# TEACHING MORAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS USING REAL-LIFE DILEMMAS

By

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to contribute to contemporary debates about alternative ways of teaching Moral Education (ME) in Malaysia by including the voice of students. ME in the Malaysian setting is both complex and compulsory. This study explores alternatives to the current somewhat dated approach. It seeks to discover what young adolescents describe as moral dilemmas, how they approach them and what they find useful in resolving these moral problems.

The research is founded on a modified version of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), extended to suit the multicultural, multiethnic Malaysian setting, and here called the Zone of Collaborative Development (ZCD). This study uses qualitative research methodology consisting of a modified framework of participatory action research (PAR) as the methodological framework. Data was gathered for textual analysis through a modified form of participant observation, focus group transcripts, interviews, and student journals.

The research trials a process of resolving real-life moral dilemmas in the ME classroom. It critically analyses the types of real-life moral dilemmas that a selected group of secondary students face. It also indicates the moral choices they make and the moral orientations they use. Participants in this study were 22 16-17 year old adolescents from three different types of secondary schools in a Form Four ME classroom in Malaysia. They were from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but within a non-Muslim community of students. ME in Malaysia (MEM) is designed to cater for this group while Muslim students study Islamic Studies.

Findings show that students were concerned about moral issues and values not covered in the current ME curriculum. The moral dilemmas that they identified were relational and context dependent. Multiple factors contributed to the problems they described. These factors included national legislation, Malaysian culture, ethnicity, and religion as well as the effects of history, in particular the Japanese occupation. Students named autonomy, self and mutual respect, trust, freedom, and tolerance as main conflicting themes in their real-life moral

dilemmas. They found their peers helpful in providing support, advice, and direction. Students also appear to find the process trialled in the research interesting, interactive/collaborative, meaningful, and reflective.

The analysis also shows that the respondents' moral choices were influenced by parents, culture, religion, utilitarianism, collaboration, and friendship, within a strong care-based approach. However, moral pluralism was also evident in the findings in cases where participants made decisions based on care and justice interchangeably. The study suggests that including students' voices in MEM in this way might better engage students' interest, whilst at the same time contributing to inter-cultural tolerance and understanding.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Vishalache Balakrishnan*

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ME:        Moral Education

MEM:      Moral Education in Malaysia

PAR:       Participatory action research

TESL:      Teaching of English as a Second Language

MOE:      Ministry of Education

NUTP:     National Union of Teaching Profession

SPM:      *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*

ZPD:       Zone of Proximal Development

ZCD:       Zone of Collaborative Development

Re-LiMDD:  Real-life moral dilemma discussion

CDC:       Curriculum Development Centre

UNESCO:  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

NIER:      National Institute of Educational Research

NPSC:     New Primary Schools Curriculum

ICSS:      Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools

MJI:       Moral Judgment Interview

WA:       Working agreement

RM:       *Ringgit* Malaysia

Nvc:       Non verbal communication

efvr:       evidence from video recording

TLC:       Tender love and care

# TRANSLATIONS

*Air muka*:               Dignity

*Akhlak*:               Positive moral values

*Allah*:               God in Islam

*Bahasa Malaysia/Melayu*:               Malay Language

*Baju kurung*:               Malay national costume for women

*Bertanggungjawab*:               Being responsible

*Bertolak-ansur*:               Give and take

*Bhuma Devi*:               Mother earth

*Bunga raya*:               Hibiscus

*Cheongsam*:               Chinese traditional attire for women

*Cinta monyet*:               Monkey love (similar to puppy love)

*Dharma*:               Righteousness earned by performing religious and social duties

*Guru Kulam*:               Traditional Hindu schools

*Guru*:               Teacher

*Iyer:*               Hindu Brahmin priest

*Karma*:               Future lives

*Kaum*:               Race

*Kavadi:*               Offerings carried by Hindu devotees during Thaipusam (festival for Lord Muruga)

*Kebodohan:*               Stupidity

*Kekwah*:               Chrysanthemum

*Kepekaan*:               Tactfulness

| | |
|---|---|
| *Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan*: | Belief in God |
| *Khutbah*: | Sermons in the mosque |
| *Madrasah*: | Malay informal schools based in small mosque |
| *Main mata*: | Showing eyes |
| *Masjid*: | Mosque |
| *Masyarakat majmuk*: | Pluralistic society |
| *Maya*: | Material world |
| *Mokhsha*: | Liberation |
| *Moralitas*: | Manner, character, proper behaviour |
| *Orang Asli*: | Aborigines |
| *Orkid*: | Orchid |
| *Pandaram*: | Hindu local priest |
| *Parathma*: | God in Tamil |
| *Pembinaan modal insan*: | Developing human capital |
| *Pergaulan bebas*: | Mixing around freely without boundary/ restrictions |
| *Rakan sebaya*: | Peer |
| *Rakan*: | Friend |
| *Rukun Negara*: | National Ideology |
| *Rumah panjang*: | Long house |
| *Sari*: | Indian traditional attire for women |
| *Se-fu*: | Teacher |
| *Sejarah*: | History |
| *Seri pagi*: | Morning glory |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*: | Malaysian centralised exam equivalent to O levels |
| *Sogit*: | Native court |
| *Swarnabhumi*: | Land of gold |
| *Syariah* courts: | Muslim courts |
| *Syariah* law: | Islamic law |
| *Tanggungjawab*: | Responsibility |
| *Tao*: | Way/path |
| *Tata-rakyat*: | Civics |
| *Tegur*: | Reprimand |
| *Toleransi*: | Tolerance |
| *Tuai:* | Head of the long house |
| *Tuak*: | Fermented/liquor drink |
| *Tuhan*: | God |
| *Tutup sebelah mata*: | Close an eye |
| *Ugama*: | Islamic Studies |
| *Ustaz*: | Male Muslim religious teacher |
| *Ustazah*: | Female Muslim religious teacher |
| *Waheguru*: | God in Sikhism |
| *Yang di-Pertua Negeri*: | Governor of the State |
| *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*: | King |

**CHAPTER ONE**

**The journey begins…**

## 1.1    Introduction

The purpose of my thesis is to explore new ways of teaching Moral Education (ME) in Malaysia. So far, the cognitive development approach introduced by Kohlberg (1984), the value clarification introduced by Raths, Harmin and Simon (1966), and character education introduced by Lickona (1991) have been implemented in the Malaysian ME syllabus. However, the problem is that students study ME as any other content related subject and are unable to see the relevance of ME in real-life situations. There is a gap between what is in the syllabus and how the students approach real-life moral dilemmas. So far, in Malaysia, students' perceptions have not been taken into account when formulating or revising the ME syllabus. This study aims to focus on students' voices through participatory action research (PAR), that is, to involve students of ME in active communication (Habermas, 1987) and discussion to resolve the real-life dilemmas that they face in their daily lives.

