

EXPANDING THE ASSUMPTIONS OF SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY: COLLECTIVE SENSEMAKING OF INTERFAITH HARMONY BY TEACHER AND STUDENT GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

Thesis. The aim of the study is to identify the deficiency of the assumptions of Symbolic Convergence Theory (Bormann, 1973, 1985) by implementing the theory in the context of collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony by teacher and student groups at different faith elementary schools. The study argues that collective sensemaking of reality can also be affected by organisational values, such as religious values, organisation vision and missions, and structure.

Concept. To analyse and interpret the data the study implements the concepts of SCT based on the perspective that collective sensemaking occurs through the process of communication, or practice of discourse, or dramatisation. The process of dramatisation involves exchange of fantasy themes, namely creative and imaginative interpretations, constructed by individuals according to their own purposes. An overlapping of fantasy themes occurring within the dramatisation will develop a common understanding and group cohesiveness. A collection of fantasy themes in group rhetoric indicates the rhetorical vision of the group.

Results and conclusions. The results show commonalities and differences between teacher and student groups and between the two faith groups not only those of the fantasy themes created by the groups but also of the values that underlie the collective sensemaking of social diversity. They also show that the structure of each rhetorical group affects the collective sensemaking by defining the character of membership that can limit in rhetorical communities through organisational rules, as well as the vision and mission of the organisation based on religious values adhered to. The study proposes additional assumptions and propositions for SCT and recommends further study or analysis to test and develop SCT.

Keywords: assumptions, Symbolic Convergence Theory, collective sensemaking, interfaith harmony, teacher groups, student groups

INTRODUCTION

Collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony has not fully successful in creating group cohesiveness, and peaceful atmosphere among religious groups in Indonesia. With the majority of the population is Muslim (87.18 percent), and the minority consisting of Adventist (6.96 percent), Catholic (2.91 percent), Hindu (1.69 percent), Buddhist (0.72 percent), and Khonghucu (0.05 percent) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011), conflicts between the majority and the minority that caused casualties and damage have occurred in many regions, for example in Ambon in 1999-2001, (Indrawan & Putri, 2022), and in Papua in 2016, 2017 (Sabara, 2023). However, current data show that the Religious Harmony Index at the national level in 2023 was quite high; the score for the dimensions of Tolerance was 74.47, Equality 77.61, and Cooperation 76,00 (Kementerian Agama, 2023).

The learning process to create common understanding of interfaith harmony can be facilitated by educational agents, specifically parents at homes and teachers at schools by teaching values and habituating various activities related to multiculturalism. Beginning at early education children must learn interfaith harmony to live in a multicultural society like Indonesia. To realise interfaith harmony among religious groups, specifically in education field, since 2000s the Indonesian government has issued several regulations. These include the Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religion Education and Religiosity Education, that refers to the provisions of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System; the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 16 of 2010 concerning Management of Religious Education in Schools; and the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 13 of 2014 concerning Islamic Religious Education.

Theoretically collective sensemaking within and between groups on interfaith harmony can occur through communication, specific group processes, or the practice of discourse. In the perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), the process is called dramatization that involves exchange of fantasy themes, namely creative and imaginative interpretations, constructed by individuals according to their own purposes. An overlapping of fantasy themes occurring within the dramatisation will develop a common understanding and group cohesiveness. A collection of fantasy themes in group rhetoric indicates the rhetorical vision of the group. After three decades of development, reformulation, and use in various scientific inquiries, SCT has become a general theory with 18 technical concepts, including basic concepts (3), structural concepts (5), evaluative concepts (3) (Bormann, 1973, 1985).

There have been many studies implemented SCT conducted by researchers in various contexts. For instance, those studies in the context of incidents of boycotting cotton products (Wu, 2021), decision making (Horila, 2021), joint interpretation of health issues, university-wide organisational change (Ba & Zhao, 2021), online group (Aghazadeh, 2022), and an understanding of Jihadist Nasheed (Matusitz & Owsley, 2022). In Indonesia such research has also quite often been implemented by researchers, for example, in the context of social media communities (Imarshan, 2021) (Kurniatmastria & Sulistyani, 2021), group organisations (Sinaga, 2021), and women's empowerment (Saharani et al., 2023).

