

Reconstructing Tolerance Education Through a Co-curricular "Social Laboratory": A Theoretical Review of Intergroup Contact and Sosial Learning

Sarif Hidayat¹, Prayoga Bestari², Asep Mahpudz³

¹ Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia ; sarifhidayat@upi.edu

² Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia; yogabestari@upi.edu

³ Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia; asepmahpudz@upi.edu

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary tolerance education in Indonesia faces a fundamental challenge: the discrepancy between the idealism of an inclusive curriculum and the reality of an increasingly polarized society. This article aims to reconstruct character education approaches by proposing a co-curricular-based "Social Laboratory" model as an alternative to conventional learning. Employing a conceptual analysis method on the "Breaking Down The Wall" program case study, this article synthesizes two primary theoretical frameworks: Gordon Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The in-depth analysis demonstrates that co-curricular interventions are effective in reducing prejudice only if they satisfy four situational prerequisites: equal status, common goals, interdependent intergroup cooperation, and support from institutional authorities. These findings imply a need for school policy reform to institutionalize cross-identity encounters as a structured mandatory curriculum, thereby transforming students' tacit knowledge into tangible civic dispositions.

Corresponding Author:

Sarif Hidayat

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia; sarifhidayat@upi.edu

1. INTRODUCTION

Civic Education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan* or PKn) in Indonesia faces a severe test in realizing its mission as a vehicle for nation and character building. The latest regulatory mandate regarding Graduate Competency Standards (*Standar Kompetensi Lulusan* or SKL) explicitly emphasizes the achievement of Graduate Profile Dimensions, which include competencies of faith, piety, and global diversity (*berkebinekaan global*) (Holilah et al., 2024; Mutiani, 2020). However, sociological reality contradicts this mandate, revealing that educational institutions often serve as incubators for the proliferation of intolerance and exclusivism. This phenomenon reflects the broader challenges in establishing a multicultural society in Indonesia, as identified by Cathrin & Wikandaru (2023), where educational practices often struggle to bridge diverse identities.

Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) illustrates Indonesia's diversity, with over 1,340 ethnic groups and various religions as a demographic fact demanding high social competence from its citizens. The management of this rich diversity has not yet been fully optimized within educational praxis. The tolerance index report from the SETARA Institute (2024) confirms this alarming trend, recording an escalation of intolerance events reaching 477 incidents and 731 actions violating freedom of religion/belief. West Java Province consistently ranks highest as the region with the most cases. This

phenomenon serves as a stark warning to the education sector that the current value transmission methods have failed to stem the tide of polarization due to an over-reliance on lecture-based classroom methods. Schools, which should function as miniatures of a democratic society, are instead trapped within walls of homogeneity that reinforce "us" versus "them" prejudices (*in-group vs out-group bias*) (Setiawan et al., 2024).

The failure to cultivate tolerant character is inseparable from an epistemological error in perceiving value education. Civic Education learning has historically been trapped in cognitive dominance, positioning tolerance merely as a memorized definition for exams rather than a disposition to be practiced. Consequently, there is an urgent need for learning media and methods that shift the focus from cognitive memorization to attitude implementation (Imansyah et al., 2024). Students are taught to "know" tolerance (*civic knowledge*) but lack experience in "feeling" and "doing" tolerance itself (*civic skills*).

This disconnection between knowledge and behavior causes tolerance values to be poorly internalized. Strengthening tolerance values in the global era demands more than textual understanding; it requires a firm affirmation of identity through dialectics with diversity (Mahpudz et al., 2020). Students' knowledge of "the other" will only stem from media stereotypes or biased family prejudices when they never interact directly with individuals of different religions or cultures (Mahpudz, 2023).

A radical pedagogical intervention is required to respond to this deadlock by moving tolerance education out of the classroom and into social reality. Educational policy must not stop at the level of administrative regulation but must manifest in essential learning designs with tangible public impact (Bestari, 2020). This aligns with recent findings highlighting that the implementation of character education encounters significant obstacles when it relies solely on instructional hours (Aniah et al., 2024). Instead, effective internalization requires integrating values into the broader school culture and extracurricular activities. School policies are required to boldly create structured spaces for encounter.