As I begin this journey of researching a pedagogical issue in ME, I start my reflection from the age of one and a half when my family moved to live in a church compound in Batu Gajah, Perak, Malaysia. About eight families lived in this church compound, as well as the priest who was managing the clergy work. Growing up in an environment filled with priest, nuns, and brothers of the Catholic mission, I developed a passion for looking into the hearts of people from a very young age. My family was the only Hindu-Buddhist family living in that area. My parents were open-minded and my siblings and I were actively involved in church activities such as social visits to hospital and helping the needy. Then I went to an all-girls missionary school. At that time ME was not yet in the Malaysian education system but the nuns and teachers in school taught ethics and catechism. In those early days I became very interested in morality, ethics, and the development of human personality.

As I attended a college of education to be a teacher of English, my passion for humanistic subjects grew. My English classes in school were always connected with stories of virtues. I strongly believe that teaching involves more than transfer of knowledge. It is always about the relationships between individuals in a school. I always reflected on my lessons and made sure that they made sense and were meaningful to my students. Vygotsky (1978) whose theory will be used later (see Chapter Four) believed that our life experiences affect and influence our development. My upbringing in a Christian environment, coming from a family of two faiths (Hinduism and Buddhism), and living in a pluralistic country influenced me and, ultimately, this research. This study is not only focussed on the education system of the country I love and take pride in, but it is also a self-mission that creates a sense of beginning for me to be able to conduct research on matters close to my heart. According to Wink and Putney's rendition of Vygotsky (2002), "Our use of language determines our learning; and our learning determines our use of language. None of this takes place in a vacuum". (p. 60)

The above quote provides deep insight into my experience as an English teacher in my earlier days. When I taught English language in the early 1990s, I used to reflect if my teaching was reaching the hearts of my students or whether it was just at a superficial level where students mastered the four basic skills in language and became competent in using the language. My head said, "That's sufficient", but my heart was yearning to take a step further to reach out to the hearts of the students. This was one of the main factors why I left Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) after doing three academic and professional courses in that field (my basic teacher education, my specialised teacher education, and my first degree) and embarked on ME which was introduced into the Malaysian education system in the late 1980s. I did my minor in ME during my entire undergraduate course and then fully embarked on Social Science, majoring in ME. Ever since then, there has been no turning back because ME in Malaysia (MEM) is dynamic and always changing. There is no completion period to say that we have the most ideal syllabus and that teaching ME has achieved its aim.

It would be helpful to understand morality and the cultural context of morality in the Malaysian setting to ground the rationale of my thesis.

## 1.2    What is morality?

In my opinion, morality is a complex concept. Though it is one of my most frequently used terms in the past decade, it can mean different things to different people. Morality is a commonly used word in most cultures. Puka (1976) indicated that:

> If we do not know what morality is we cannot teach it. In crucial ways we do not know what morality is. Yet we must teach it because it is of prime importance and must be learned. Moreover, teaching must not be brainwashing; it must be moral. (p. 47)

So, in order to understand ME, the term "moral" needs to be understood. Morality can be viewed from different perspectives and I shall start with the simple definition of the word itself. Morality from a dictionary definition (from Latin *moralitas* "manner, character, proper behaviour") refers to the concept of human action which pertains to matters of right and wrong – also referred to as "good and evil". It can be used to mean the generally accepted code of conduct in a society, or within a sub-group of society (Bull, 1969).  It relates to values expressed as: a matter of individual choice; those values to which we ought to aspire; and those values shared within a culture, religious, secular, or philosophical community. This definition is clear when morality is spelt out and agreed upon by others. However, it becomes ambiguous when defined by different ethnic groups, especially in the multicultural Malaysian setting.

Before starting this thesis, I had been using "race" and "ethnicity" interchangeably and it's quite common to hear the word *kaum* (race) being used by individuals and the media in Malaysia. Race is an anthropological classification based on physical appearance, and some authorities believe the term should be eliminated from any scholarly discussion on multiculturalism (Gladding, 2001). I strongly agree with the above because in a multicultural country like Malaysia, the different ethnic groups have blended well into one big community and physical appearance does not reveal the ethnic identity as it used to do prior to Malaysia's independence.

Ethnicity describes peoples who "share a common origin and a unique social and cultural heritage" (Gladding, 2001, p. 45). Almost all Malaysians originated from different parts of Asia. Thus from now on I will consistently use the term ethnicity to address the people of Malaysia.

Morality has been a topic of discussion for a very long time. According to Socrates (Rachels, 1993, p. 1) "We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live" when issues of morality are discussed. I agree with Socrates' assertion that morality is not a small matter. In fact, moral philosophy is the attempt to achieve a systematic understanding of the nature of morality and what it requires of us. In Socrates' words it's "how we ought to live". Living in a multicultural country, how we ought to live can be very complicated because of the diversity of culture that is vast and unique. I agree with Rachels (1993, p. 13) who stated that:

> Morality is, at the very least, the effort to guide one's conduct by reason - that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing - while giving equal weight to the interest of each individual who will be affected by one's conduct.

It is important that in a country like Malaysia, morality is shared as a common goal to ensure harmony and integrity.

Terms such as morality and ethics are often used interchangeably in everyday speech as referring to justified or proper conduct (Alexander, 2005). In Malaysia it is the same, but ethics is usually associated with a certain conduct within a profession; for example, the code of ethics for the teaching profession (Vishalache, 2008b). Morality is a more general term referring to the character of individuals and community. In Malaysia, both these concepts are also influenced by Islam, the official state religion, and many other religions which have been practised by non-Muslim societies for centuries.

Morality, whatever else may be said about it, is about things over which we have control that lead to "bettering human life" (Swedene, 2005, p. 43). According to Benedict (1934), morality differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits. During my forefathers' time,

morality teaching was confined to the family, the place of worship and the society to which one was affiliated.

The Malay community then lived in their villages, moving only among their own social group. Their children usually attended Islamic classes in "make do" religious schools. Their moral lessons were delivered by the school religious teachers or during *khutbah* (sermons) in their local *masjid* (mosque). The Indian community lived mostly in the estates and the plantations. They usually had a temple where the *pandaram* (local priest) or *iyer* (Brahmin priest) would gather the community and preach about good character. Morality teaching for the Chinese, who mostly occupied the cities, towns, and tin mine areas, was confined to the family, both nuclear and extended. However, after independence from the British in 1957, the government restructured the boundaries between these three major groups and children started meeting other children from other ethnic groups. Clashes of culture and values became more prominent leading to social problems and eventually resulted in the suggestion for a values education syllabus which I will describe in the following chapter.



Figure 1.1: Left shows a *pandaram* teaching Indian students. Top shows a Muslim religious teacher (*ustaz*) teaching Malay students. Right shows a Chinese teacher teaching Chinese students.

In Malaysia, morality is governed by factors such as the state religion and religion embraced by different individuals (absolute morality), law (unless there is a change in the constitution), and norms of the society. Morality here refers to the code of conduct that is accepted by the Malaysian society. A moral person, as defined in the ME programme, is one who abides by the *Rukun Negara* (National Ideology) (see 2.3.1), is virtuous, responsible, and is able to contribute towards the harmony and stability of the country and global community (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Students, 2000, p. iii).