However, analysis on how different faith groups, specifically in early education institutions, making sense upon interfaith harmony collectively is rarely done by researchers. To expand the SCT research programme Bormann suggested new ways to measure the propensity-to-fantasise (Bormann et al., 2001). However, most studies have not produced agreement on the usefulness of SCT and they have some weaknesses. For example, according to James Olumide Olufowote, SCT provides insufficient explanations for why humans dramatise and share fantasy, a restrictive convergence ideology, and restrictive characterisations of membership in rhetorical communities (Olufowote, 2017).

Considering the research gaps and the critiques toward SCT, the study was conducted to identify the deficiency of the assumptions of SCT in the context of collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony by teacher and student groups at different faith elementary schools. The analysis is conducted to answer two research questions:

- RQ1: How do different faith groups of teachers and students at elementary schools make collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony? Are there commonalities and differences between the groups?
- RQ2: Why do different faith groups make sense of interfaith harmony collectively in that way? Do they use the same values, references, and experiences when making sense of the reality?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is conducted by using fantasy theme analytical framework of SCT based on its five assumptions (Shields & Preston, 1985). The rhetorical materials were taken from conversations that took place in separated focus group discussions (FGD) of teachers and students at one Islamic elementary school and one Catholic elementary school located in the city of Jakarta which were selected purposively based on criterium of private schools for lower and middle-class communities. The data collection process of rhetorical materials was carried out from May to September 2023. The study involved 19 teachers and 20 students, with details: 8 teachers and 8 students from the Islamic school, 11 teachers and 12 students from the Catholic school. Students come from

grade 5 and grade 6 and each of them had received permission from his or her parents to be involved in the research. The fantasy theme analysis was carried out by following the SCT propositions and applying 11 concepts of fantasy theme analysis to map the symbolic convergence that occurred in each rhetorical group (Shields & Preston, 1985). Results of the analysis were documented in the form of comparison among different faith groups.

RESULTS

Findings of the study show that the different faith groups of teachers and students at the observed elementary schools did not have the same understanding and rhetorical vision of interfaith harmony. Each group has its own shared view of interfaith harmony through its own fantasy themes, rhetorical vision, and actions to realise their respective rhetorical visions, builds dramatic explanations equipped with dramatic personae (heroes, villains), plotlines (storylines), scene descriptions and sanctioning agents to maintain and disseminate its own rhetorical visions that are different from each other. It is obvious that differences in the groups’ fantasy and rhetorical visions occur because in interpreting the reality of interfaith harmony the groups use different values, references, and experiences that are mostly different from each other.

Collective Sensemaking by Teacher Groups

Table 1
Collective Sensemaking by Teacher Groups

Basic Concept	Islamic School	Catholic School
Fantasy theme	We are brothers and sisters; we should not judge, we should respect, be tolerant, be kind to different faith communities We are one, we can be friends, we can study together, we can live side-by-side We have the same nationality and citizenship.	We should respect to Muslims and different faith, to the people who are fasting, and to accept religious differences We should respect different faiths We have differences, but we should be tolerant to others
Fantasy type	We are all God’s creatures	We should be tolerant to different faith people
Modal societal fantasy	Nationalism, brotherhood, tolerance, equality, and cooperation between different faith communities	Tolerance between different faith communities

Source. Own research.

At the Islamic school, the teacher groups interpreted interfaith harmony as an implementation of values of inclusiveness. Group members dramatize and share fantasy to explain the situation of interfaith harmony that seems interesting to others so that they support the common understanding, have group awareness, and share the idea with a wider audience. Despite differences in religious beliefs, the school communities have the same nationality and citizenship, like brothers or sisters, and they are all the same God’s creatures. With all differences in society, they must respect and value each other, respect anyone, be tolerant to others having different faiths, be kind to every human being, and do not judge others. The teacher groups have stock scenarios, called fantasy types, that can be used by them to explain interfaith harmony, specifically “we are all God’s creatures”. Moreover, there are several modal societal fantasies relevant and can be used to represent their collective sensemaking, namely nationalism, brotherhood, tolerance, equality, and cooperation between different faith communities. Three of the modal societal fantasies relevant to the teachers’ understanding are the same as those dimensions of measurement of the National Index of Interfaith Harmony, namely tolerance, equality, and cooperation (Kementerian Agama, 2023).

