

Headline	Universal values in different religions		
MediaTitle	New Straits Times		
Date	20 Jun 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	Letters	Circulation	74,711
Page No	18,19	Readership	240,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	716 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 24,587
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 73,761



EDUCATION

Universal values in different religions

I AM pressured by my Malaysian friends, who live all over the globe, to respond to the recent issue of religious misunderstanding that took place at a public institution of higher education.

It is easier to be critical when you are the third party.

But, it is a challenging task for me as an educator, who teaches a subject dealing with morality and religion, and even more so because 90 per cent of my students are those of one faith, but will teach Moral Education in schools that comprise students of other faiths, except the one that the teacher follows.

How do I deal with this scenario in my course, called "Moral and Religion"? Firstly, I ensure that university students are provided with basic knowledge on religion and show them the timelines of the world's religions.

In fact, in their first year, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) major/Moral Education minor students would have been exposed to a course called "Moral and

Ethics", where they are taught about the formation of ethics and morality in ancient Greek, Roman and Asian societies.

The students are taught the concepts of different moral principles and theories that do not touch on religion, but have more to do with belief systems and spirituality.

When they learn about morality and religion, they start to understand the philosophy of religion, including alternative beliefs about God; the purpose of religion; the link between science and religion; the moral and ethical implications of religious commitment; and the relationship between faith, reason, worldly experience and how religion plays a role in the different stages of individual or collective life.

Then, there is the crucial research stage, where students analyse a religion or belief system other than their own, and they present their findings to the class. Their research includes reading the sacred texts of different religions, such as the Quran, Bible, Vedas, Dhammapada and Guru Granth

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Sahib, to name a few. They are also encouraged to interview authorities of different religions, and obtain a clear picture of the religions and how they came into existence.

Finally, the students present their findings to their peers, and we end with discussions, which allow them to reflect on their understanding about values that are universally present in different religions and belief systems, and how the values are incorporated in the Moral Education syllabus.

This method serves as an eye-opener for almost all of my students — and for me as their lecturer — because every time they present their findings on a certain religion or belief system, there is bound to be new facts or values not discussed in previous presentations.

As they have to present findings based on primary sources, quote from sacred texts and interview the authorities of different religions, there are no issues of wrong facts being presented.

I find that my students are “transformed” because not only do they get to have a real understanding of other religions, but they also examine their own faiths more deeply. Hopefully, they will become “inter-religion ambassadors” not just in Malaysia, but anywhere in they world.

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