MEM has an eclectic philosophy. Since the difference between ethnic cultures is diverse, the philosophy has to be sensitive towards all ethnic groups and complement the National Philosophy of Education. It is a difficult task and research is conducted continuously to meet the ever-changing requirements in ME. The tradition of the moral philosophy to which the Malaysian education system used to appeal, is a mixture of the liberal or rational tradition, in particular the "formalistic" or "deontological" tradition running from Kant to Rawls.

Kant's version of morality is from the ethical doctrines and is derived from the integral idea that rationality is capable of serving as a base for action (Rawls, 1971). According to Kant, the ultimate aim of education should be the formation of moral character (Dickerson, 2001). The idea of being a rational person is important in Malaysia. In my experience, at times when society or individuals become irrational, mishaps and tragedies take place. One specific example is on May 13, 1969 (Mukherjee, 1983), when the Malay and Chinese societies clashed due to political and emotional disagreement and many innocent lives were lost.

According to Rawls (1971), "man" is the only biological entity capable of reason and of controlling natural impulses in favour of logical processes that enable the consequence of an action to be predicted. The claim that Rawls makes here is that an adequate morality is principled. It makes judgments in terms of universal principles applicable to all of mankind. Principles are different to rules. Conventional morality is grounded on rules, such as "thou shall not" in the Ten Commandments.

As for principles, they are more universal guides to making a moral decision (Kohlberg, 1976). One example that Kohlberg describes clearly is Kant's version of moral laws formulated in two ways. One requires the maxim of respect for human personality which comes down to acting toward the other as an end, not as a means. The second is the maxim of universalisation which states, "Choose only as you would be willing to have everyone choose in your situation". Principles described according to a Kantian perspective state the formal conditions of a moral decision or action. The simple state is putting us into the shoes of others before deciding on an action and its consequences. In other parts of the world, including New Zealand, principled Kantian ethics have been challenged by the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982), and communitarian and ecological ethics (care of "the commons"). In Malaysia too, various philosophies of ethics are being applied according to the situation. It is an ongoing task to provide ideal yet practical solutions for teaching ME in schools with so many diverse cultures.

Many times during my teaching experience in schools and in the university, I reflected on what a morally educated person should or should not be. A few authorities have tried explaining who qualifies as morally educated. The characteristics can be very subjective but here are a few that have relevance in a Malaysian setting.

Wilson (1972) claims that a morally educated person is one who takes other people's interests seriously into account and begins his thinking with an acknowledgement that other people matter. He understands human feelings and knows his own feelings. He knows enough about the facts of a certain situation to understand the consequences of his action, can combine the insights so far obtained into people's rights and feelings, and into fact and consequences so as to make a rule of action as well as see that this rule applies to himself. Finally, a morally educated person has sufficient control over his own impulses to carry out his own rule. These few explanations provide deep insights into how a morally person should act or react at all times.

In Malaysia, one needs to be sensitive towards others, especially in situations where there are clashes of culture and values. Consequences of actions are as

important as how the action was carried out. Understanding the feelings of others provides maturity to react and to apply one's own standards of morality. The following is an example of an incident where lack of sensitivity and insufficient control over individual and group impulses caused moments of danger and tragedy. The incident happened in Malaysia in a suburb where different ethnic groups were living together.

One Sunday, in this suburb, a Malay wedding and an Indian funeral were taking place along the same road. The hearse of the Indian funeral had to pass the Malay house which was decorated with wedding tents. The Malay family refused to allow the hearse to pass their home as it was considered a bad omen and they asked the Indian community concerned to find an alternative route. The Indian community refused as in their culture too, you cannot turn the direction of an on-going hearse. That caused a lot of commotion. Starting with that, many Indian and Malay youths started picking fights on each other which led to injuries and unnecessary killings. The whole series of incidents could have been amicably solved right at the beginning if the first two parties involved were sensitive to each others' needs and understood the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, insufficient control over their emotions started a series of deaths and tragedies. It was a great lesson learnt. Cultural differences should not be swept under the carpet but instead analysed, understood, and respected in order to live together in harmony.

Mackie (1977, p. 106) defines morality thus and it is a useful way to think about morality in a Malaysian setting:

> In the narrow sense, a morality is a system of a particular sort of constraints on conduct - ones whose central task is to protect the interests of persons other than the agent and which present themselves to an agent as checks on his natural inclinations or spontaneous tendencies to react.

But, as in Malaysia, for a mass education system hoping to promote a shared morality verbalisation is inevitable as regards both means and ends. As regards means, this is the attempt to develop certain virtues in students that are acceptable by society as a whole and that will become part of a proactive society. As regards ends, a shared morality requires that citizens have a

common language in which they can talk about matters of morality (Tappan, 1997); about what kind of moral nation they are ultimately going to build; about the kind of behaviour they expect from each other; and about public moral problems. In my 15 years of teaching ME in secondary school, I have observed that secondary school students do not engage in the major conflicts in our society. Rather than engaging in on-going ethical thinking and dialogue between different ethnic groups, the students assume that the problem is someone else's to solve.

## 1.3    Morality in the Malaysian setting

Malaysia constitutes five major ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, and Kadazans. They belong to certain religions and have a certain way of life. The social climate in Malaysia is pluralistic in nature. Other than those five ethnic groups, there are also the *Orang Asli* (aborigines) and other small groups practising their rich, cultured ways of life in Malaysia. In such a setting, it is very important for members of all ethnicities to understand and respect each others' norms though some norms differ from one culture to another (see 2.5.2). Below are pictures of the five main ethnic groups in Malaysia.



Figure 1.2: From Left: A young Malay woman in *baju kurung*, a young Indian woman in *sari,* a young Chinese woman in *cheongsam*, a young Iban woman and a young Kadazan woman in traditional costume.

In Malaysia, morality is governed by certain factors such as religion, law, and the norms of the society. According to Mohamad Suffian (1976), the Constitution of Malaysia states Islam as the religion of the federation but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the federation. The constitution is the supreme law of the Federation. The validity of any law made by Parliament or the Legislature is accepted nationwide irrespective of whom any person is and which ethnic group they belong to. Nobody is above the law.

The norms of Malaysian society formulate one great aspect of what constitutes morality in Malaysia. Being a pluralistic country, the norms of the different ethnic groups formulate vast cultural norms. Certain norms that are practised by some or most cultures have been accepted as moral norms. For example, giving or receiving anything is done using the right hand. It is rude or immoral to give and receive things using the left hand. What started off as a cultural norm in the early Indian culture is now accepted by Malaysian society as a moral norm.