Revitalizing the role of co-curricular activities becomes crucial in this context. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities have a strong positive correlation with students' character formation compared to classroom learning alone (Rahayu & Dong, 2023). Unlike optional extracurricular activities or rigid intracurricular ones, co-curricular activities offer spatial and temporal flexibility for social engineering. These activities can be designed as "Social Laboratories" where civic theories are tested in real human interactions (Ramdani et al., 2025).

Academic literature in Indonesia still minimally discusses specific operational models, a gap also noted in the review of tolerance education literature in Indonesia (Hadisaputra & Syah, 2020). The majority of character education research remains focused on textbook content analysis, classroom teaching strategies, or surveys of student tolerance attitudes. In-depth studies regarding the effectiveness of student exchange programs between schools with contrasting sociological characteristics (Rural-Urban, Muslim-Christian) as a character curriculum are still rare.

This article aims to fill this theoretical gap through a conceptual analysis of the innovative "Breaking Down The Wall" program. This program is an initiative bringing together SMA Kristen Yahya (an urban homogeneous school) and SMK Gema Nusantara 5 (a rural homogeneous school). The authors propose the thesis that tolerance is the result of a conditioned social learning process. This analysis, utilizing the lens of social psychology from Gordon Allport and Albert Bandura, is expected to prove that prejudice must be dismantled through equal encounter experiences, not merely advice. The reconstruction of this model is projected to serve as a reference for education policymakers in designing a more participatory and grounded national curriculum.

In response to this issue, this article seeks to answer a fundamental conceptual question: how can co-curricular interventions be operationally designed to transform civic knowledge into tangible tolerant character (*civic disposition*)? Specifically, this article examines how Gordon Allport's

intergroup contact prerequisites and Albert Bandura's social learning mechanisms operate within a 'Social Laboratory' to dismantle prejudice among students from contrasting sociological backgrounds.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a Case-Based Conceptual Analysis design. This approach was selected because the primary objective of the article is not merely to report descriptive field data, but to reconstruct a new theoretical model in character education based on empirical practice. The material object of this study is the "Breaking Down The Wall" student exchange program, implemented collaboratively between SMA Kristen Yahya Bandung and SMK Gema Nusantara 5 Cikalong Wetan. This program was selected purposively due to its unique characteristics representing the complexity of intergroup interaction in Indonesia, specifically the encounter between two entities distinct in theological (Christian-Muslim), sociological (Urban-Rural), and academic (Senior High-Vocational High) terms.

The data collection process was conducted through two simultaneous mechanisms. First, an in-depth documentary study of the program framework, activity modules, and participant reflection notes was performed to understand the pedagogical anatomy of the social intervention. Second, a critical literature review was conducted on authoritative theories in social psychology and civic education, specifically Intergroup Contact Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Data analysis was performed using the Theoretical Synthesis technique. The researcher dissected the activity components of the "Breaking Down The Wall" program, such as communal dining (*botram*), group games, and interfaith dialogue, and subsequently synthesized them with the theoretical propositions of Gordon Allport and Albert Bandura. Through this dialectic between empirical data and theoretical frameworks, the study formulates new propositions regarding the ideal design of a "Social Laboratory" in Civic Education learning. The validity of the concept construction was tested through theoretical triangulation to ensure that the proposed model possesses a solid epistemological foundation and can be replicated within a broader educational policy context.

However, this study has methodological limitations inherent to its design as a conceptual analysis. While it offers a theoretical reconstruction of the 'Social Laboratory' model, it does not aim to statistically measure the magnitude of change in students' tolerance levels through quantitative instruments. The synthesis presented relies on the qualitative interpretation of program designs and pedagogical frameworks using the lenses of Allport and Bandura. Consequently, the effectiveness claims in this article are theoretical-predictive. Future research is encouraged to test this model using experimental designs or longitudinal surveys to obtain statistical validation of the impact of such co-curricular interventions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The "Breaking Down The Wall" program serves as an illustrative case for examining how tolerance is formed through structured co-curricular encounters. The findings presented in this section are derived from a qualitative analysis of program implementation documents, activity reports, participants' reflective notes, and embedded observational records. Rather than treating tolerance as an immediate outcome, the analysis reveals that tolerance emerged through a gradual social process shaped by sequential interactional stages. Three interconnected components, such as communal dining (*botram*), mixed-team collaborative activities, and the active participation of authority figures, functioned as key mechanisms within this social laboratory.