Whereas at the Catholic school, the teacher group interpreted interfaith harmony as a condition of society where their religious communities are willing to be tolerant by accepting differences as well as respect and value to other religious communities. The symbolic cue created by the teacher groups at the Catholic school are “respect,” and “accept”. The fantasy themes that show teachers’ subjective and creative interpretations of interfaith harmony are “respect to Muslims and others”, “respect to the people who are fasting”, and “accepting religious differences”. The stock scenario or fantasy types reflected from the rhetoric of the teacher groups is “We should be tolerant to different faith people”. The fantasy themes are relevant with modal societal fantasy of “tolerance between different faith communities” which are often used in people’s rhetoric about interfaith harmony. The words “Muslims” and “others” that the teachers’ group choose and use to make collective interpretations of interfaith harmony could possibly reflect the psychological distance between the group and Muslim as well as other non-Catholic communities.

For the teacher groups when Catholic students give respect to Muslim students who are fasting during Ramadhan, the Islamic fasting month, it is a form of interfaith harmony. It is also interpreted as a social condition in which mutual respect between different religious communities exists.

Table 2
The Structure of Collective Sensemaking by Teacher Groups

Structural concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Rhetorical vision	To develop inclusive school communities	To develop tolerant school communities

Structural concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Dramatis personae	Different faith students Students with different faith parents Disabled students The teachers themselves	Muslim students Disabled students The teachers themselves
Plotline	To teach students with the Holy Quran and the Hadits based curriculum (combined with the national curriculum)	To teach students with the Bible based curriculum (combined with the national curriculum)
Scene	The teaching activities to habituate students to implement inclusive values of equality and cooperation between different faith students and disabled students in school, and to invite them to interact, work together with, and give hands to anyone inside and outside school	The teaching activities to habituate students to be tolerant persons to Muslim and different faith students in school, and to invite them to interact, work together with, and give hands to different faith people inside and outside school
Sanctioning agent	The Islamic teachings The school curriculum The school foundation's vision and missions	The Catholic teachings The school curriculum The school foundation's vision and missions

Source. Own research.

At the Islamic school the teacher group’s rhetoric about interfaith harmony presents a drama with a vision to develop inclusive school communities. The drama involves not only the teachers themselves but also different faith students, students with different faith parents, and disabled students as dramatic personae. Teaching students with the Holy Quran and the Hadits based curriculum (combined with the national curriculum) has functioned as plotlines of the drama. The setting, or the element of scene, in which the dramatis personae involve is the student learning process to understand the idea of inclusive school communities. During the process the teachers teach students to be tolerant persons by inviting them to interact with students from different religious schools, and to create artworks that reflect tolerance and social harmony. The teachers also invite students to learn the values of equality, for instance, by ensuring that all human beings are equal before God, and the values of cooperation by encouraging students to help classmates with special needs, and to support non-Islamic students in learning their respective religions. In the drama, teachers and students involve and work together with student parents in the process of making students have the Islamic personal character of *akhalakul karimah*. The teacher groups’ rhetoric represents efforts to make students have high quality and commendable morals and have such behaviour that follows Islamic teachings.

The common rhetorical vision to develop inclusive school communities owned by the teacher's group involves rhetorical visions of individual members. Some members of the teacher group have fantasies that have such power of artistry to explain the situation of interfaith harmony that seems interesting to others so that they support the common understanding, have group awareness, and share the idea with a wider audience. The fantasy themes that have such power of artistry are usually the stories of interfaith harmony experienced with his or her own students. To disseminate messages consisting of the values of inclusiveness in the school there are various learning resources, media, and channels like textbooks, internal magazines, school march songs, and communication forums for the teachers. Overall, the teacher groups' rhetoric about their ideas and actions to date shows the Saga, the detailed story of what have been done by the groups during the drama performance.