Another example is receiving guests in *rumah panjang* (long house) in Sabah and Sarawak. It has been a tradition from their forefathers' time to welcome visitors to their long houses by serving *tuak* (a kind of liquor) to guests. It is also very rude to refuse *tuak* because refusing to drink *tuak* means visitors are not happy with the welcoming session of the *tuai* or the head of the *rumah panjang*. However, in Islamic law, it is forbidden for any Muslim person to consume intoxicating drinks. In the early years both the long house occupants and their Muslim visitors blamed each other for not understanding the other person's cultural and religious obligations.

Now through exposure, awareness, and deliberate discussions, both parties have kind of reached some agreement. Through "real-life" experiences and through verbalising the differences, "moral" harmony has been negotiated. The *tuai* or heads of the long houses still welcome visitors but instead of *tuak*, they present juice or tea. The Muslim visitors on their part accept the drink. Thus, both parties have become satisfied with the act of tolerance. It is accepted in the Sabah and Sarawak culture that it is immoral to serve Muslim visitors with

*tuak*. It is also accepted by the Muslim visitors that it is immoral not to accept the juice during the welcome ceremony. In many other cases too, cultural norms have been accepted as part of morality in the Malaysian setting.



Figure 1.3: *Tuai* serving juice to receive his visitors in the *rumah panjang*.

Being a democratic country with vast differences in culture and religion, it is essential that members of society in Malaysia live in harmony. Individuals have to be responsible for their own ethnicity and also live within the macro society. Coming from a family of mixed-parentage, I had plenty of learning to do where cultural norms were concerned. When I go to my father's relatives who are Indians, they expect my siblings and I to eat with our fingers, talk Tamil or Malayalam language, and acknowledge the elders in the family with a soft and polite voice. When I visit my mother's relatives who are Chinese, they expect us to eat with chopsticks, know how to greet every elderly relative with the right term, and speak to elders with great respect. Though most of the cultural practices vary, values like respecting and being polite to elders are common norms which I have internalised.

A fully participatory democratic society relies upon the ability of its members to be responsible moral citizens (Vishalache, 2005). To be responsible and moral citizens, students need to be exposed to the different ways of life that exist in Malaysia. They need to differentiate between what is a norm, what are shared norms, and what is shared morality within the Malaysian setting. Fundamentally, moral behaviour is how people behave within the limits, rules, and conventions of the society in which they live (Day & Tappan, 1996). Being in a mixed-parentage family has provided me with ample opportunities to accept different cultures and behave within the social norms. At times, certain habits or behaviour contradict each other but moral maturity and cultural tolerance comes into play.

## 1.4    Introduction to Moral Education in Malaysia

ME in Malaysia is a core subject in the secondary education system. The focus of the subject is on cultivating, appreciating, and practising the "noble virtues" of Malaysian society (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools, 2000, p. v). It is hoped that the subject will deliver students who are knowledgeable, have noble personalities, and who are polite and willing to contribute productively towards their society and their country.

ME in Malaysia is defined as a subject that is compulsory for all non-Muslim students studying in government and private schools. While non-Muslim students study ME, Muslim students are taught Islamic Studies. Students study ME from Standard One to Form Five following which they sit a formal examination conducted by the Examination Board, Ministry of Education (MOE). I and many other academics like me in the field of ME have, for more than a decade, been critical of formal assessment for ME arguing that morality cannot be assessed just by grading cognitive development; it also involves emotional development and transformation in the action of the students within their own capacity of moral growth. However, while it is a government policy, construed in an act of parliament, that teachers and the Examination Board are required to assess ME, vigorous debate by educators has had an effect; now multiple methods are used to assess students in the ME exams that are not testing just cognitive ability. Formal and informal strategies are used to assess

the subject. Formal strategies include written examinations, project work, assignments, and report writing. Informal assessments include observation, anecdotal reporting, and conferencing with students and parents. In pre-schools, ME is combined with Socio-Emotional Education and taught to all pre-school students. Subjects are taught in isolation or integrated into other core subjects like Mathematics and language.

ME emphasises the spiritual, familial, environmental, social, and humanitarian aspects in the total development of the individual. It is in accordance with the Malaysian Educational National Philosophy which states:

> Education in Malaysia is an effort towards developing the individual's potential as a whole and combined to deliver individuals who are balanced and harmonious, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically, based on belief and obeying God. This is a continuous effort to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable, dynamic, virtuous, responsible and capable of achieving self-fulfilment as well as providing their service towards the harmony and peace of the family, community and country.
>
> (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Students; 2000, p. IV, my translation).

Having introduced a Malaysian perspective of how morality and ME is understood, it is useful to understand what ME aims to achieve. ME is a subject in the form of a programme that educates students to become individuals who are good mannered and responsible citizens of Malaysia. The moral programme stresses the holistic development of the individual and is concerned with development of moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991).

ME focusses on the effort to instil spiritual and moral strength through experiential and daily virtues of Malaysian society that are found in religion, traditions, and cultural rites. Thus, students can build a way of life that enables them to be moral individuals. This also enables them to be socially and morally responsible in any decision or action taken. They can be rational in their thinking and make a difference to their feelings and actions because of the process they have undergone.

The ME curriculum in Malaysia enables students to:

1. understand and internalise values which are needed to be virtuous;

2. realise and accept the importance of harmony between man and environment and strive to sustain it;

3. enhance understanding and cooperation by sustaining a peaceful and harmonious life in a democratic Malaysia;

4. develop mature thinking based on moral and spiritual values and use them when making moral decisions and solving problems;

5. develop initiative to act morally, based on justice and altruism in line with the noble values of the Malaysia community.

(MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Students; 2000, p. 3, my translation).

A variety of methodologies are used to teach ME in Malaysian secondary schools. They include small group and class discussions, singing, story-telling, debate, role play, drama, problem-based learning, and resolving moral dilemmas. It is important to understand that ME and Values Education are used interchangeably in Malaysia. In Chapter Two I present explanations of the connection between principles, values, and morals in the Malaysian setting. This lays the ground to understand the value system that has been practised in Malaysia.

## 1.5    Background and rationale

ME is important globally. It is particularly important in Malaysia because of the particular nature of Malaysian society where many conflicting voices exist, therefore communication and developing a moral language where different ethnic groups may have different codes so long as the practices they espouse do not lead to cultural disharmony is important. ME was introduced in Malaysia not just to create moral students but also to enable students to develop and flourish in a multicultural, multiethnic environment. The students are instilled

with awareness about their differences but taught to live in a "unity within diversity" context.

### 1.5.1 ME is important globally

ME in Malaysia has always been of great interest to many different parties, including myself as a teacher, educator, and researcher. But this phenomenon is not confined to Malaysia; in many parts of the world, moral/values education is the on-going topic of debate in education today. Some groups, on both the political right and left, are deeply suspicious about any kind of values teaching in schools. But beneath the battles is a steadily growing conviction that moral or values education is part of the whole education process in schools. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is currently adapted and taught in ME establishes international standards of human rights moral imperatives (see 2.4.3).

