

# We learn from our decisions, whether good or bad

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WHEN children grow up in an environment — family, nuclear, extended or single parent, orphanage or shelter homes — they are usually inculcated with values. Such values develop good habits and enable children to live peacefully in a society. If they grow up in a religious family, then religious values are inculcated in them.

However, when they start schooling, they may think about the values they learnt when younger. For example, parents always remind children not to speak to strangers. But when children are in school and they see another child fall down or get hurt, they are taught to be compassionate and help the other child, who may be a stranger. The more difficult real-life dilemmas are yet to come.

As adolescents, their circle of friends become wider. They associate with individuals who are different in ethnicity, religion, faith and belief system. Now, with apps, the world is at their fingertips. How are they taught to cope with such a transformation? If children are from families that have taught them the values of religion, then they will conform to norms prescribed in their religion. But in schools, we encourage critical and creative thinking.

Children and adolescents will question the system, their uneasiness with anything that exists in their spheres. With this comes the issue of what they are doing with their lives. Moral Education, as I have come to see, and am experiencing and researching, is a subject that enables students to cope with the challenges and opportunities in life, at least in the Malaysian education system. There is no one solution in moral decision-making.

People are provided with skills and knowledge to weigh a moral dilemma and to decide on a solution that has consequences they have to live with. If a bad decision is made, then individuals face the consequences of that decision, but that does not mean they are bad for life. They will learn from the mistake, and become wiser when facing the next moral dilemma. Civics and Citizenship Education is not Moral Education.

The development of informed, effective and responsible citizens is different from making wise, practical moral decisions or following a religious scripture and living up to be an ideal religious person. Without the commitment by citizens to the values and principles of our multiethnic and multicultural nation, we cannot declare that we are a harmonious society. It is essential that educators, policymakers and civil society make the case for the support of civic education, meant for a multicultural society, from all segments of society.

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