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A Survey of the Relationship between TREDONE Course and Learning of DLSU Students towards Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract: Interfaith or interreligious dialogue (ID) is the foundation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration especially to build an ASEAN Socio-Cultural community. Southeast Asia (SEA) is replete with diversity as reflected by the multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious societies in most SEA countries. This region is a home to a mosaic of the world's great religions. As the society and the world, especially SEA, are diverse and plural, De La Salle University (DLSU) assists to create this community by preparing its students for life to face the reality of diversity and religious pluralism with an attitude of inclusivity, tolerance and understanding through its religious education (RE) as a salient part of curriculum. This research is explanatory in nature that is conducted to determine if TREDONE course (Humanity's Search for Meaning) had been adequately effective in leading the students to learn about the ID culture. The researcher opted for quantitative research using one-shot or after-only survey. A total of 47 college freshmen who had taken up the course during the second term of academic year 2016-17 are the eventual respondents through purposive sampling. They accomplished and submitted online the questionnaire. Results yielded an empirical data implying the degree of learning in three domains—cognitive, affective and psychomotor—which the students acquired after TREDONE. It can be inferred that the school's RE in interreligious model undertaken by Catholic, Christian and non-Christian undergraduates is effective in changing their knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) toward the others. Although it can be concluded that there is a relationship between TREDONE course and the learning of students towards valuing ID, there are still a lot to improve and reinforce in the content and pedagogy of religious education in DLSU to make the students become much more ready to the context of religious pluralism in Asia and beyond.

Key words: TREDONE; interreligious/interfaith dialogue; religious pluralism, learning; diversity; religious education



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1. INTRODUCTION

One thing that ASEAN, a 10 member nation community, has apparently achieved 50 years since its foundation is “unity in diversity” resulting to regional peace and stability. This is realized because leaders of member states continuously engage in fruitful dialogue among themselves. For sustainable progress, member states should continue the international relations under the fundamental principles of mutual respect, equality, peaceful coexistence and cooperation as enshrined in their Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC, 1976). Leaders of member states are aware that this level of relationship should redound among its citizens. The areas of mutual respect and cooperation are not only in the field of economics, politics, and security but also in culture and religion by means of policies and education.

One basic characteristics of contemporary post modernity period is religious pluralism. Southeast Asia (SEA) is one of the continents where religious diversity is present. In Philippines alone, there is a wide range of religions across the land. Based on Philippine Religion Statistics (census 2000), a large number of Filipinos are Catholics (80.9%); Evangelicals (2.8%); Iglesia ni Cristo (2.3%); Aglipayan (2%); other Christians (4.5%); Muslim (5%), others (2.5%). It is clear that Philippines is a multicultural and diverse society. The same is true in neighbor countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia where a wide variety of religions and denominational diversity exist. In view thereof, the challenge for Filipinos and Asians, in general, is how to deal with the constant encounter with other people with different beliefs, values and lifestyles. Edgar Javier, SVD., in his book “Dialogue: Our Mission Today” stated that the most promising possibility and inescapable strategy for achieving understanding, appreciation of, and coming closer to the “other” is dialogue (2006, p122)

Marzia Scuderi (2015) said, we can say that the school may be an appropriate place for training in dialogue. Within school, children begin to meet and to deal with diversity.” She stressed that starting to teach the richness of plurality and dialogue in the schools is important to empower children and young people to develop a strong sense of ethics.

1.1 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND INTER- RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Javier cited Knitter who declared that dialogue is “the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding. It is a mutual opening of persons to each other, arising from the desire to learn from one another’s faith and to be enriched by it.” He further continued that by its very nature, dialogue is a process of talking and listening, of giving and receiving, of searching and studying for the deepening and enriching of one another. It is a deep communication or conversation between at least two partners from different religious adherence (2006, p123). This whole phenomenon is popularly known as interfaith or interreligious dialogue (ID). Its complexity, the long process to cultivate the attitude or the skill, the transformation as an expected outcome upon groups or individuals, and religions as being the main concern, imply the necessity of religious education (RE).