### 1.5.2 ME is particularly important in Malaysia

In Malaysia, ME was instituted after certain incidents and a change of climate in the country (see Chapter Two). It is very important for a multicultural country like Malaysia to have ME as a core subject, not because the society is not moral but because there are many differences and conflicts to face and overcome in order to live in harmony with each other. Conflicting cultures, body gestures, words and phrases which contradict each other in different cultures might lead to prejudice and develop to vengeance and revenge. All these need to be considered and planned for. We are a nation of unique identity with a diversified ethnic mix. It took our forefathers more than 50 years to build what Malaysia is today. With the advancement of science, technology, and globalisation, Malaysians need to live harmoniously with their differences if they are to continue building a well-reputed, moralised society in the micro as well as macro aspect.

### 1.5.3 Review of Malaysian ME programmes

It is the practice in the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) in Malaysia to revise the syllabus after a period of time (usually after more than 10 years) or

when complaints are received from authorities like teachers and the public (CDC of Malaysia Report, 1988). I was involved in the revision process from 1998 to 2000 representing the teaching group, and argued that students should also be called upon to give their views and suggestions. But this never materialised and students' views were hardly considered.

Even though ME is established in the Malaysian education syllabus, many complaints are aired by various parties through the media. The National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) has often argued through the media that ME should be integrated into other subjects and ME per se abolished. Parents have complained to schools about the heavy workload of ME and that their children do not benefit from the subject. ME lessons are compulsory, even at tertiary level and the workload varies from (two hours to three hours per week). They are assessed through tests, examinations, projects and assignments.

In the Malaysian ME syllabus, content and values are delivered without considering the possibility of discussing contradictory issues and conflicts. This could be seen as another weakness. Several times I have had students raise a certain moral issue like cleanliness of the river. While one group of students may get emotionally upset because in their culture, the river is sacred and should not be littered, other students do not care about such issues. Solutions on how to deal with such contradictory views and opinions have not been spelt out in the ME syllabus and students' feelings and opinions have hardly been considered. This provides fruitful ground for this area of my proposed research.

According to Alexander (2005), one cannot engage with views different to one's own without understanding one's own orientation, and one cannot respect the other without respecting oneself. I agree with Alexander who adds that sacred and transcendent ideals, like the conditions of moral discourse and human agency, are to be lived in the here and now, and not merely studied in the abstract. There is a need to ensure that social justice and human rights are protected. What was right during our forefathers' time might not be applicable in today's society. For example, smacking (to any extent) to discipline a child was accepted previously, but today the child has a right to report to authorities if they are being abused by any individual (Child Act, 2001).

MEM has as its grass roots foundation the *Rukun negara* and aspects of religion. Religions and ways of life such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity create the stage for absolute morality in children growing up in Malaysia. Malaysians who affiliate with a particular religion actually follow "a way of life" associated with it. Therefore I think it is important that measures be taken to ensure that future policies of ME take into consideration the perception of students, their religiosity and place ME within a broader paradigm to ensure the effectiveness of the subject in the unique Malaysian setting.

This research seeks empowerment for the students. In other words, the research aims to enable students to take charge of their own lives and conflicts within the parameters of the country's social justice system, religious laws, constitution, and social norms. According to Boostrom (1998):

> People are subjects, not objects. They are flesh-and-blood, emotion and aspiration, not microchips. We want to teach in a way that clearly acknowledges the worth not only of the curriculum but also of the student. (p.179-180)

This approach is a challenge in the Malaysian setting because education, especially ME, is supposed to prepare students for real world challenges. In former times these were the challenges of local situations but are now inclusive of globalisation too. Dewey (1934, p.85) saw moral education as central to the school's mission: "The child's moral character must develop in a natural, just, and social atmosphere. The school should provide this environment for its part in the child's moral development".

### 1.5.4  Dissatisfaction with the way ME is taught and assessed

During the ME class, students often claim that too much emphasis is given to cognitive development associated with assignments and exams and very little importance is given to social and emotional development (Vishalache, 2004). This research, therefore, also looks into the notion of whether ME can prioritise social and emotional development without sacrificing cognitive development. Through their active, open dialogue and later reflection, students have ample opportunity to consider the three junctures of moral domain: moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action.

Another timely concern addressed by this study is the assessment and implementation processes of ME. Students experience 11 years of ME syllabus without reflecting whether any of the content learnt makes a difference to their lives and to their personal development. During my teaching period at the University of Malaya, where I provide courses like Curriculum in ME, Religion and Morality, and Assessment in ME for teacher trainees, my students agree that ME is important and should be in the education system. But when asked about what they learnt in ME in their eleven years of schooling, all they remember is jotting notes and memorising.

However, there were one or two responses which gave me hope for ME in Malaysia. One Iban student from Sarawak related that ME in her school was always held during meal-time. The school subsidised the meal and during the ME lesson, teachers and students prepared the meal together. The ME teacher instilled values like dividing the chores and saying grace during meal-time which was ME class time. The ME teacher also asked about the students' well-being and if they had any problems in school or at home. Here, I realise, even though the student was in an informal setting, the lessons learnt were far more meaningful than ME lessons learnt in a formal setting. Another reason for my research is to challenge the accepted theories of moral education being applied to date, and to broaden the vision of teaching ME in a pluralistic setting like Malaysia.

### 1.5.5 Existing definitive ways of teaching ME are not appropriate to the Malaysian setting

Though the techniques used vary, many students find ME a waste of time. In a study by Vishalache (2002), a class of 24 Form Four ME students of both genders expressed how tiresome it is to study ME where teachers emphasise memorising values, and the difficulty of applying whatever is learnt on paper in the ME classroom to real-life. The quotes below are taken from my research conducted in 2002:

> *All we need to know is understand the values and answer according to the need of the exam paper. ME is done. Why waste time with projects and homework? (*16 year-old girl)

*Moral is boring. We study the same values over and over again and then sit for this exam. But in real-life, it is more complicated.* (17 year-old boy)

In most ME contexts, teachers might use basic moral principles like justice, equity, and, following the Kantian view of morality, the utilitarian concept of bringing the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people; not so practical in present day education (Nor Hayati, Nasriah & Asmah, 1994). Why? Because society is changing, technology is increasing, and people are becoming more global. Students are beginning to gain values through various resources such as the internet. They have become more vocal and question matters of cultural and traditional norms that were accepted for generations.

## 1.5.6  Student-centered approaches

Students' own motives must be honoured (Noddings, 1997) and engagement (an end-in-view) cannot be coerced through threats or bought by bribes (Boostrom, 1998). Students are part of ME and they take responsibility for what is in store for them. They need to be given the opportunity to develop within the capability.

According to Lickona (1991), based on researches conducted in the United States, schools cannot be ethical bystanders at times when society is in deep moral trouble. Rather, schools must help to contribute to the character development of the young and, thus, to the moral health of the nation. In my experience as a discipline teacher, whenever there are moral issues like school fights, theft and vandalism in school, schools and ME teachers are bombarded with questions like "What's happening to all the values you are teaching?"; "When is your effort in the ME class going to be seen?". But the fingers that point to these ME teachers forget that they too are part of the moral team and students have acquired their value systems, or at least a part of them, from the homes that they come from.

