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Published: Sunday April 7, 2013 MYT 12:00:00 AM

Updated: Friday April 26, 2013 MYT 1:08:36 AM

The Moral dilemma



HAVE we destroyed the intrinsic value of Moral Education (ME) and made it so simplistic that it has become one-dimensional?

A handful of my second-year education students in Universiti Malaya (UM) and I find that ME is too exam-oriented.

Students even feel frustrated with ME as it is crammed with a set of moral values in which each of these values are defined neatly with specific key words and terms in the syllabus.

Questions and marking schemes in ME can only test how well the students are adept at memorising the subject.

As long as the candidates are able to provide answers with correct keywords in the answer scheme, they could pass or even get an A.

Deviated answers are not allowed and this indirectly shuts down the door for the students to think critically and analytically.

Talking from our personal point of views as university students, ME is not something structured, or something that you can just learn about through memorisation.

We agree with the view that ME extends beyond skills and knowledge; it is not just an academic subject.

With this, my students and I believe that moral is something caught but not taught.

Learning ME can be lively when we actually learn about life, how to live and the most important reason is, learning about yourself.

The danger of being too bound by our moral textbooks makes the subject redundant.

In preparing students for exams, students are being trained to do more exercises for the purpose of central assessment.

They are also trained to memorise like robots, where what they learn is merely to remember the key words so as to score well in the examination.

In our opinion, there will be no problem regarding morality anymore if students memorise all the values in the moral syllabus.

Rigid teaching

However, it will be such a waste of effort if students only memorise moral values but do not practise them in their respective lives. This reflects how rigid ME has become.

Even worse, such drudgery in memorising does kill the students' interest in the subject and it eventually becomes totally meaningless to them.

On the other hand, most parents find ME is unnecessary and should not be included in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exam. They think the subject is too trivial and unimportant as it does not help children develop any skills.

While it may be unimportant where skills are concerned, ME is otherwise a great subject to instil good values and helps enhance critical thinking.

Heads and hearts

The subject teaches students how to cultivate the importance of reasoning using their "heads and hearts" and to get wise, rational and objective decisions when faced with real-life moral dilemmas.

There is no doubt that the subject concerns the philosophy of life, ethics, humanity and values.

If it is taught with greater effort, creativity and commitment, we are sure students will be happy to learn ME.

They will certainly appreciate life and contribute to society in a constructive manner.

From what some of us had experienced during ME lessons in secondary schools, teachers expected us to memorise the first value of the subject's syllabus, which was on self development.

We were initially surprised that we were taught this way — to memorise word for word when the new learning approach was to encourage students to analyse and answer.

However, because of the teacher's authoritarian style, we had to abide by what the teacher instructed us to do, or be categorised as immoral students.

We were given 15 minutes for the exercise.

As for the moral value on Belief in God, we were given 15 minutes to explain our definition.

Since the definition was long, it was hard to memorise within the stipulated time.

In fact, one of our classmates was punished and ordered out of the class for failing to provide the full answer.

We are curious about the type of training the ME teachers currently undergo before they are allowed to teach the subject.

From our experience in UM, we know that ME is a complex subject and it is necessary that those who teach it, have proper training.

There should be no form of indoctrination and there should be choices when one makes moral decisions.

Only then can students reason out and think about their decisions based on values and principles.

In higher institutions, ME is taught by certain academics who might be influenced by indoctrinated philosophies.

If such academics are not open-minded towards the epistemology and philosophy of ME, then the subject is doomed to fail again and again.

Instead of introducing Islamic Education and Moral Education into two separate subjects in schools, we could do something to transform the essence of the subjects, and present them in one single subject.

This in turn will teach students about moral, ethics, religion and philosophy that will develop them holistically.

Learning together

We also believe that by having all students learning ME regardless of their faith, there will be no disparity and differences as they can share challenges and issues that happen around them.

They can even voice out their opinions to some extent, to cultivate love and respect among themselves.

In certain circumstances, the subject is taught by teachers according to what appears in the textbook.

This is done without focusing on the true domains in the subject which include developing moral reasoning, moral emotions and moral action.

In order to transform ME as a subject that helps students and the community, teachers should transform their mindset and the way they teach.

Moral Education is not an examination subject but one that imbibes principles and values for life.

If taught with the appropriate pedagogy, students at the end of their 11 years of schooling will excel in character and on paper.

There will not be any need for memorisation because such values have been inculcated from primary school and have become part of the students' character.

One needs to respect the old when they are young, help the weak when they are strong, and admit to their faults or mistakes — after all, these are the values that should come from within.

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