What does being patriotic mean in the digital era?

By Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan - September 14, 2020 @ 3:07pm

Patriotism is the feeling of loving one’s country more than any others and being proud of it. - Photo by AIZUDDIN SAAD/NSTP

SEVERAL years ago, when one of my trainee teacher was teaching a Moral Education class on patriotism, she was trying to put forward her idea of how the local police in a story called Bukit Kepong showed their patriotism to the country.
She first showed a video clip, which had lots of shooting and killings of Bukit Kepong police station being ambushed by the communists in the 1950s and then told the story of Bukit Kepong.

It was a Form Four Moral Education class made up of only other than Muslim students (because the Muslim students were learning Islamic Studies at that time).

The teacher explained how the police officials who sacrificed their lives for the nation showed patriotism and they too should be willing to show their patriotism too to their country, Malaysia.

For the next stage of her lesson, the teacher got students into small groups and asked them to discuss and later present their thinking on how they can be patriotic to their country.

The students then got together and started discussing but could not identify themselves with the police who safeguarded the Bukit Kepong police station, nor the communist who ambushed the police station.

Precisely at that moment, my student, the trainee teacher, got into a panic mode as I was observing from the back and asked me to help out with the discussion.

So, I asked the students what was their current role in their life as they were not police serving nor communist in the jungle. They responded that they are students, friends, and children to their parents and so on and so forth.

Then, my next question to the students is how do they show their patriotism to the country as a student? They looked confused.

We continued our discussion on what is patriotism and everyone agreed that it's the feeling of loving one's country more than any others and being proud of it.

So knowledge-wise, all the students understood what patriotism is, meaning their moral knowledge was good and the trainee teacher will get full marks for that in her evaluation sheet.

After that came the moral emotion and moral action part of the discussion. The students felt they loved the country and the beauty and safety in Malaysia.

However, my question to them was, how do they put that in action, in moral action? For example, in the current digital era, all of them have electronic devices like laptops and smart phones.

Every day, they receive messages, images, and videos of all sorts. However, if they receive something about Malaysia, which could be on the current situation, an ongoing situation, politics etc; how do they react?

Or, what do they do about them? Do they just forward the messages without validating the truth? Do they reprimand friends who keep forwarding fake news about Malaysia to them?

Do they even remember that every time they forward a fake news about Malaysia, they are actually being not patriotic or unpatriotic because being patriotic is to love one's country and be proud of that country.

So, if others tarnish their country, do they just keep quiet? That particular part of the discussion kept the students thinking deeper.

The trainee teacher then went on with the lesson where the students presented their discussion and ended with writing a patriotic sajak (poem) in their Moral exercise book.
The most important message here is when educators are teaching their students, they must link what is in the textbook, in the syllabus with students’ daily lives.

If they can do that, only then does the element of HOTS (higher order thinking skills) develop and students complete with deep learning.

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