Gilligan (1982) claims that when problems are heard directly from those involved, the process of resolution is different than those that are presented in hypothetical dilemmas. Students need to be given the opportunity to develop within their capability. Providing them with skills to resolve moral dilemmas is

useful but providing them with the actual dilemmas might not be as effective. As one Form Five student preparing to sit for SPM said during a ME class, "I just answer according to the teacher's head and I score my grades but in real-life it's completely different. I will have to consider the consequences of my action because I am responsible for what I do".

Huebner and Garrod (1991) argue that Western theories of moral reasoning do not adequately explain moral development in other cultures. In Hindu culture, for example, the various philosophies of reincarnation and karma are quite different from the Western tradition. In Huebner and Garrod's view, students need to understand the various cultures of their friends before being able to tolerate or reason why a certain application of moral principle is mutually accepted in their own or in their friends' cultures. Different cultures have different moral codes. What is thought right within one ethnic group may not be acceptable at all to members of another group, and vice versa. This is another specific area of my research: finding a place where students are able to voice their moral conflicts and challenge the accepted belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth in the Malaysian context. This provides an opportunity to gauge the match or mismatch of syllabus and students' real-life moral dilemmas.

Theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that for children to develop into competent adults, they must gradually engage in the actions that represent full participation in adult practices. Taking responsibility for others is a form of preparation for adult roles. Engaging these students in open proactive discussions (Habermas, 1987) would be an alternative to the orthodox teacher-student, teaching-learning environment and strategies of teaching ME.

### 1.5.7  Adolescence is a crucial time for forming moral identity

During secondary schooling, students become very vulnerable. Students are in the midst of great dilemmas as to where they stand and what their next action should be. Erikson (1968) provided an overall theory of human psychology development that gave an emphasis on the balance between the inward

development of an individual and the outward social and cultural stimuli. In MEM, it can lead to moral conflicts if students are unable to interplay between the two tensions. They are at a crossroad where they either continue with their system of values which is in accordance with the values of society, or they take another road because their current beliefs contradict and conflict with the Malaysian society's value system. It is not an easy choice because the students' culture and family background may not be conducive to permitting changes in their value system. This research also looks into the processes of students caught in such dilemmas and how they disentangle themselves to be accepted as part of a moral society.

About 10 years ago I had a very disturbing experience with one 16 year-old boy in my ME class. He used to disturb other students in class because he worked during the night and treated school as a playground and a place to release tension. He used Cantonese "swear words" (which is considered an immoral act in the Malaysian context) towards his friends and even me, the teacher. Only later I found out from his friends that his parents used such words in their daily conversation. So my task in the class became extra difficult because norms that this student accepted at home contradicted the social norms in school. Many other adolescents are also going through the crucial stage of forming moral identities.

In Malaysia, rules and norms tend to stand alone on some matters but overlap on other matters. According to Alexander (2005), rules tend to be straightforward and firm. They are motivated by means of external rewards and punishments. Norms, on the other hand, are more often layered, multifaceted, and subjective in terms of interpretation. Thus, in ME, students need to have the ability to differentiate between the two and to be able to find and live within a balance. It is essential that students of ME are able to think through the rationale of both and are able to balance their identity within the two. What a challenge for the student!

These factors indicate that there is great need for a study of ME using self-created dilemmas with 16-17 year-old adolescents; my study meets that need.

**1.6    Research questions**

This research seeks to explore the real-life dilemmas that students face in different secondary schools in Malaysia. The process of resolving the real-life dilemmas in a collaborative setting followed by self and group reflection is also part of the research. In analysing the process of real-life dilemma discussions, the moral choices and moral orientations of the students involved are also derived. Finally, the effects of using real-life dilemmas in ME classrooms are analysed.

**What is the research question?**

1.    What are the moral conflicts faced by a representative sample of 16-17 year-old adolescents in a ME class in Malaysia?

2.    To what extent do peers help these adolescents solve their moral conflicts?

3.    How do these adolescents describe moral choices they make in their daily lives?

4.    What are the moral orientations used by these adolescents to solve such moral conflicts?

5.    What are the implications of using real-life dilemmas in the ME classroom?

**1.7    A guide to reading the thesis**

In my thesis, there are eleven chapters that together tell the story of a journey. Chapter One sets the mood for the moral journey, generally describing the rationale for the research.

Chapter Two focusses on the Malaysian experience and context: the view of ME; the contextual complexities of the educational system generally; and complexities within ME specifically.

Chapter Three covers ME issues in Malaysia. Pedagogical issues such as cognitive moral development, values clarification, and character education are discussed. An alternative, comprehensive-eclectic approach using real-life moral dilemmas – while retaining regard for the current Malaysian education realities – is suggested for ME teaching. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is briefly introduced as a starting point for developing a theoretical framework for the research.

Chapter Four opens with Vygotsky's notion of ZPD - the theoretical framework for the thesis. ZPD is discussed in relation to ME. Weaknesses in ZPD in the Malaysian context are discussed and suggestions provided for modifying ZPD as an extended theory, Zone of Collaborative Development (ZCD), through participatory action research (PAR).

Chapter Five discusses PAR, the methodology used in my research. The rationale for using PAR and the careful planning of ethics in my research is included here. The research process is explained in detail including the methodology within the PAR, sequences for the PAR, recruitment of participants, and challenges in conducting PAR in a Malaysian ME classroom. The chapter ends with explanations on how the PAR data is analysed.

Chapter Six describes the profile and setting for the research. It provides an overview of the demographic, social, ethnic, and faith characteristics of the participants. It also discusses the nature of the participation and the role of the participants in my research. The working agreement (WA) is unique because it established the mutual trust and rapport between participants and researcher.

Chapter Seven focusses on the findings of my research. It discloses surprises for the researcher and identifies matters that affected moral conflicts that the participants brought up. Based on the real-life dilemmas that participants wrote about in their journals, the conflicting themes of autonomy, respect, trust, freedom, and tolerance are discussed.

Chapter Eight focusses on the process of ZCD in real-life moral dilemma discussion (Re-LiMDD) and how peers help in resolving the conflicting themes identified in Chapter Seven. It also covers ways in which peers help each other

in times of crisis and learn to decide for themselves. The process of resolving the conflicts is helped by peer suggestions, reprimand, motivation, and support.

Chapter Nine focusses on the moral choices and moral orientations that participants discussed and reflected upon. The moral choices arise during the real-life dilemma analysis and are based on participants' experience and knowledge. The chapter ends with the types of moral orientations participants use in resolving their real-life moral dilemmas. Care-based orientations and moral pluralism are two moral orientations suggested based on the findings.

Chapter Ten focusses on the implications of using Re-LiMDD in ME classrooms in secondary schools in Malaysia. Discussion is based on how the PAR process encouraged my participants to take moral action on their own to sum up the complete process of ZCD.