De La Salle University (DLSU) is a Catholic school but it welcomes students, even employees, from different religions or Christian denominations to become part of the institution. DLSU includes RE as part of its curriculum which consists of four courses taken up by all college students, regardless of religions, as prerequisite for graduation. This research paper focuses only on the first course in the series, i.e., Theology and Religious Education One (TREDONE), which is taken up by freshmen students during their first year in college. Responding to the reality of religious diversity both inside and outside the campus, TREDONE is interreligious. This can be clearly gleaned from the course description which states that TREDONE aims to develop in the students the skills for religious respect and tolerance, dialogue and unity, as they open themselves into interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. This dialogue and sharing of spiritual gifts from the great traditions in turn show the way to promoting justice, peace and integrity of creation. In this course, the students discern the role that faith plays in their lives as they grapple with questions and concerns on the meaning of life. As the course looks at the distinctiveness of Christianity and its different faith expressions, students are led to discover and critically appreciate the life-giving roots exemplified in their own beliefs, norms and rituals. They deepen their understanding



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of the meaning of life by recognizing the truth, goodness and beauty found in the different religious traditions (Course Syllabus). According to Bagir, RE in interreligious model is a kind of religious pluralism but one which seeks the possibility of mutual enrichment. It doesn't take religion as a closed, finished system which has to be accepted as it is, but opens it up for contact with others because there is an expectation of mutual enrichment. This is achieved through interfaith dialogue between people representing and committed to particular religions. Ideally, these people are open to other perspectives and possible enrichment by others (2008, p5).

1.2 LEARNING TOWARDS INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

TREDONE course, otherwise described as "Humanity's Search for Meaning" underscores the commonalities among religions, i.e., the way or path of life that reveals the answers to the questions that beset humankind such as: What is human being? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Why do people suffer? Where does suffering come from? What is right and wrong? What is the way to true happiness? What is death? What is judgment, and the reward after death? Why do we exist? What is prayer, worship and mystical experience? The answers to these questions constitute the teachings, doctrines and practices of the different religions. All these are the topics that are the subjects of classroom discussions. Religious education classes in DLSU consists of students from diverse religions, even few atheists and agnostics, who study altogether for understanding, appreciation, tolerance, acceptance and respect of the universal values of other religions. RE in DLSU is inclusive.

As for how TREDONE classes are conducted, students are made to study and report by groups about a particular religion, preferably their own religious affiliation. There is reporting and small group discussion about the teachings, doctrines and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and even the indigenous groups in the Philippines. There is the sharing of faith as Evangelicals, Born-Again Christians, Iglesia ni Cristo (INC), Protestants, Muslims, and Catholics openly share about their religion. Noticeably, this kind of activity where students of different religious traditions sitting together in a room, listening to others and discussing their faith and practices has

very significant impact. Moreover, students are given group activity to compare the religions to determine not only their differences but also the similarities. Students perform role plays on the prayers, worship celebrations or religious festivals of the particular religion. They also wear the religious dresses identified to particular religion in some activities but done with due respect and right understanding of its religious significance.

The activities for TREDONE pertinent to the discussions about the normative dimensions of different religion (normative dimension refers to the fundamentals and basic knowledge about the religions) are the Taize prayer, seminar on interfaith dialogue and/or festival of religion. Taize prayer is an ecumenical way of prayer that originated in a small village of Taize, Burgundy, France. This event is regularly replicated in the campus, spearheaded by Lasallian Pastoral Office, for various occasions of prayer such as the yearly celebration of the week of prayer for Christian unity (every January 18-25). The whole academic community is invited to attend the Taize prayer regardless of religion and among the attendees are TREDONE students. The seminar on ID, organized by Theology and Religious Education Department (TRED), is to expose the students on how ID is happening in reality among diverse religions in the Philippines. The invited speakers, from ID groups or NGO's whose advocacy is to promote ID, narrate the works of cooperation and unity among members from diverse faith traditions. Likewise, they discuss their perspectives on various issues with openness and respect. This specific activity enables the students to see Muslim, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, even a representative of an indigenous group altogether in one platform. The festival of Religion is another TRED sponsored activity where TREDONE classes participate in a competition or showcase of talents. By classes, they present either song, poem, dance, short skit or a combination of all or any of these. Each presentation focuses on the different religious festivities that prominently feature the faith and prayer life of particular religions. The classes who have successfully presented before the panel of judges the unity of religions despite the differences of faith and practices are adjudged as the winners.