Within the interpretation of the Islamic teacher groups, interfaith harmony is understood as a condition of peaceful and harmonious society that must be realised and maintained together by all religious communities so that Indonesian multicultural society will not be fragmented, and all communities can live side-by-side in a familial manner. The rhetorical vision to develop inclusive school communities can be justified and disseminated easily because it is supported by Islamic teachings. According to the teaching, if there are Muslims who hurt anyone, including non-Muslims, then they will get sanctioned by God and kept away from Prophet Muhammad. As admitted by a communicator of the male teacher group (P7, Group 2), such vision is strongly influenced by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, as written in the hadith narrated by Imam Thabrani which reads: "Whoever hurts a zimmi (non-Muslim who does not fight Muslims), then indeed he has hurt me. Whoever has hurt me has hurt God."

In educational practices, then, if there is an incompatibility of education and learning activities conducted in the school that are not compatible with the decided Government curriculum, then the school will be given certain sanctions from the Ministry of Religion as well as from related laws and regulations. At the least, the incompatibility of education and learning activities can cause the teachers to be sanctioned by the school and the Mosque Foundation, the founder and trustee of the school.

On the other hand, the Catholic teacher groups' rhetoric about interfaith harmony presents a drama of developing a tolerant school group that involves teachers and their students as *dramatis personae*. In the drama, the teacher groups have a vision to make the students internalise the values of tolerance toward different faiths. The setting of the drama is the process of education and learning in the school with the plotline of teaching students to be tolerant persons. During the learning activities at school, teachers do not teach the values of tolerance in the form of special subject matter but teaching the material by inserting it in relevant subjects and through habituation of tolerant attitudes and behaviour, such as inviting students to cooperate

with, to be responsible to, and to respect others. When doing so teachers often do not even realise that they teach about the values of tolerance to the students.

To disseminate values of tolerance to students most teachers use classroom lessons and habituation of daily attitudes and behaviour as communication media and channels. The teachers invite students to internalise the core values taught in the school, namely Respect, Integrity, Caring, Citizenship, and Initiative. The teaching and learning activities in this school follow the vision and missions of the Foundation. In addition, the teachers also invite students to take lesson-learned from educational movies, to form student groups with members of different religions, to learn knowledge and experience of fasting shared by Muslim students, and to visit worship houses of different religions. Overall, the teacher groups’ rhetoric about their ideas and actions shows the Saga, the full story in the drama of developing tolerant school communities.

As one of the eight schools established by the Catholic Education Foundation, the elementary school must realise the Foundation’s vision and missions. The vision of the school is to educate students to have superior character, intelligence, culture, and faith, based on Christian values and spirituality. One of the five missions of the school is to educate students with superior character, intelligence, culture, and faith, based on Christian values. Therefore, the justification and dissemination of this rhetorical vision of the teacher groups come from the Foundation’s vision and missions.

The incompatibility of education and learning can cause the teachers to be sanctioned by the Foundation, the founder and trustee of the school. Moreover, like the Islamic School, if there is an incompatibility of education and learning conducted in the school with the decided Government curriculum, then the school will be given certain sanctions from the Ministry of Religion as well as related laws and regulations.

Table 3
Critical Evaluation towards Collective Sensemaking by Teacher Groups

Critical evaluation concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Rhetorical community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The rhetorical teacher group is determined by the school management School’s situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Currently all teachers and students are Muslims– The school’s rules: Anyone can be student at the school, but only Muslims can become teachers to realize the school vision and mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The rhetorical teacher group is determined by the school management School’s situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Currently there is a few teachers and students who are non-Catholics– The school’s rules: Anyone can be student, non-Catholics can become teachers for certain subjects

Critical evaluation concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Reality link to here-and-now phenomena	Group cohesiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All teachers agree that non-Muslim students will be provided relevant religion teachers – There is no conflict among teachers although they come from different Islamic sects 	Group cohesiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All teachers agree that all students have to take Catholic religion subject – There is no conflict among teachers caused by different faith issues
Dramatistic rhetorical strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – By telling stories and experiences of inclusive behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – By telling stories and experiences of faith tolerant behaviour

Source. Own research.

