheets are some examples that occur in Indonesian teachers in general. Such habits seem to fossilize in them that make them difficult to release from. In addition, the system of performance evaluation on the basis of loyalty, work performance, responsibility, obedience, honesty, cooperation and initiative tend to be misleading in the teachers’ evaluation. It applies to all Indonesian civil servants including majority of teachers. Indonesian civil service culture, in sum, promotes values and behaviors that are fundamentally at odds with the new role of teacher that the government is currently promoting (Bjork, 2005). This is in contrast with the American teachers in general that show high discipline and more responsibility in their jobs. From the class discussion, we know that many American teachers will come early to classroom to prepare all things needed for the class running. They will start and finish the class exactly as scheduled. They also spend their spare time to do some other teachers’ works such as grading and correcting instead of chatting with friends in the office.

In conclusion, the educational values both in Indonesia and the US related to the accountability, parents' choice and teachers' professional are challenges the government and public need to take into account for better education.

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