At the initial stage of the program, the collected data indicate that interactions between students from SMA Kristen Yahya and SMK Gema Nusantara 5 were characterized by social distance and hesitation. Students tended to remain within familiar peer groups, and spontaneous cross-group interaction was limited. This condition reflects the presence of latent intergroup boundaries, suggesting that tolerance could not be assumed at the outset but required deliberate pedagogical intervention.

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3.1. Communal Dining (Botram) as a Social Ice-Breaking Mechanism

The first structured intervention took the form of communal dining (botram), adapted from Sundanese cultural practice with intentional pedagogical modifications. In the original cultural context, botram represents a form of collective eating that emphasizes togetherness, egalitarianism, and social intimacy. Within the Breaking Down The Wall program, this tradition was deliberately recontextualized as a pedagogical instrument rather than a mere cultural performance. Observational records document that all participants, which engage students, teachers, and school leaders from both institutions, sat together on the floor without chairs or tables, shared identical food portions arranged on banana leaves, and ate using their hands rather than cutlery. These arrangements were not incidental but carefully designed to suspend conventional school hierarchies and symbolic distinctions that typically structure inter-school encounters. Conventional markers of authority, such as VIP seating, differentiated utensils, or segregated dining spaces for teachers and students, were intentionally eliminated.

This egalitarian setting functioned as a symbolic rupture from the formal norms of schooling, where power relations are usually expressed spatially through seating arrangements, dress codes, and behavioral expectations. In the absence of these markers, participants encountered one another as co-presences rather than representatives of institutional status or religious identity. The physical posture of sitting on the same level, consuming the same food, and engaging in informal bodily practices created a shared situational context that subtly redefined social relations. Such embodied arrangements are significant because, as emphasized in the thesis, prejudice and social distance often operate at the level of tacit assumptions rather than explicit attitudes. By reorganizing the material conditions of interaction, botram intervened directly in the micro-social dynamics through which boundaries are reproduced.



Figure 1. The practice of "Botram" (communal dining) where students and teachers sit together on the floor to share meals, symbolizing the removal of hierarchical and social barriers.

Participant reflection notes consistently indicate that this communal dining experience played a critical role in reducing initial awkwardness, anxiety, and hesitation during the early phase of interaction. Students reported that the informal atmosphere allowed spontaneous conversations to emerge without the pressure of formal discussion or interfaith dialogue. Rather than being compelled to articulate tolerant attitudes verbally, participants began to experience each other's presence as ordinary and non-threatening. In this sense, botram did not immediately produce tolerance as a consciously articulated value, but instead functioned as a social ice-breaking mechanism that normalized co-presence across differences. This finding aligns with the thesis's argument that tolerance formation is a gradual social process rather than an instant moral outcome.

Interpreted through Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory, botram operationalized the principle of equal status in a concrete and experiential manner. Allport emphasizes that equal status must be realized within the contact situation itself, not merely asserted as an abstract norm. In the Breaking Down The Wall program, equality was not declared through verbal instruction or program slogans but enacted through everyday practices of eating together. The embodied experience of sharing food without hierarchy allowed participants to temporarily suspend preconceived notions associated with religious affiliation, school reputation, or urban-rural distinctions. This experiential equality laid the psychological groundwork for subsequent stages of interaction, such as cooperative games and collaborative problem-solving, by first dismantling the initial social distance that often undermines meaningful contact (Imperato et al., 2021).