The rhetorical vision of the teacher groups to develop inclusive school communities contains fantasy themes that have a strong connection with reality. The fantasy themes have a foundation in reality that reflects implementation of the values of nationalism, brotherhood, tolerance, equality, and cooperation in the education and learning processes. Although they are all called Muslims, among the teachers there are followers of Islam sects, such as *Muhammadiyah*, *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU), and *Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia* (LDII). Despite having different sects of religious belief, in interacting with fellow teachers and with students, teacher groups show a cohesiveness; they respect, value, and tolerate each other so that the rhetorical vision of inclusivity created by the teacher groups is more believable and makes symbolic participation in the vision more acceptable.

Teachers' understanding of religious harmony based on inclusive values is also reflected in their attitudes and behaviour in learning activities. The teachers invite students to practice how to respect, appreciate and care for their friends and anyone who deserve it. They also give appreciation to students who help their friends, who appreciate their different friends, and who help calm friends with special needs to strengthen students' attitudes and behaviour in maintaining interfaith harmony in the school. When they meet students who are deemed to need special attention, regardless of their religiosity background, the teachers undertake a home visit to get to know the student's home environment and life so that they have a complete understanding of his or her condition before taking further steps in helping the student.

Whereas at the Catholic school, the rhetorical vision of the teacher groups to develop a tolerant school group contains fantasy themes that have a strong connection with reality. Although it does not provide a special teacher to teach non-Catholic religious lessons to non-Catholic students, the school is tolerant by accepting two non-Catholic teachers and providing social assistance to the group around the school at every non-Catholic religious celebration. The fantasy themes created by the teacher groups in the Catholic Schools have a strong connection with reality that reflects school group's tolerance in their daily as well as special religious activities, such as *Aksi Puasa Pembangunan* (APP) or the Fasting Action for Development which is part of the Catholic church's liturgy.

Collective Sensemaking by Student Groups

Table 4
Collective Sensemaking by Student Groups

Basic Concept	Islamic School	Catholic School
Fantasy theme	Although we have differences, we are one nation; we complement each other; we need each other; we must respect, value, and be tolerant to others having different faiths	Although we are different, we should understand, respect, the company of different faith friends
Fantasy type	We can be friends to anyone; <i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i>	<i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i>
Modal societal fantasy	Nationalism; equality, and cooperation between different faith communities	Tolerance between different faith communities

Source. Own research.

At the Islamic school, the understandings of interfaith harmony conveyed by the student groups are simpler than by the teacher groups. The student group members dramatize and share fantasy to remind themselves about the teachings given by their teachers and parents concerning the importance of interfaith harmony for the life of the Indonesian society. Therefore, it is reasonable that the fantasy themes exchanged between members of the Islamic students' groups contain symbolic cues that resemble to some of the teachers' groups fantasy themes. Except those fantasies that are oriented towards divine values, the interpretations or fantasy themes that students have created are the same as what teachers have made. Student-created fantasy themes reflected in their rhetoric are primarily: "Although we have differences, we are one nation"; "We complement each other", "We need each other", "We must respect, value, and be tolerant to others having different faiths." The scenarios or the fantasy types used by the student groups whenever responding to new issues of interfaith harmony is "We can be friends to anyone" and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Therefore, whenever they meet new realities related to interfaith harmony most students remember and use the motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* to make fantasies, understand, and interpret the realities. The motto functions as a fantasy theme which has power or artistry to create group consciousness, and at the same time it functions a fantasy type in the process of collective sense making of interfaith harmony. The interpretations of interfaith harmony created by the student groups indicate their relevancies with modal societal fantasies of nationalism, equality, and cooperation between different faith communities which are often used in people's rhetoric about interfaith harmony.

For student groups, interfaith harmony is understood as a condition of group where their families, neighbours, and school fellows of different faiths interact

and make friends without any conflicts and disputes. Within such group they can study and play together peacefully; they can also complement, need, respect, value, and be tolerant to each other. In addition, the student groups also interpreted interfaith harmony by referring to the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. For the groups, being tolerant to each other will make the group live in harmony as symbolised by the motto “Although we have differences, we are one nation”.