The downside of RE in interreligious model is that it deprives the students in DLSU, who are predominantly Catholics, to internalize their own faith. The answer to this is that DLSU is not the only source of knowledge about the Catholic faith.



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RE is a shared responsibility with the student's family, parishes and religious organizations. In response to this, TREDONE has a Church involvement program which requires the students to go back to their own parishes or church organizations in their own localities to render services as well as share time, talents and resources for at least five consecutive weeks for a total of 10 hours. It is expected that they will be able to discover or re-connect with their community for a deeper knowledge and understanding about their faith. The same is required for non-Catholics to also immerse themselves in their own faith community.

Bagir argued that the aim of ID is not limited to cognitive understanding of others then RE goals should also be not limited to understanding—it should play a transformative role, just as ID does. He continued that if RE is to be useful and meaningful for students' personality development, it cannot stay at the confine of normative dimensions of religions. The normative is important, at least as a source of identity formation of the students as members of their religious communities. But surely it is not the only thing one can say about religion. Learning about religion may reach deeper to its spiritual roots, but also to the question of how to bring knowledge, feelings, and attitudes shaped by religions to the world in a constructive way. In short, religion is ultimately existential. Good education is also existential and as such should fulfill the cognitive, affective and psychomotoric aims (2008, p1 and p7).

Researcher of this study has the basic assumption that TREDONE course is adequately effective in influencing students' learning towards ID. Specifically, the areas of learning to gauge is Knowledge, Attitude/Appreciation and Practice (KAP). Hence, the research question is, does TREDONE help students learn ID? It has three sub-questions: 1) Do students acquire a formal knowledge of religions and ID through TREDONE? 2) Do students get to appreciate diversity of religion in mutual understanding and enrichment through TREDONE? 3) Do students learn to practice respect, tolerance, and openness through TREDONE?

2. METHODOLOGY

Researcher of this study utilized incidental or accidental non-probability sampling in choosing the respondents. Criterion for the respondents are students who took up TREDONE course during the

2nd trimester (January – April) of academic year 2016-17. They are the target respondents of this study. The quantitative research design used is one-short or after-only survey to determine the impact of TREDONE to students who took up the course. The evaluation survey questionnaire consists of three tests to gauge the basic KAP levels of the students. There were a total of 28 questions: 10 questions each for knowledge test (K-Test) and attitude test (A-Test); while, eight questions for the practice test (P-Test).

The researcher utilized the google forms to formulate the survey questions; thereafter, the survey was sent to email accounts of the target respondents. Facebook groups, created by some teachers during the term for their classes, was also used to reach out to the students. Clearly the use of social media facilitated the serving of the survey from April 28 – May 15. 47 former TREDONE students answered the survey questionnaire and submitted online the accomplished forms.

The K-Test is a multiple choice. The questions are as follows: 1) A belief in the supernatural supreme God with whom we are bound by the system of code of living to find the meaning of life; 2) All religions ultimately aim for (complete the sentence); 3) A body of believers subscribing to religious doctrines different from those of others within the same religion; 4) Christianity is a religious denomination; 5) The teaching that is shared by all Religions is (complete the sentence); 6) Every form of meeting and communication between individuals or group of communities to bring about a better grasp of the truth and to achieve better human relations in a spirit of sincerity, respect for persons and mutual trust; 7) The promotion of cooperation and unity among Christians according to the will of Christ; 8) All positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment; 9) Dialogue should involve the principles of (complete the sentence); 10) The work for peace should begin from (complete the sentence).