Moreover, the analysis suggests that botram functioned as a threshold activity within the broader social laboratory. It did not aim to resolve prejudice directly but created the affective and relational conditions necessary for deeper interaction to occur. By softening boundaries and fostering a sense of shared humanity, communal dining served as a foundational mechanism that enabled other elements of the program to operate effectively. Thus, within the framework of Intergroup Contact Theory, botram exemplifies how cultural practices, when pedagogically redesigned, can translate abstract theoretical principles into lived social experience, reinforcing the thesis's central claim that tolerance is cultivated through structured, embodied encounters rather than through cognitive instruction alone (Lytle, 2018).

3.2. Cooperative Games and the Emergence of Cross-Group Collaboration

Following this initial phase, students were reorganized into heterogeneous teams that deliberately crossed institutional, religious, and social boundaries. The reconfiguration of participants into mixed groups was not a logistical convenience, but a core pedagogical strategy designed to disrupt established in-group formations. Activity modules and participant reflection notes indicate that students from SMA Kristen Yahya and SMK Gema Nusantara 5, who had no prior history of interaction, were intentionally placed within the same teams to complete a series of collaborative physical challenges, including the "Shoe Tower" game and the "Sarong Relay." These activities were structured to ensure that no single participant or subgroup could succeed independently, thereby necessitating active cooperation, shared strategy formulation, and mutual reliance.



Figure 2. Students from SMA Kristen Yahya and SMK Gema Nusantara 5 collaborate in the "Shoe Tower" game, requiring mixed-team cooperation to build a stable structure using limited resources.

The design of these tasks foregrounded interdependence as a practical condition rather than an abstract moral injunction. In the "Shoe Tower" game, for instance, students were required to construct a stable structure using limited resources, demanding coordination, role distribution, and collective decision-making. Similarly, the "Sarong Relay" required synchronized movement and trust

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among team members to achieve completion. Observational records suggest that these challenges compelled students to shift their attention away from identity markers, such as school affiliation or religious background, and toward the immediate demands of task accomplishment. In doing so, the activities reoriented interactional dynamics from symbolic differentiation to functional collaboration.

Empirical data derived from activity reports and reflection notes indicate that these cooperative tasks significantly altered the way students perceived one another during the program. Students who initially described feelings of hesitation, unfamiliarity, or social distance began to articulate a sense of shared responsibility and mutual dependence. Rather than engaging as representatives of distinct groups, participants increasingly related to one another as teammates working toward a common objective. This transformation was not driven by explicit discussions about tolerance, but by the practical necessity of collaboration under time constraints and collective pressure. Such findings reinforce the thesis's argument that tolerance is more effectively cultivated through situational engagement than through declarative instruction.

From the perspective of Intergroup Contact Theory, these activities operationalized two key conditions for prejudice reduction: common goals and intergroup cooperation. Allport's framework emphasizes that shared objectives must be sufficiently meaningful and achievable only through collective effort. In this case, the activity design ensured that success was contingent upon coordinated participation across group lines, thereby activating the mechanism of interdependence. As Mahpudz et al. (2020) argue, cooperative engagement within diverse groups fosters opportunities for reciprocal recognition, where individuals begin to appreciate others based on contribution rather than categorical identity. The mixed-team structure thus functioned as a social catalyst that transformed abstract diversity into lived collaboration.

Importantly, the analysis suggests that the emergence of tolerance within these cooperative settings was neither immediate nor ideologically driven. Instead, tolerance began to take shape as a practical orientation embedded in shared problem-solving and situational trust. Students learned to anticipate, rely upon, and support one another's actions in order to achieve collective success. This experiential process aligns with the assertion that civic dispositions are formed through participatory engagement rather than normative persuasion (Bestari, 2020, 2022). Trust, in this context, was not introduced as a value to be endorsed, but developed organically through repeated cycles of cooperation and feedback.

Within the broader structure of the Breaking Down The Wall program, cooperative games functioned as a critical transitional phase between initial social contact and deeper forms of interaction. Building upon the affective openness established during communal dining, these activities translated social proximity into functional collaboration. By embedding tolerance formation within task-oriented cooperation, the program demonstrated how co-curricular activities can serve as effective social laboratories, where civic values are enacted, tested, and gradually internalized through practice rather than proclamation (Bestari, 2020, 2022; Mahpudz et al., 2020).

