

Equip teachers with skills

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WHEN Moral Education was introduced as a core subject in 1983 in all primary schools, society had mixed feelings about it. In 1993, the first cohort of non-Muslim students who took Moral Education had to sit the paper for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia. Many parties were unhappy with the way the subject was taught, assessed and evaluated. The curriculum covered aspects on moral thinking, moral feelings and moral actions. However, in the examination, all answers were based on moral thinking, although questions did cover aspects of how you would feel and what you would do in that given moral dilemma. But students were drilled to answer questions according to the requirements of the curriculum. Since the curriculum focused on specific values, what they meant and how they could be applied in daily life, students were asked to memorise the values, their definitions and answer examination questions accordingly. It was very superficial, and students, parents and individuals were enraged by the system. It was disheartening to see so-called Moral Education expert teachers using creative ways to teach students to memorise values. Then, Moral Projects were introduced as a component of the Moral Education evaluation for SPM. It was a way to reduce cognitive weightage and instead focus on teaching the values through community service and volunteerism. Again, because there was a lack of experts in disseminating knowledge about how to conduct the moral community service projects, the focus was more on reports and grading. The Moral Projects component became a mockery as upper secondary Moral Education students resorted to posing as if they were cleaning the classroom or helping to sustain a clean environment for picture evidence. Teachers forced weaker students to copy project reports for grading purposes. There were genuine cases where teachers, trained to conduct Moral Projects, collaborated with other school authorities and community leaders to provide avenues for students to perform community service. If Moral Education teachers are trained professionally, with support of the Education Ministry, and the state and district education offices, Moral Education would have championed the notion of formative and summative assessment, which is being introduced and evaluated in the Malaysian examination system. Currently, more than 50 per cent of teachers teaching Moral Education have no formal training in teaching the subject. This is based on my research titled "Moral Education in the 21st Era in Malaysia: Empowering Moral Education Educators with Appropriate Skills and Values", conducted from 2013 to last year. It is indeed a mockery to have teachers teaching a subject that they have little knowledge of or skills, and who use the trial and error method to disseminate the curriculum. It is more destructive when Islamic Studies teachers teach Moral Education using the religious lesson approach. If we want to transform the students and the education system, it should start with the basics. Where Moral Education is concerned, it is vital to train Moral Education educators professionally and equip them with the right knowledge, skills and values.

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