Finally Chapter Eleven presents important findings based on the research. New values suggested by my participants and their use of non-verbal communication are discussed. Moral pluralism is also further clarified. The suggestion for a process for Re-LiMDD which may enable the Malaysian ME Syllabus to insert such an alternative pedagogy for ME lessons is included. The nature and limitations of the study and ideas for further research are presented. Implications of using real-life dilemmas in the classroom, in the ME Syllabus, and in education policy in Malaysia are also discussed.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**Taking a truly Malaysian view of ME**

## 2.1    Introduction

A truly Malaysian view of ME is necessary to understand the purpose of humanistic subjects like ME in secondary schools. MEM is a challenge for students who need to conform to several different moral codes. There is seldom one right answer where moral dilemmas in a multicultural nation are concerned. I begin with some history of education in Malaysia, then describe the history/development/establishment of MEM and explain other aspects of complexities within ME.

## 2.2    Education system: An overview of the big picture

Education is viewed as a life-long process in Malaysia. It is expected to develop national integration (Mukherjee, 1983) in formal and informal education and aims to create a harmonious environment between the different ethnic groups living in Malaysia.

In the early years when Malaya was ruled by the British Empire, there were four distinct types of school; this helped to reinforce the distinctions between racial, social, linguistic, and cultural groups in the country (Mukherjee, 1983). The Malay vernacular school system was made up of Islamic religious schools and was located in rural areas where Malays lived. Malays were given only six years of elementary education. Three objectives were defined for Malay education: (1) to familiarise Malay boys with sufficient simple arithmetic to handle small business transactions, (2) to develop a better sense of hygiene, and (3) to train the sons of the Malay aristocracy in English to serve the colonial masters (Abdullah, 2007).

Tamil schools were mainly located in rubber plantations where the Indian plantation workers lived. The Indian students were also given six years of

elementary education, and were expected to provide labour for the rubber plantations and railways. This was a deliberate policy to deny them both economic and geographic mobility (Barone & Bajunid, 2001).

Chinese schools were located in towns and urban areas where primary and secondary schools were built. The Chinese were allowed to establish their own schools and use curricula, teachers, and textbooks from China, as the British colonial government did not consider it their obligation to provide education to the transient population.

There was no mention of ME in any of the vernacular syllabus. Malay children were taught to memorise Qur'an verses and facts about good and bad virtues according to Islamic philosophy in the *madrasah* schools. From the 19th century onward, Christian missionaries came to Malaya and set up some English medium schools. They implemented ethics and catechism lessons informally in their syllabus. The ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak were on their own too, schooling their children in their own informal, traditional way.

After several decades and incidents like World War Two, the Chinese and Indians in Malaya realised that they were here to stay and demanded that education be provided by the government. The different ethnic community leaders got together and demanded that the colonial government accept responsibility for educating their children and their future generations. These demands resulted in the British establishing an education committee which produced a report. The Report of the Education Committee (1956) (Federation of Malaya, 1956) states:

> …a national system of education acceptable to the people of the federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention of making Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country… (p.1)

According to the Education Ordinance of 1957 (Federation of Malaya, 1957) the educational policy was to set up a system of education to fulfil the needs of the

nation and to initiate cultural, social, and political development. However, although an important exception to the common content principle is Islamic Studies which was made a compulsory and examinable subject for Muslim students, ME was not mentioned. Schools were provided with the flexibility to teach other religions or ethics according to their own arrangements which were not part of the state-approved curriculum provisions.

Since the post-independence period, education in Malaysia evolved through four different eras The 1956 Razak Report and Education Ordinance 1957 reflect a consolidation period. The implications of the Razak Report and Education Ordinance were the formation of a single system of national education, making *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language) the main medium of instruction, and the beginning of a Malaysia-orientated curriculum and conception of a single system of evaluation for all.

The next stage was the updating period during which the Rahman Talib Report was produced and Education Act 1961 adopted. Emphasis was on the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), basic education with a strong spiritual education. Other objectives included the opportunity to continue education from nine years to eleven years of education and facilitation of education management procedures to improve the overall quality of education. ME was not yet in existence but Islamic Studies was implemented as a core subject in all primary and secondary schools for Muslim students.

The third stage saw further implementation of the 1979 Cabinet Report. It was as a result of this report that ME was introduced in 1983 as a new subject for all non-Muslim students. The concern for the deterioration of moral values and increasing social problems among teenagers (Rosnani, 2007) was one of the rationales for formulating such a subject. It was also necessary to fill a vacuum of moral instruction for non-Muslim pupils.

The fourth change came about after the Education Bill 1995 which aimed to provide a world-class quality national education system which would support the achieving of the nation's aspirations. The National Education Philosophy became the base for the national education policy. During this period, the first

ME syllabus was evaluated and revised according to national and global changes (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools, 2000).

In 2006, under the Ninth Malaysian Plan, the Major Plan for Education Development 2006-2010 was introduced. The main purposes of the plan were to tidy up the implementation of existing educational programmes and to stabilise the process of developing human capital comprehensively and continuously so that the output achieved was capable of filling the needs of the local and international workforce as well as to stabilise Malaysia's position in the global arena. The one strategy linked directly to ME was to develop human capital. Emphasis was given to the need to develop the knowledge and skills to appreciate noble values; to continue to inculcate the spirit to empower knowledge, skills and competency; inculcate values, moral and positive attitude and build self discipline among students (Economic Planning Unit, 2006). Since this complements the philosophy of ME in Malaysia, it is essential that the development of human capital starts from the students themselves.

Policy changes over the years have made the teaching of ME in secondary schools even more important. I will go on to describe briefly certain historical events that brought about the implementation of ME in Malaysia.

## 2.3    Historical events that led to ME in Malaysia

After independence, several events took place which made the Malaysian government look seriously into the Education Ordinance of 1957. One incident is the riots of May 13, 1969 (see 1.2). The riots started after the announcement of the results of the general election in which the opposition party won more parliamentary seats compared to the earlier general election. During victory celebrations by the two different ethnic political groups, use of language not appropriate to the other culture, non-verbal gestures, and strong emotions and frustrations resulted in Malays and Chinese attacking each other. Many lives were lost and all ethnic groups became suspicious of each other. Many days of curfew were declared and the ruler declared a state of emergency. Following this, the political, spiritual, and ethnic community leaders became cautious

about bridging national integrity and harmony among the different ethnic groups.

Various programmes, advertisements through media, and other government campaigns have been used from time to time to remind the nation that in order to develop and live together, the different ethnic groups must make their diversity their strength. The introduction of *Rukun Negara* (National Ideology) was one of the strategies and stands as a source of values in both the primary and revised secondary ME Syllabus for schools in Malaysia.

