# Philosophical Inquiry in the Malaysian Educational System – Reality or Fantasy?

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*ABSTRACT: Thinking skills are a popular topic of conversation nowadays among Malaysian educationists. These experts lament that Malaysian students are ill-equipped to face the challenges of life in the 21st Century. As a solution to this and other problems, a reform document was proposed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2012. The 'Malaysian educational blueprint' as it is called, has at last recognized the importance of critical thinking skills and seeks ways to include these into the national curriculum. Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a teaching method that develops critical thinking and analytical reasoning in children. The paper therefore recommends the use of P4C to achieve the goals of the Malaysian educational blueprint vis-à-vis critical thinking, since it has proven its effectiveness in various studies around the world. The main purpose of this paper, therefore, is to raise the following pertinent questions: how suitable is P4C for the Malaysian education system? Secondly, how will P4C be implemented, bearing in mind the challenges within the unique Malaysian context? These questions and others, need to be explored if P4C is to be implemented successfully, and Malaysia is to be transformed into a more 'thinking nation' through education.*

### INTRODUCTION: P4C IN MALAYSIA

Philosophy for Children (P4C) was first introduced into the Malaysian educational scene in 2002 by Rosnani Hashim, a Professor at the Institute of Education at the International Islamic University Malaysia, receiving a first-hand, formal training from its founder, Matthew Lipman. Rosnani Hashim went on to remodel Lipman's approach incorporating discussion about common, central and contestable concepts by including religious ethics and values relevant to Muslim society. She then rebranded it with a new name, the *Hikmah*[1] Programme. The reason for renaming P4C was because she noticed that the Malaysian teachers seemed to have an 'allergy' towards philosophy i.e., they had no background in philosophical inquiry and so she felt the name *Hikmah* had a more positive ring since it comes from a traditional Malay word (Rosnani Hashim, 2009c, p. 660).

In January 2006, the Centre for Philosophical Inquiry in Education (CPIE) was established under the Institute of Education, with the aim of promoting philosophical inquiry in the Malaysian education system via the *Hikmah* Programme. Rosnani Hashim was made its first Associate Director and the Centre, through its members, conducted studies in the practice of P4C at different levels of education —primary, secondary and tertiary. As a result of these studies, *Hikmah* has been found to be an effective and stimulating pedagogy. Books containing thinking stories and issues relating to Muslim children have been published under the Centre. For example, *'Sarah'* (Rosnani Hashim,

2012b) for secondary school students and the 'Mira Series' (Rosnani Hashim & Abdullah, 2009; Rosnani Hashim & Banging, 2009; Rosnani Hashim, 2009a, 2009b) for the primary level. The following studies have been conducted by members of the Centre and relate to P4C in the Malaysian context.

The first attempt to study the suitability and effectiveness of P4C for Malaysian children was conducted by Rosnani Hashim herself, in 2003, using an experimental methodology that involved a class of 30 'average' ability, 5th Grade students. The class was treated to the novel 'Siti', which is a translated version of Lipman's 'Pixie'. P4C was conducted twice a week for sixteen weeks. Using the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTRS) for the pre- and post-tests, it was found that the students showed a statistically significant improvement in their critical thinking skills. Also, the results of a survey administered to the students revealed very positive feedback showing that the students liked the classes very much and wanted the programme to be continued (Rosnani Hashim, 2003).

Research by Moomala Othman (2005) compared P4C and a teaching method known as 'Reader's Response' (RR). The effects on critical thinking and English reading skills among secondary school students was measured for these two methods and the results revealed a statistically significant difference for both thinking and reading for P4C but not for RR. This suggests that there is adequate evidence that P4C enhances thinking and reading skills.

Juperi (2010) conducted a study about philosophical inquiry in Islamic Education and its effects on the development of questioning skills among secondary school students. A qualitative observation, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, showed that throughout the eight sessions of philosophical inquiry, students displayed significant improvements in their ability to create and pose questions, demonstrating Bloom's 'Higher Order Thinking Skills' of analysing, synthesizing and evaluating.

A more recent study conducted by Preece (2012) explored ways of making English Language Teaching Materials more engaging for Muslim learners, using philosophical inquiry, discussion and critical thinking. Preece found that the combination of philosophical discussions related to learners' culture and worldview enhanced their motivation to study English. It also gave them opportunities to practise the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as enhancing their critical thinking skills.