3.3. Authority Participation and Social Learning through Modeling

A further critical mechanism identified in the findings was the active involvement of principals and senior teachers from both schools. Program reports and observational documentation consistently indicate that authority figures did not position themselves as external supervisors or ceremonial guests, but instead participated directly in the same activities as students. Principals and senior teachers from SMA Kristen Yahya and SMK Gema Nusantara 5 were observed sitting together with students during communal meals, engaging in informal conversations, and interacting naturally across religious and institutional boundaries. These interactions occurred without visible protocol, symbolic hierarchy, or formal role differentiation, thereby temporarily suspending the conventional power structures that typically govern school interactions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).



Figure 3. School principals and senior teachers actively participating in student activities, modeling inclusive behavior and reducing psychological distance between authority figures and students.

This deliberate collapse of hierarchical distance had significant pedagogical implications. In most school contexts, authority figures are associated with evaluation, discipline, and formal instruction, which often generates psychological distance between teachers and students. In the Breaking Down The Wall program, however, the presence of principals and teachers within the same social space as students redefined their role from institutional authorities to relational participants. Observational notes suggest that this role transformation created an atmosphere of psychological safety, where students felt more secure engaging in cross-group interaction. The absence of rigid protocol allowed inclusive behavior to appear not as an exception, but as a normalized mode of interaction endorsed by institutional leadership.

From the perspective of Bandura (2019) Social Learning Theory, these interactions functioned as powerful modeling processes. Bandura emphasizes that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors demonstrated by models who possess social authority, credibility, or symbolic status. In this context, principals and senior teachers served as high-salience models whose actions carried normative weight. By openly engaging with colleagues and students from different religious backgrounds, authority figures communicated an implicit message: inclusive interaction is not only acceptable but institutionally valued. This modeling effect was further reinforced through vicarious learning, as students observed positive social exchanges occurring without negative consequences.

Reflection notes from participants indicate that students' initial anxiety toward cross-group interaction gradually diminished after witnessing authority figures interact comfortably and respectfully across boundaries. Rather than being instructed to behave tolerantly, students learned through observation that intergroup engagement was safe, legitimate, and socially rewarded. This finding supports Bandura's assertion that learning is often mediated by observational processes rather than direct instruction. In the social laboratory created by the program, teachers and principals effectively demonstrated how tolerance is practiced in everyday situations, transforming abstract values into observable conduct.



Figure 4. A participant's reflection note illustrating the shift from initial hesitation to a sense of comfort and friendship after the joint activities.

Within the analytical framework of the thesis, the role of teachers and school leaders can be understood as constituting a form of hidden curriculum. Beyond formal lesson plans or explicit moral messaging, their embodied behavior transmitted powerful social cues that shaped students' perceptions of acceptable conduct. By sharing meals, participating in games, and engaging in informal dialogue alongside students, authority figures enacted tolerance as a lived practice rather than a prescribed norm. This experiential modeling aligns with the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) emphasis on leadership by example as a cornerstone of best practice in character education.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of co-curricular tolerance education is inseparable from the visible commitment of institutional authorities. The presence of principals and senior teachers as active participants functioned as a legitimizing force that stabilized the social learning environment. Their behavior provided continuous vicarious reinforcement, signaling both social safety and institutional approval for inclusive interaction. In this sense, teachers and school leaders operated as a living curriculum, embodying the values they sought to cultivate and ensuring that tolerance was internalized not merely as an ideal, but as a socially endorsed and practically enacted civic disposition (Bandura, 2019; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

3.4. Tolerance as a Gradual Process of Internalization

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that tolerance formation within the "Breaking Down The Wall" program unfolded through a cumulative sequence of social experiences rather than through abstract or didactic instruction. Tolerance did not emerge as an immediate attitudinal shift, nor was it transmitted through verbal exhortation or moral messaging. Instead, the process began with initial social distance and uncertainty, which were gradually transformed through a carefully staged progression of informal contact, structured cooperation, and legitimized modeling. Each phase contributed incrementally to reshaping how students perceived, felt about, and interacted with peers from different sociological and religious backgrounds.