Student groups interpret tolerance by using their own experiences when interacting with different faith fellows. When in school, for example, students can make friends and play with anyone regardless of religious background. They respect each other’s religious beliefs and give each other the widest possible opportunity to practice respective worship. The communicator of the student group (P5, male) explains the group’s interpretation of tolerance that they think as one of the prerequisites for the realisation of interfaith harmony: “No discrimination, and no making fun of friends of different religions. When the time comes for him to do worship, we are welcome. After he finished worshipping, we can play together again.”

Similarly, for the Catholic student groups, just like in the Islamic Schools, the fantasy themes of interfaith harmony created by student groups in the Catholic School is also limited to symbolic themes. Most students learn about religious diversity and differences from the school environment where Christian, Buddhist, and Catholic students are the majority, whereas Muslim and Khonghucu students are the minority. Symbols of religious diversity that are understood by students include differences in worship places, and rituals. Students generally do not have a deep understanding of the differences between religious teachings.

The study found three symbolic cues created by the student groups to interpret the reality of interfaith harmony, namely “understand”, “respect”, and “company”. The student groups have creative and imaginary interpretations or fantasy themes of interfaith harmony that “Although we are different, we should understand, respect, and company of different faith friends.” The rhetoric of the student groups reflects the fantasy types of tolerance, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and is also relevant to the modal societal fantasy of “tolerance between different faith communities” which are often used in people’s rhetoric about interfaith harmony.

Table 5

The Structure of Collective Sensemaking by Student Groups

Structural concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Rhetorical vision	To develop inclusive friendship	To develop tolerant friendship
Dramatis personae	The students themselves	The students themselves
Plotline	– To habituate being brothers or sisters for others	– To habituate being tolerant to different faith friends

Structural concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Scene	– The learning process to understand different religions; to respect the worship of others regardless their religious background	– The learning process to be tolerant to Muslim and non-Catholic friends and others; to help people in need
Sanctioning agent	The teachers (in school), the parents (home)	The teachers (in school), the parents (home)

Source. Own research.

At the Islamic school, the student group's rhetoric about interfaith harmony presents a drama that mostly involves dramatis personae of themselves, teachers, parents, and friends. The actions in the drama are the students' activities in the learning process led by their teachers to become quality Muslims with personal character of *akhalakul karimah* as well as good citizens of the Republic of Indonesia. The learning processes become the plotlines of the drama. The actions include to learn values of tolerance (such as being brothers or sisters for others, befriending anyone, helping friends in needs, respecting others, and respecting the worship of others regardless their religious background), and of nationalism (such as involving in the frequent ceremonies to raise the National flag, to memorise, and sing national anthems as well as learn the culture and language of various ethnic groups, and taste local foods of different areas). The values that they learn from their teachers all together indirectly represent their vision of unity in diversity. The dissemination of the values of quality Muslims and being good citizens mostly occurs through textbooks and classroom learning as well as friendships, both at school and outside school, which serves as a medium and channel of communication. The media and channel have significantly helped students' knowledge and consciousness of unity in diversity to grow.

The Saga, the full story in the drama performed by the student groups is about developing inclusive friendships. The vision has similarities with the vision of teacher and contains fantasy themes that have a strong connection with reality. The fantasy themes created by the student group in the Islamic School have a strong connection with reality that reflects student's tolerance in their daily activities.

However, the understandings of students are mostly limited to symbols of interfaith harmony and derived from subjects taught at the school, specifically from the subject of Pancasila and Civic Education or *Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan* (PPKN). The subject mainly contains basic teachings of nationalism and aims to provide basic knowledge of Pancasila ideology of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (literally meaning although we are different, we are one nation). In some parts it also provides basic knowledge of duties and obligations of Indonesian citizens. In addition to referring to PPKN materials, another source that students refer to as references in understanding the reality of interfaith harmony is the subject of Islamic Education or *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (PAI). Having

basic knowledge of interfaith harmony, many of the students guess the consequences that may occur if interfaith harmony is not successfully achieved; there will be social fractions, conflicts, and no peaceful atmosphere in the society.