It is worth noting that the above mentioned studies were conducted in the Malaysian context by members of the Centre (Rosnani Hashim, 2003; Juperi, 2010; Othman, 2005; Preece, 2012) and although results and findings were positive, the studies were exploratory in nature and only conducted on a small scale. Consequently, their results have little impact on the Malaysian education scene. Additionally, the length of P4C in these studies was limited to short periods, with no follow-up studies. Moreover, the studies only showed one or two facets of P4C, i.e., its contribution to the development of cognitive skills or English language. It is the authors' opinion

that 'Doing philosophy' with Malaysian children should have more far-reaching implications and benefits, such as character development and behavioural change. Thus, research in the Malaysian context is needed to strengthen the argument for introducing P4C into the Malaysian national curriculum.

In spite of the fact that empirical research has been carried out on the implementation of P4C in the Malaysian context, there is still a need to take a step back and re-examine some of the basic foundational aspects of P4C and how it might be beneficial to the Malaysian educational system, given the distinctive characteristics of Malaysia. Thus, the over-arching question to be answered in this paper is: *How would Philosophy for Children be beneficial in the Malaysian Educational context?*

This question comes in the light of the numerous success stories around the world about the implementation of P4C. Since its inception in the early 1970s, many studies have shown how successful and effective P4C is in promoting good thinking practices among children, i.e., critical, creative and caring thinking. The influence of P4C continues to spread throughout the globe. P4C has proven its effectiveness for enriching students' educational experience and cultivating critical, ethical and caring thinking in countries such as Australia, Iran, Mexico, South Korea and the United Kingdom. It would therefore be a great loss if the children of Malaysia were deprived from experiencing such an innovative and revolutionary pedagogy. However, it is important to understand what are the distinctive benefits and challenges faced in the Malaysian education setting, if P4C is to be implemented here. Being able to think philosophically is a substantial advantage for children, but would that be beneficial in the Malaysian context where teachers favour a didactic approach and where teachers and parents are very exam-oriented? To answer these questions, we divide our discussion into three parts; 'The uniqueness of the Malaysian socio-cultural landscape', 'The current educational reform process' and 'Reviving the interest in philosophy in the Malaysian public.'

## DISTINCTIVE MALAYSIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE

Malaysia is a comparatively small but unique country, blessed with a diverse demography. It is home to various ethnic groups, professing different religious beliefs and speaking different languages and dialects. According to the most recent World Bank data, the total population of Malaysia, in the year 2011, was 28.86 million[2].The report from the official Malaysian census in July 2011 showed that 91.8 per cent of the population were Malaysian citizens, while 8.2 per cent were non-citizens. Malaysian citizens consist of four main ethnic groups: *Bumiputera* (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others races (0.7%). The predominant religion is Islam (61.3%), followed by Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%) and others (2.1%). The official language is Malay or *Bahasa Melayu*, but English is also widely spoken and each race has its own language and sub-race dialect.

Historically speaking, Peninsular Malaysia was originally populated by the Malays and indigenous tribes (collectively identified as the *Bumiputeras*[3]). In the eighteenth century, it was the British, under

their colonial rule, who brought the Chinese and Indian immigrants to the country to work in the tin-mining industry and rubber plantations respectively. This, and subsequent economic migration "forms the basis of Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society" (Rosnani Hashim, 2004). Given this unique historical background, Watson (1980, p. 150), describes Malaysia as, "undoubtedly the most complex and difficult country of the region to examine" when it comes to discussion about education and culture.

One of the purposes of this paper is to examine how P4C can help children living in a multicultural society to understand and assimilate the concepts of tolerance and respect towards people of different backgrounds and cultures, by thinking and discussing in a 'community of philosophical inquiry' (COPI). The proponents of P4C strongly believe that, COPI enables children to deal with issues that are sensitive to their social and cultural backgrounds (Brighouse, 2009; de la Garza, 2009; Echeverria, 2009; Hannam, 2009; Turgeon, 2004). Therefore, COPI under the auspices of P4C is an ideal space for intercultural growth, something invaluable for promoting national unity and social integration in a country as diverse as Malaysia.

