

Teaching students to live a good life

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AS a child growing up in a religious environment, I acquired many values inculcated by my parents, especially my mother, an educator. Then, there were the environment (preschools, places of worship and clubs), societies, friends and relatives. Everyone I came into contact with taught me to be a good child, a good student, a good teacher and a good researcher. However, when I begin thinking of myself and those around me, especially my students, I realise that “good” is a subjective word and what is good to me may be bad for someone else. I would like to highlight situations when parents are not good role models. When I was a novice teacher in Pahang, a student told me that she had been sexually abused by her biological father. The worst thing was that her mother told her to keep quiet or their father would be taken away and no one would support the family. It was disturbing for me. I took the case to the evening supervisor but he said if no report was lodged, there was nothing much the school could do. I was a young teacher and did not know about children’s rights, my own rights and my responsibility as a teacher. My heart went out to the student. All I could tell her was never to be at home alone. When I was doing my master’s later, I brought up the issue during a Values Education Conference. An academic refused to accept that parents could be in the wrong. I continued arguing with him and even gave the example of “Harap-kan pagar, pagar makan padi”. But he went on providing examples of the goodness of parents and respecting them at all times to receive blessings from God. It was at that juncture that I decided that teaching students to be sensible would enable them to live a good life. When students grow up in a warm, loving environment at home and at school, they will develop to their fullest potential. But that is being too idealistic. For every child who comes from a complete home with loving parents and siblings, there are also children who come from single-parent homes, foster homes and social welfare homes. It is not practical to expect students of different backgrounds to be good and well-behaved all the time, especially if their emotions are disturbed and their spirituality unstable. Focusing on educating students to be sensible and employing practical and reasonable knowledge, skills and values to face life and its challenges is what every teacher should do. Our education system includes aspects such as higher order thinking skills (Hots) and holistic development. But the challenge is how teachers are going to use pedagogical tools to educate children on such an important aspect of life?

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