The subjective interpretations of students about interfaith harmony are reflected in their utterances and attitudes and behaviour in daily activities. During the learning process most students do not have courage to violate the teacher's teachings. If students' behaviour at school does not seem to support the vision of unity in diversity, then they will get a reprimand from the teachers. If students do the same thing at home, the same rebuke is often given by their parents. Thus, here in the learning process teachers and parents function as sanctioning agents for most students.

Like the teachers' vision, the rhetorical vision of the students' groups to develop inclusive friendship contains fantasy themes that have a strong connection with reality. The values of nationalism, brotherhood, tolerance, equality, and cooperation in friendship are reflected strongly in reality, specifically in the students' daily social interaction.

Similarly, at the Catholic school the composite drama performed by the student groups reflects a rhetorical vision of developing tolerant friendships. The vision gets justification and is more easily spread widely to students who learn PPKN subject. The motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* has functioned as a fantasy type for the students whenever responding to new issues of interfaith harmony. The motto also has the power of fantasy theme artistry to create and sustain group consciousness as well as to present situations in a form that appears attractive to students so that they share the fantasies among themselves.

Media and channels that can be used as sources of knowledge and experience for students in learning the values of tolerance are exercises or practices of implementing these values in everyday life. For example, on certain occasions students are invited to involve in a charity activity; they are asked to set aside their pocket money as funds, some of which are distributed to communities in need ahead of Easter, Christmas (the so-called Christmas Action or *Aksi Natal*). Some of the students' pocket money savings funds are donated for organising various activities at the school (such as iftar with Muslim employees and social activities to help students in wealth), and some are donated to churches to be managed by higher institutions. The school's ways to instil noble ethics in accordance with the school's mission to share with others, give gifts to orphanage children and in the framework of religious holidays, are very effective and permeate the spirit of education of the elementary school children. The process of cultivating this social spirit is carried out by the school continuously in time following the learning process at school, with habituation methods for elementary school students.

The student groups' rhetoric about their ideas and actions to date represent the full story in the drama of developing tolerant friendships. For the student groups, interfaith harmony is understood as a condition of group where their families, neighbours, and school fellows of different faiths are tolerant to each other. According to students, tolerance can prevent fractions in their friendships as well as in social life.

Most interpretations of reality of interfaith harmony created by the student groups are in the context of nationalism thought by their teachers. Ideas about the reality conveyed by student groups are more derived from subject matter in the school, especially the subject of *Pancasila* and Civic Education or *Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan* (PPKN), which mainly contains teachings of nationalism. The subject matter aims to provide basic understandings of Pancasila ideology of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia with the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, means “unity in diversity”, as well as of duties and obligations of citizen.

Therefore, in interpreting interfaith harmony most students remember what their teachers have taught about the subject in the class, and they do not have courage to violate the teacher’s teachings. Teachers and parents, for most students, function as sanctioning agents during the learning process. If students do not seem to support the values of tolerance, then they will get a reprimand from teachers at school or by parents at home.

Table 6

Critical Evaluation toward Collective Sensemaking by Student Groups

Critical evaluation concepts	Islamic School	Catholic School
Rhetorical community	Muslim students	Catholic students and some non-Catholic students
Reality link to here-and-now phenomena	Muslim students can befriend anyone inside and outside school	Catholic students can befriend anyone inside school
Dramatistic rhetorical strategy	By telling stories of own experiences	By telling stories of own experiences

Source. Own research.

The rhetorical vision of tolerant friendship created by the student groups contains fantasy themes that have a strong connection with reality. The values of tolerance learned in school have succeeded in creating students’ awareness not to easily suspect people who have religious differences with them.

Briefly, the findings show how and why teacher groups and student groups in Islamic schools and Catholic schools create collective sensemaking by making certain fantasy themes to interpret reality of interfaith harmony that some of them are different from each other. The findings confirm the assumptions of SCT that through conversations in the FGDs, the teacher and student groups build a shared view of interfaith harmony which is created symbolically. The findings also indicate that the collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony were influenced by ideology, specifically by the religious, organisational, and social values established in each school. The values have been used by each group in each school as references in creating the fantasy themes to interpret interfaith harmony. In addition, the study also found how the organisational structure affects the groups in making sense of the reality. The religious ideology espoused and implemented by the organisation has exerted a significant influence on the teacher group and student group in each school.