The initial informal encounters, particularly those facilitated through communal activities, functioned to reduce social anxiety and normalize co-presence across differences. This phase was critical in establishing affective openness, which served as a precondition for deeper engagement. Structured cooperation subsequently translated this openness into functional collaboration, compelling students to rely on one another to achieve shared goals. Finally, the visible participation of authority figures provided institutional legitimacy and psychological reassurance, stabilizing the interactional environment and reinforcing inclusive norms. The sequential nature of this process underscores the thesis's central claim that tolerance is not a static trait to be taught, but a dynamic disposition cultivated through repeated social engagement.

This developmental trajectory aligns closely with Lickona's framework of moral development which conceptualizes character formation as an integrated process involving moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Prabowo, 2024). Within the program, students initially possessed a cognitive awareness of tolerance as a civic value (moral knowing), largely acquired through formal instruction. However, it was through emotionally salient experiences, such as shared meals, cooperative challenges, and supportive social modeling, that this knowledge was infused with affective meaning (moral feeling). Over time, these experiences facilitated the enactment of tolerance in practice, as students began to engage in inclusive behaviors without external prompting (moral action). In this sense, the social laboratory enabled the transition from conceptual understanding to embodied practice.



Figure 5. Inclusive interactions illustrating the transition of tolerance from a cognitive concept to an embodied practice, where students from different backgrounds engage in natural, habitual social exchanges without external prompting

Importantly, tolerance within this context was not internalized as a declarative value to be articulated, but as a habitual mode of interaction embedded in everyday conduct. Drawing on Nonaka and Takeuchi's knowledge conversion framework, this process can be understood as the transformation of tacit social experience into stable behavioral patterns (Costa et al., 2016). Through repeated participation in inclusive interactions, students gradually developed practical knowledge of how to navigate difference in concrete situations. This tacit understanding, once internalized, became part of their habitual repertoire, allowing tolerance to function as an implicit orientation rather than an explicitly stated belief.

The analysis further suggests that co-curricular activities, when intentionally designed, can serve as effective social laboratories for civic education. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, which often emphasizes verbal reasoning and normative explanation, co-curricular settings provide opportunities for experiential learning where values are enacted rather than explained. As Istianah et al. (2024) argue, civic education becomes more impactful when learners are placed in authentic social contexts that require them to practice civic virtues in real time. The Breaking Down The Wall program exemplifies this approach by embedding value formation within lived social experience, thereby bridging the gap between curriculum objectives and students' everyday interactions.

By grounding tolerance education in interaction, observation, and practice, the program demonstrates how civic dispositions can be cultivated through social processes rather than moral persuasion alone. This finding resonates with the assertion that sustained intergroup contact fosters psychological investment in equality by transforming abstract commitments into relational experiences (Tropp & Barlow, 2018). Within the social laboratory framework, tolerance emerged not as a prescribed attitude but as a socially learned disposition reinforced through participation. Consequently, the study underscores the potential of co-curricular design as a strategic pedagogical

avenue for nurturing tolerant citizens capable of engaging constructively within pluralistic societies (Costa et al., 2016; Prabowo, 2024; Tropp & Barlow, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

Reforming tolerance education in Indonesia requires a fundamental move away from cognitive-heavy instruction toward experiential social learning. This study demonstrates that the 'Social Laboratory' model is a viable pedagogical strategy to bridge the disconnect between *civic knowledge* and *civic disposition*. The analysis confirms that prejudice reduction is not automatic; it requires social interventions meticulously designed around Allport's prerequisites: equal status through egalitarian traditions, collaborative goals, and visible support from authority figures. Moreover, the study highlights that teachers serve as the primary catalyst for students' psychological safety, acting as social models rather than just instructors. Consequently, educational stakeholders should stop viewing inter-school visits as mere recreation. Instead, these cross-identity encounters must be institutionalized within the national curriculum to cultivate graduate profiles that are not only intellectually capable but also inclusively humanist.

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