In the Malaysian educational scene, the Government attempted to address the issue of national unity through several programmes, such as the commencement of the 'Student Integration Plan for Unity'[4] in 1986, the introduction of Civics and Citizenship Education as a subject in the national curriculum and the establishment of Vision Schools[5] in 1995. Despite all these efforts, a perennial social gap and racial polarization among Malaysian students remain unresolved.

In a study conducted by Malakolunthu (2009, p. 130) about 'Vision Schools,' an initiative established by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE), it was observed that there was "no special pedagogical intervention to help students understand the concepts of race, religion and culture, and how they varied from people to people." The absence of such intervention eventually resulted in the failure of the whole Vision School project. Thus, the introduction of COPI would be timely because it would offer Malaysian school children, as described by Turgeon, (2004, p. 105) "a safe haven for diversity that is both encouraged and nurtured and also caringly examined." Through philosophy, we can nurture more respectful, tolerant, cooperative children and in the long run, better citizens, in such a way as to effect social change (Kohan, 2009, p. 119). Put another way, the inquiry process in P4C presents children with the opportunity to share their own views on challenging and controversial issues, in a safe space, enabling them to become aware of the assumptions and stereotypes present in society in order to challenge them. This process will not only contribute towards children's self-development, but it could also be a factor for constructive social change towards a more democratic society.

In summary, schools should become places where children can learn how to make judgments without being judgmental, to differentiate but not to discriminate. School should act as a giant filter where all negative influences passing through its gates are neutralized. Ideally, this is how school should be, but in reality schools seem ill-equipped to counteract the torrent of bigotry, racism and hate that surge from every corner of society, and sometimes from within school. Thus, if the

Malaysian government is serious about national unity and racial integration, then the very first place to start would be the national schools, where the majority of Malaysians are educated.

## EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN MALAYSIA

The education system in Malaysia has undergone several reforms and transformation, since independence in 1957. These changes happened due to several factors, such as a shift in the educational philosophy of the country or changes in the aims and objectives of the system itself. Changes in curriculum have happened mainly as a result of the changing needs of society, e.g., to develop the country in terms of science and technology, yet national unity has always been the overriding priority (Ahmad, 1998, p. 463).

The most recent government initiative to improve the education system is the National Educational Blueprint 2013-2025 (MoE, 2012b). On September 11, 2012, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Abdul Razak, launched the Blueprint, and at last, higher order thinking skills and the 'spirit of inquiry' were given emphasis for Malaysian students, alongside the 3R's.

It became evident to the Malaysian public in 2009 that Malaysian students' achievement was at a discomforting level as Malaysia was ranked 55 out of 74 countries by PISA (the Programme for International Students Assessment). This put the country in the final third cohort well below the international and OECD average for all three areas of Mathematics, Reading and Science (Walker, 2011). Almost 60% of Malaysian 15-year-olds who participated in PISA in 2009 failed to meet the minimum proficiency level in Mathematics, while 44% and 43% failed to meet the minimum proficiency levels for Reading and Science respectively. A discrepancy of 38 points on the PISA scale is equivalent to one year of schooling. A comparison of the scores shows that 15-year-olds in Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Shanghai were performing as though they have had three or more years of schooling than Malaysian 15-year-olds (MoE, 2012b). This poor performance in the PISA rankings was one of the factors that moved the Ministry of Education to draft the new Blueprint, after conducting a rigorous nationwide survey on the strengths and weaknesses of the national education system.

The dismal performance of Malaysian students against this international benchmark has become a matter of concern when discussing Malaysian educational standards. Such concerns have increased when we consider the amount of money spent by the government on education in the annual budget. Based on data produced by the World Bank in 2010, Malaysia's performance lagged behind other countries with a similar or even lower expenditure per student, per annum, for example, Thailand, Armenia and Chile (MoE, 2012b). Furthermore, the average teacher to student ratio in Malaysia is 1:13 which is high compared to other countries. Given these advantageous conditions, it is perplexing to think that Malaysian students performed so poorly on international assessment.