The result of the study means that overall, the five assumptions of analysis of fantasy themes as explained by Donald Shields and C. Thomas Preston (1985) are relevant to the group processes to interpret reality of interfaith harmony (Shields & Preston, 1985). The conversations and messages of teacher groups and student groups in Islamic Schools and Catholic Schools are used to build the reality of interfaith harmony. The concept of fantasy themes can reveal the views shared by the rhetorical group. The dramatic statements made by these groups show a direct relationship between symbolic manifestations with reality (rhetorical vision) and group behaviour. Dramatic explanations of interfaith harmony are constructed by groups in various ways so that they can be shared and expanded. The issue of interfaith harmony has competing rhetorical visions from rhetorical communities of different religious beliefs.

The findings are crucial because they complement the shortcomings of SCT as identified in previous studies. The findings indicate that each of the rhetorical groups dramatise and share fantasies to explain the situation of interfaith harmony that seems interesting to others so that they support the common understanding, have group awareness, and share the idea with a wider audience. In addition, the study results also clarify ideological values that influence the formation or absence of convergence of understanding or interpretation of a group, such as religious ideological values and organisational values that are used as the basis of education in schools where rhetorical communities are located. Characteristics of membership that can limit in rhetorical communities include structures in the form of organisational rules, and common religious values, which can encourage the formation of a common mindset among members.

However, the study results have some limitations. Because the study implements SCT as an interpretive theory in qualitative research, it is unable to produce generalisable findings about collective sensemaking, especially collective sensemaking of interfaith harmony in the context of wider societies. Such a generalisation can only be produced through the use of SCT as a positivistic theory in quantitative research within larger communities.

To develop and strengthening SCT's ability as an interpretive theory to explain the phenomenon of collective sensemaking, this study recommends additional assumptions for SCT analysis, namely that: (a) Dramatization and sharing of fantasies can be driven by the experiences that groups have in dealing with reality; (b) The understanding and interpretation of reality can be limited by the ideological values of the group; (c) The characterisation of group membership can be limited by structure, particularly organizational rules, and shared ideological values. With the addition of these three assumptions, SCT has a new proposition about group rhetoric, which relates to the values that the group has, namely that collective sensemaking can be sourced and can be influenced by the values agreed to be applied by the rhetorical communities so that different communities will create different fantasies as well as rhetorical visions. These new propositions certainly need to be further explored more deeply to clarify underlying values that make differences or changes in collective sensemaking among similar and different groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis that has been done, this study produces conclusions: First, the rhetorical communities of the two elementary schools make collective sense of interfaith harmony by creating fantasy themes that many of them are different from each other. The rhetorical group of teachers at the Islamic School interprets the reality by creating fantasy themes of nationality, God's creations, brotherhood, respect, value, tolerance, kindness, and good prejudice, whereas the teacher group in the Catholic School create fantasy themes of respect others and accept differences. The rhetorical group of students at the Islamic School create and exchange the fantasy themes of nationality, complement, respect, value, and tolerance, whereas the student group at the Catholic School create the themes of understanding, respect, and accompanying others. Second, the values underlie the collective sensemaking of the reality between the two communities are different. The collection of fantasy themes created by the teacher and student groups at the Islamic School represents the underlying values of inclusiveness, while that at the Catholic Schools represents the underlying values of tolerance. Third, the structure of each rhetorical group affects the collective sensemaking by defining the character of membership that can limit in rhetorical communities through organisational rules, as well as the vision and mission of the organisation based on religious values adhered to. By this way, group members can have the same mindset and understanding of the reality at hand, including the reality of interfaith harmony.

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends further study or analysis to test and develop SCT in more comprehensive research within different as well as larger rhetorical communities to gain a deeper understanding and/or fuller explanations of the group processes and intergroup relations. In addition, for the purpose of communication practice this study recommends persuasion communication to use of cultural approaches to create common understanding and to realize inter-group agreement on interfaith harmony.

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