The choices for each of the aforesaid questions are the following: 1) A. Morality; B. Religion; C. Spirituality; D. Church. 2) A. Happiness here on earth or in the afterlife by means of living the right path of life; B. Material prosperity which means amassing great wealth and possessions; C. Power and influence to take control of others for one's personal interest; D. Prayer and worship, rites and



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rituals, scriptures. 3) A. Community; B. Denomination; C. Church; D. Organization. 4) A. Yes; B. No; C. It depends. 5) A. Morality (Don't kill, Don't lie, Don't steal, etc.); B. Compassion and respect for everyone; C. Peace and non-violence; D. All of the above. 6) A. Engagement; B. Dialogue; C. Relationship; D. Connectivity. 7) A. Interreligious Dialogue; B. Religious Diversity; C. Religious Inclusivity; D. Religious Tolerance. 8) A. Interfaith Dialogue; B. Religious Diversity; C. Religious Inclusivity; D. Religious Tolerance. 9) A. Honesty and tolerance; B. Humility and mutual respect; C. Equality and free expressions; D. All of the above. 10) A. Teachers; B. Government Leaders; C. Parents and Elders; D. Myself.

The A-Test is a questionnaire consisting of 10 items using a 5-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) to strongly agree with a midpoint of (3) no comment. The 10 items are: 1) I feel that religion is important to find one's meaning and purpose of life. 2) I feel that it is good to recognize that there is sanctification and truth outside my own religion. 3) I feel that interreligious dialogue does not seek Christian unity and equality of religions at the expense of the truth. 4) I feel that the right attitude towards religions is to see both the differences and similarities in order to understand and respect each other's religious perspectives. 5) I feel that freely sharing each other's beliefs and practices creates opportunity to give witness to one's faith. 6) I feel that my religion, just like any other religions, has everything to offer for me to know God and live a meaningful life. 7) I feel that people from different faith traditions should not look at each other as we and they but rather as brother and sisters who are part of one and the same humanity. 8) I feel that religions are not the real cause of conflict in this world. 9) I feel that the religions can be a strong force for peace and harmony in this world. 10) I feel that instead of fighting each other, religions should set aside their differences to unite for the common cause—the fight against poverty, injustices, and violence against human dignity.

The P-Test is also a multiple choice. Eight questions present certain scenarios that solicit student's possible reactions or behavior when confronted with them in real life. These questions and choices are enumerated herein: 1) If I encounter people with opinions different from mine, I should... A. Understand and respect their views; B. Engage them in debate to prove they are wrong; C. Disassociate myself from them; D. Treat them as my

enemies. 2) Whenever I encounter Muslims in school, in the neighborhood or elsewhere... A. I see them as terrorists; B. I see them as inferiors or nobody; C. I see them just like me or just like anybody; D. I see nothing or I don't care. 3) Anybody belonging to another faith traditions or religions different from mine, I have: A. Openness to establish friendship, acquaintance or working relations with them; B. Prejudice that it is difficult to establish any form of relationships with them; C. Reservation that I can work with them, that's all—no more no less. 4) When I experience inconvenience such as traffic along the road brought about by the expression of faith by other religions, I tend to have: A. Condemnation of these people for the inconvenience; B. Religious tolerance; C. Indifference. 5) In catholic setting like DLSU campus, when Catholics are in the moment of prayer at 12 noon and 6pm for their angelus... A. I stop and pause in silence to join in the moment of prayer as a sign of respect; B. I stop and pause because I have no other choice; C. I continue to do whatever I am doing because I don't practice what Catholics pray. 6) When national holidays are declared because of the religious observance of one particular religion...A. I don't care what these believers celebrate or observed as long as there is no class; B. I understand that the religious celebration or observance is a matter of great importance for the adherents of that particular religion; C. Religious events should not be allowed to be celebrated to spare the public from unnecessary holidays and inconvenience. 7) When I see Muslim women wearing hijab, I tend to: A. Laugh at them as the dress is out of touch with the modern times; B. Look at them as ordinary as I understand that this dress is an expression of modesty and Islamic identity for Muslim women; C. Judge them as hypocrites and extremists. 8) When I see Catholics, Protestants, INC members, Born-Again Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists who interact with one another, I tend to see it with: A. Admiration; B. Amazement; C. Confusion; D. Indifference.