It is interesting to note that the assessment in PISA focuses on questions that test for higher order thinking skills, such as analysing, evaluating and synthesizing. In other words, it does not test for mere application of knowledge. This suggests that the Malaysian educational system is still behind other countries in equipping students with such skills (Rosnani Hashim, 2012a, p. 1). There is therefore a crucial need for educational reform to introduce higher order thinking skills into the Malaysian national curriculum.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education distributed a booklet[6] on thinking skills for all state-school teachers. The purpose of the 13-page booklet was to act as a guide for teachers to understand the basics of thinking skills in the hope that they would implement it into their classroom teaching. The booklet also aimed to help students acquire the basics of thinking skills as outlined in the new Educational Blueprint (MoE, 2012b). Some brief descriptions and examples of how thinking skills can be assimilated into learning were included in the booklet. However, it is not known how helpful the booklet was and whether it was successful in enabling teachers to realise the government's aspiration of teaching students to think critically, creatively and innovatively. Judging by the size and simplicity of the booklet we should not expect too much. The Ministry would do better to make a concerted effort to reform the curriculum, rather than adopting this quick-fix approach.

Rosnani Hashim (2012a, p. 9) suggests a reform in curriculum as well as in pre-service teacher-training programmes, so that trainee-teachers are exposed to the use of thinking skills as well as the techniques of teaching thinking. If they themselves are sufficiently equipped with thinking skills then they will be better placed to introduce these into their future classrooms. Rosnani Hashim further submits that the *Hikmah* philosophy programme is the most suitable thinking skills programme to achieve this objective. Indeed, the existing literature shows that P4C has the edge in helping children to cultivate their critical and creative thinking. Thus, P4C or the *Hikmah* programme should be considered as one of the ways to make the Educational Blueprint a reality.

## REVIVING INTEREST IN PHILOSOPHY

It is interesting yet disturbing to know that there is, at present, no faculty or department of philosophy in existence in any of the Malaysian institutions of higher learning, public or private. A glance through the e-handbook of public university admissions applications for 2013 intake ("*E-Panduan Kemasukan ke IPTA 2013*") issued by the Ministry of Higher Learning[7], shows that there is not a single undergraduate course related to philosophy on offer for prospective students, in all 21 public universities across the country. As one would expect, there are numerous courses relating to science, technology, business and economics, and the like. One might counter that even though there is no specific undergraduate course in philosophy, students will still be exposed to philosophy in their respective disciplines e.g., philosophy of law or philosophy of science. Yet this should not be taken as an excuse to exclude philosophy as discipline in its own right.

The reason for this omission can be attributed to several factors. According to A. Murad Merican, a professor at the Petronas University of Technology (UTP), (Abdul Rahman, 2010), the dearth of philosophy is the result of the country's development policy over the last forty years. As a relatively young nation that attained its independence in 1957, Malaysia needed to develop quickly requiring a strong foundation in economics, science and technology. More emphasis and funds were consequently awarded to these areas of knowledge. Conversely, funds and financial support for the social sciences and humanities were significantly reduced in public universities, with adverse effects on facilities, resources, opportunities and teaching expertise in these fields. Similarly, scholarships to study science, technology, economics or law were greater in number than the humanities and social sciences. As a consequence, university departments of philosophy had to be closed down due to a shortage of students. Students, parents and the general public perceived these fields to be useless, having no practical value, or marketability. After all, studying philosophy, sociology or literature did not appear to contribute anything towards the development of the country. Thus philosophy lost its importance and was abandoned.

Rosnani Hashim (2009c, p. 658) also discusses this 'death' of philosophy in Malaysian society holding that in many predominantly Muslim societies including Malaysia, philosophy has been abandoned because it is seen to challenge Islamic theology. Muslims believe Islam to be a complete way of life, and so they see no place for philosophy in it. Philosophy is not viewed as something within religion but rather something alien to it. However, this was not always the case. Historically, philosophy had a place in the Islamic religion, but this tradition was lost centuries ago. In fact, Muslim philosophy came out of a rich culture of intellectual exchange that involved Syrian Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers and others (Rosnani Hashim, 2009c, p. 656). Muslim scholars engaged in philosophical arguments and discussion in the fields of jurisprudence ('*fiqh*'), the nature of law, analogy ('*qiyas*') and meaning ('*mantiq*'). But it was the arrival of Greek philosophy that challenged traditional Islamic sciences and it was this that was considered a threat according to the traditional scholars. It also gave rise to the emergence of the Mu'tazilites[8], a group of Muslim scholars who relied purely on logic, reasoning and rationality, as well as their rivals, the Ash'arites, who argued that mere reason alone was not enough to establish the basic tenets and beliefs of Islam (Rosnani Hashim, 2009c, p. 658). This division went on for centuries and in the end, resulted in the alienation of philosophy from Islamic fields of knowledge. For this reason, it is a common trait of typical Muslim societies nowadays that too much questioning or inquisitiveness on the part of students is seen as inappropriate. In fact, excessive questioning is discouraged because it is seen as a threat that could cause Muslims to doubt their faith. Whilst there does seem to be ambiguity about the demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable questions in Islamic tradition, this should not be an obstacle for students who ask questions in the sincere pursuit of knowledge.

