

Here's hoping civics class thrives in third appearance



In this file pic dated Oct 20, 2016 shows year one student (from left) Shayazwan Nizamuddin, Tharenraj Rajan and Venezio Tan attending their first day at Sekolah Kebangsaan St Xavier, Air Itam.- NSTP/File pic

By [Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan](#) - October 19, 2018 @ 10:53am

THIS semester, I took the road not taken by lecturing 155 first-year medical students in the subject of “Ethnic Relationship”.

One topic in the subject module is about vernacular schools and how they play a role in bringing students from different ethnic groups together.

I asked six students to come forward based on their education; two from Chinese vernacular schools, two from Tamil ones, and another two from religious (Islamic) vernacular schools.

I gave them two questions: how did you learn to integrate with students from other ethnicities and how did you learn other cultures?

The three groups said they learnt about other cultures in the Civics subject class, while the Tamil vernacular students also mentioned Moral Education.

However, they did not have much interaction with students from other ethnicities until the Tamil and Chinese vernacular students came to secondary schools and the Islamic vernacular students entered university.

This is real-life evidence that Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) has been the lifeline for many students to learn about other cultures. I am glad that CCE, which was supposed to be phased out in the 2013-2025 educational blueprint, is likely to return to classes next year.

The philosophy behind CCE is PKN (*pengetahuan, kemahiran dan nilai*), which translates into knowledge, skills and values.

I hope this will materialise, although I'm sceptical about it, considering that the subject has "lived and died" and this would be its third "rebirth".

I wrote about "Rebirth of Civics and Citizenship" in 2004, and submitted an article for this newspaper in 2015 about how CCE helps develop soft skills and patriotism. All these are observations I made after being involved in CCE and concluding that it was becoming popular globally, but was seen as not that important in our education system.

I hope the Education Ministry will take caution of the previous disaster that brought the subject to a halt.

First, only those who have been trained to teach this subject should be allowed to do it.

Since the philosophy behind CCE is PKN, there should be a balance between cognition, action and reflection in teaching and learning the subject.

Just teaching the subject in classrooms is asking for another doomsday for CCE.

Next, there should be multicultural and intercultural elements included in CCE. Cultural Quotient is becoming popular.

We should not repeat the mistakes by allowing educators who have no expertise in the matter to teach it. It should be taught by teachers who see their students as individuals who are rich in culture and help educate them into citizens of Malaysia.

DR VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN

Director, Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2018/10/422662/heres-hoping-civics-class-thrives-third-appearance>