To measure the knowledge and practice levels, and the direction of the respondents' attitude, the formulas used are:

$$LOK = \frac{HPS}{DNC} = \frac{10}{2} = 5.0 \quad (\text{Formula 1})$$

Where: LOK = Level of Knowledge
 HPS = Highest Possible Score
 DNC = Desired Number of Categories



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$$LOP = \frac{HPS}{DNC} = \frac{10}{2} = 5.0 \quad (\text{Formula 2})$$

Where: LOP= Level of Practice

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic profile of the respondents is 15 males and 32 female students. 39 (83%) of the respondents are Catholics; 2 (4.3%) are Protestants; 5 (10.6%) are Born Again Christians; and 1 (2.1%) is Iglesia ni Cristo. 32 or two thirds (68.1%) of the respondents had earned a grade of 4.0 (95-100%); 4 (8.5%) a grade of 3.5 (90-94%); 6 (12.8%) a grade of 3.0 (84-89%); while all the rest (10.6%) a grade from 1.0-2.5 (60-83%).

Table 1

K-Level	Low	High
Questions	0-50%	51-100%
Q1	12.8	87.2
Q2	12.8	87.2
Q3	37.0	63.0
Q4	57.4	42.6
Q5	4.4	95.6
Q6	47.8	52.2
Q7	63.0	37.0
Q8	37.0	63.0
Q9	8.7	91.3
Q10	4.3	95.7

Knowledge level (K-level) has two categories from Low (0-50%) to High (51-100%). It can be seen from table1 that respondents have high knowledge on religion and ID. More than 50% of respondents are correct most of the time (8 out of 10 items). High level of knowledge is evident on items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. But low knowledge on items 4 and 7.

Table 2

A-Level	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Questions	D-SD	NC	A-SA
Q1	2.2	23.9	73.9
Q2	0.0	8.7	91.3
Q3	65.2	19.6	15.2
Q4	2.2	4.3	93.5
Q5	0.0	4.3	95.7
Q6	2.2	4.3	93.4
Q7	0.0	13.0	86.9
Q8	17.4	23.9	58.7
Q9	2.2	8.7	89.1
Q10	0.0	6.5	93.4

As for the attitude level (A-level), the direction of attitude is agree to strongly agree is positive; strongly disagree to disagree is negative; while, no comment is a neutral attitude. It can be inferred from Table2 that respondents have a positive attitude towards religion and ID. They showed positive perspective on almost all items as evidenced by high percentage rate except item 3.

Table 3

P-Level	Low	High
Questions	0-50%	51-100%
Q1	0.0	100
Q2	2.2	97.8
Q3	4.3	95.7
Q4	39.1	60.9
Q5	4.3	95.7
Q6	6.5	93.5
Q7	0.0	100
Q8	26.1	73.9

Practice level (P-level) has two categories from Low (0-50% to High (51-100%). Table 3 shows that practice of ID is high among the respondents. Percentage rate of respondents are high (60% and above) in all 8 items. They showed that big majority of students will act favorably in tolerance, respect and openness towards religions all the time.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown in empirical data that through TREDONE course the students have learned about religion and ID. They acquired high levels of knowledge and practice, and positive attitude towards religions and ID after the course. This research can be supplemented by other research works that focus on possible proposed curricular or co-curricular activities and projects to enhance existing content and pedagogical approach or strategies in TRED-ONE. There should be continuous attempt to improve the course.

Similar researches can be undertaken along this line of religious education and interfaith dialogue in other ASEAN member countries. It will be an interesting research undertaking to evaluate the effectiveness of monoreligious, or multicultural or interreligious education, whatever the model may be, in various schools in Southeast Asian region to find out if it is also effective in preparing the students, who will become adult members of society, to the world of religious pluralism and diversity.



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