The need for philosophy in the Malaysian schools has been further discussed by Syed Alwi Shahab (2013, pp. 36–38). Shahab suggests that by modifying the current curriculum to offer philosophy, or by infusing philosophy into the existing curriculum, students will find their studies more meaningful and interesting. He claims it is the task of philosophers to design lessons and materials with workable strategies that can help teachers develop philosophical thinking skills in their students. However, given the actual complexities of the educational system in Malaysia,

Shahab's arguments are rather simplistic.  It is easy to talk about ideals, but we have to face the realities of life. Even if the Ministry of Education were to go so far as to modify the curriculum and include philosophy, such an attempt would be fruitless if teachers are not adequately  prepared in the basics of philosophy, or trained to use philosophy in their teaching.

Currently, the only philosophy that teacher-trainees are exposed to in Malaysian teacher-training colleges is the National Educational Philosophy, which is nothing more than idealistic statements about how education in Malaysia should be. The National Educational Philosophy reads:

> Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further development of the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious based on a firm belief in God. Such an effort is destined to produce Malaysian citizen who are capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the nation at large. (MoE, 1993)

This policy statement is as far as philosophy goes in the Malaysian education system. Teacher-trainees receive no fundamental courses in philosophy such as logic, ethics or epistemology. Without knowing the basics of philosophy, how can teachers convey knowledge in a philosophical way or encourage their students to practise philosophical thinking? Like any other skill, philosophical thinking requires constant practice in order for it to flourish.

Another challenge faced by the re-introduction of philosophy into the school curriculum is resistance from stakeholders.  As stated earlier, philosophy has become something foreign within Malaysian society. Thus, getting support for such a programme from parents, teachers and members of the public will be difficult.  Similarly, finding teachers who are interested to participate in such a programme is also challenging.  Teachers are already overburdened with so many tasks and school work that we cannot simply expect them to undergo more training courses in P4C and then expect them to implement 'philosophical thinking ' into their classrooms; it is not so simple.  Rosnani Hashim (2012a) submits that the most viable way to bring philosophy back into Malaysian classrooms is to train *pre-service* teachers.

From the above discussion it can be seen that bringing philosophy back into the Malaysian school curriculum is a very complicated and overwhelming task.  To date, the Ministry of Education is still unconvinced about the potential of philosophy to develop students' thinking skills.  Hence, the future of philosophy may seem bleak in Malaysia.  Yet as we speak, there are efforts being made by parties who are aware of the gravity of the situation.  Among them is the Centre of Philosophical Inquiry in Education (CPIE) which has expended considerable effort to revive the Malaysian public's interest in philosophy.

It is therefore hoped that using P4C as a means to bring philosophy back into the school curriculum, will cause the Malaysian public to appreciate the significant impact that philosophy has on children's cognitive development and behaviour.  If this happens, then enthusiasm for this lost field of knowledge will slowly begin to increase, and this in the long run could lead to a demand to re-open philosophy departments in local universities so that philosophy can come to life once again in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

There has been much hype about thinking skills in the Malaysian educational scene of late, so the call to introduce a philosophy programme into Malaysian primary schools could come at no better time. Sadly, however, Malaysian schools are still fixated on what Paulo Freire describes as the 'banking' concept of education, where students are seen as 'depositories' and teachers are 'depositors' (Freire, 1996, p. 53). Classroom dialogue is almost non-existent and the learning process is still very much a one-way process.  If education remains this way, then children will have little chance to improve their thinking skills.

This paper therefore examines the viability and suitability of implementing the Philosophy for Children programme within the Malaysian context, and how this can be beneficial for Malaysian school children in their unique, cultural environment. Several arguments have been established in support of the idea of returning philosophy to the Malaysian school curriculum. These arguments are grounded on three main bases; i) the distinctive social atmosphere in Malaysia, ii) the plan for educational reform, and iii) the need to revive interest in philosophy among the Malaysian public and stakeholders.  Of all three grounds, the third seems to be the most difficult, yet it is the most crucial aspect that will determine the success of any philosophy-based programme in the country. Malaysia has lost interest in philosophy, which is evident from the absence of philosophy departments in all of the public universities. Thus, it is essential that enthusiasm for philosophy be rekindled among the public if programmes like P4C are to take root and grow. The public should be made aware that philosophy is not something to be fearful of, but rather something that is innate in all of us, which has been lost along the way when we become adults, due to a lack of exposure and experience in it. This is not to say that children are born as philosophers; but rather that questioning, inquisitiveness and wonder are innate to them.  Young children certainly do ask thought-provoking questions, but they need adults to develop these questions so that their questioning does not diminish. Unfortunately, more often than not, children's sense of wonderment and curiosity are stifled by adults in the name of education, making them uncritical and an easy target for indoctrination. Children's natural curiosity should be continuously nurtured and refined, not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of society as well, into which they will grow up as future 'thinking citizens'.

There are several suggestions to be made pursuant to this discussion:

1. A tailor-made P4C programme based on existing models should be adapted to suit the distinctive characteristics of Malaysian students. Rosnani Hashim's *Hikmah* programme (Rosnani Hashim, 2003, 2009c, 2012a) is a good start, but it needs to be expanded to include students from other multicultural backgrounds i.e., not just Muslims. Such a programme should be tested across the country to see whether it is viable to have a model suited to the different types of school in Malaysia (urban, rural, religious, Chinese and Tamil schools).

2. A module for conducting a community of philosophical inquiry, based on P4C or *Hikmah*, should be devised for teacher-training institutions and included as part of training for pre-service teachers. Skills acquired from this module should then be integrated into the teachers' respective subjects that they teach in school, or alternatively, a stand-alone, P4C-based programme should be implemented.

3. Training should be provided for *in-service* teachers who are interested in using philosophy in their classrooms.

4. A study should be conducted for educational materials that include thinking stories, exercises and modules etc., to be used in appropriate subjects that are already in existence in the National Curriculum e.g., Civics and Citizenship studies, Moral studies, Islamic Education, History and Languages, etc.

It is hoped that this method of teaching and learning will catch on and be accepted by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, since it affords a bridge between 'academic philosophy' and 'doing philosophy' i.e., philosophy for everyday people in everyday life. Philosophy need not be treated as an esoteric subject that is only accessible to the academic elite. In fact, philosophy is the right of everyone, and so, by nurturing philosophy in our children, we give greater depth and meaning to their lives, helping them develop a critical consciousness about the way things are; teaching them not to just accept things at first glance but to question them. Through philosophy, children, as well as adults, can experience multiple ways of seeing and of understanding the world. Philosophy teaches us to evaluate others' claims, to analyse and use our reasoning, rather than just accepting assumptions and prejudices. In contemporary life and especially in Malaysia, philosophy is very relevant and should be re-introduced to society, starting with our school children.

## ENDNOTES

1. A Malay word of Arabic origin  which literally means 'wisdom'

2. http://data.worldbank.org/country/malaysia

3. Literally translated as 'the son of the soil'

4. This programme was intended to create greater and more meaningful integration among students of different ethnic backgrounds through positive relationships and understanding, by having students become aware of and appreciative of others' cultural and religious belief and values through special outdoor projects like camping, sports, excursions etc. (MoE, 2007)

5. In 1995, the government introduced a new redesigned model of school called the "Vision Schools" by which the schools of three major media of instructions (Malay, Mandarin and Tamil) are located on the same compound, share the same facilities and organise certain shared programmes and events. By virtue of the proximity and open environment thus created, it was believed that the Vision School would help to foster racial integration, harmony, and unity among the children of the different ethnic groups by creating opportunities for them to mingle, interact, and play with each other (Malakolunthu, 2009, p. 124)

6. *Buku Panduan Kemahiran Mena'akul* (Thinking skills Guidebook) (MoE, 2012a)

7. https://online.mohe.gov.my/upu/emas/index_epanduan.php

8. The ethical theory of the Mu'tazilites is properly called 'rationalism' because it held the values of human and divine actions are knowable in principle by natural human reason (Hourani, 1976, p. 59).

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