### 2.3.1 Rukun Negara

In 1970, the *Rukun Negara* was introduced nation wide. The *Rukun Negara* was officially proclaimed by the fourth *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (King) on August 31, 1970, Malaysia's 23rd anniversary of Independence Day. The *Rukun Negara* was formulated with the intention to provide guidance for nation-building efforts. The pledge of the *Rukun Negara* is as follows:

> Our nation, Malaysia, is dedicated to: achieving a greater unity for all her people; maintaining a democratic way of life; creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably distributed; ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural tradition, and building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology.

We, the people of Malaysia, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends, guided by these principles:

Belief in God

Loyalty to King and Country

Upholding the Constitution

Sovereignty of the Law, and

Good Behaviour and Morality. (My translation)

Though good behaviour and morality are placed as the fifth principle, every principle is built upon values of nation-building. Belief in God reinforces the

need for spiritual strength. It has been carefully spelt out in the Malaysian Federal Constitution that Islam is the official religion in Malaysia but other religions can be peacefully practised by the different ethnic groups (Mohamad Suffian, 1976). For decades, people from different religious groups have been practising their own faiths and respecting and tolerating the practice of other faiths. The picture below shows two different festivals celebrated in Malaysia and indicates how the situation is tolerated and accepted as practices of religious and ethnic groups by the others who are not involved.



Figure 2.1: Left: A Hindu devotee carrying a *kavadi* during the auspicious *Thaipusam* (a festival devoted to Lord Muruga) in Batu Caves Hindu temple. Right: Buddhist devotees and monks going on a procession on *Wesak* Day (the day in commemoration of Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism).

Loyalty to the King and Country refers to the need for the nation to respect and protect the King. Malaysia practises a system of parliamentary democracy and is ruled as a Constitutional Monarchy with His Majesty the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* as the Head of the country. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia clearly

divides the power and authority of the Federation between the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive. The separation of power takes place both at federal and state levels, and is in keeping with the concept of federalism, which forms the basis of the Malaysian government administration. The Constitution needs to be accepted, respected and followed.

Principle four which is sovereignty of the law relates to the fact that every Malaysian must respect, accept, and follow the law. The final principle which is good behaviour and morality acknowledges all the principles above with the major focus on acceptable character and social acceptance within the Malaysian context. The essence of ME is to provide students with a sense of responsibility towards developing their own good character and personality in a manner which is acceptable within Malaysian culture and globally, and to be able to uphold the five principles of *Rukun Negara* wherever they are.

In the ME syllabus, all five principles are spelt out to ensure that students are able to understand and appreciate the *Rukun Negara* and make it part of their daily lives. Before ME, Civics Education (CE) was implemented to overcome the social problems in Malaysia.

### 2.3.2  Civics Education

In 1961, "civics (*tata-rakyat*) was a compulsory subject for all pupils from standard four to form three" (Rosnani, 2007, p. 87). The aim of the subject was to initiate the spirit of cooperation and harmonious relations in recognition of Malaysia as a pluralistic society. "Civics is defined as the relationship between the individual and her/his society whereas citizenship is defined as the relationship between the individual and her/his nation" (Rosnani, 2007, p. 87). The CE syllabus 1976 incorporated the *Rukun Negara*, bore the themes of *Rukun Negara,* and aimed to achieve the goals of the *Rukun Negara.* According to the syllabus, the objectives of CE include: (a) Foster the spirit of patriotism, (b) inculcate an attitude of tolerance toward other ethnic groups, (c) develop independence and self-reliance, (d) develop a positive attitude towards change, and (e) inculcate good character.

The focus of the subject was intended to establish a nation with values such as mutual respect, cleanliness, punctuality, independence, industry and respect for all kinds of honest work, sportsmanship, and appropriate use of leisure time, respect and obedience to rules and the law (Rosnani, 2007). Reports showed that being a non-examinable subject in an exam-orientated system, CE died a natural death until 2004 when it was revived with an extra component of community service. It is being taught as a non-examinable subject now to all the students and renamed as Civics and Citizenship Education (Vishalache, 2005).

## 2.4    Historical background of ME in Malaysia

One important event in the history of ME was the Cabinet Committee of Education requesting that the MOE set up machinery for the development of a ME curriculum. The requirement stated was that the curriculum should cover the 11 years of schooling period and be focussed on non-Muslim students because at that time, Muslim students were already having Islamic Studies in their school curriculum. The new ME syllabus was required to be examinable since the Islamic Studies syllabus was an examinable subject (MOE, Malaysia, 1979, para. 127.1). All activities in regards to ME were based on the 1979 report of the Cabinet Committee on Education to review the implementation of education policy. In this report, it was stated that:

> To build a disciplined, cultured and united society, it is recommended that while Muslim students study Islamic Religious Knowledge, and this includes other pupils who choose to follow this subject, non-Muslim pupils should be taught Moral and Ethics education. All pupils who study this subject, Moral and Ethics Education, must take it in the examination. In both these subjects, respect for the individual and the freedom to embrace any religion in a multi-religious society must be cultivated. (para 127.1, p. 49)

Decisions resulting from this report included the formation of several working committees. The MOE directed the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) to formulate a ME syllabus to be tabled at Parliament. During the Central Curriculum Committee meeting of October, 1976, it was decided that a ME Committee be established (Nor Hayati, Nasriah & Asmah, 1994). The role of the committee was to establish a suitable syllabus for the non-Muslim students

in Malaysia. It was to involve as many people as possible from all walks of life and the different faiths to provide feedback, suggestions, and ideas for the new subject.

Practically all members of society were involved except for the most important, the students. The students who are the end receivers were never involved in any part of the process. This is one of the greatest flaws in the top-down system where it is assumed that the so-called professionals know best what the students need in ME.

### 2.4.1  ME Committee

The ME Committee, which was a large committee, was headed by an eight-member syllabus committee whose task was to "produce a draft syllabus for ME" (Mukherjee, 1983, p. 126). The other members of the committee were given the responsibility of carrying out studies on the existing school curriculum regarding the teaching of moral values in curriculum and co-curriculum. Other than that, religious bodies and non-governmental bodies were given the opportunity to express the niche areas and values that needed to be taught in the newly established ME.

Representatives of various religious and voluntary groups, heads of schools, colleges of education, universities and other divisions of the MOE were appointed as members of the ME Committee (Mukherjee, 1983).  The findings and input at the different working levels were submitted to the main committee from time to time for further discussion and amendment.

Around the same period of time, Malaysia became involved in a series of workshops on ME in Asian countries. The project was sponsored by UNESCO and organised by the National Institute of Educational Research (NIER) in Tokyo, Japan (NIER Research Bulletin, 1981). One of the objectives of the workshops was the attempt to identify "universal moral values" that participating countries could adopt and use as part of the core content of their moral education programmes (Mukherjee, 1983, p. 127). The idea of having 16 core values in the premier moral education syllabus was one outcome of the above project.

## 2.4.2 First ME syllabus

The New Primary Schools Curriculum (NPSC) was implemented in 1983. For the first time, ME was officially introduced as a core subject in Year One in all primary schools throughout Malaysia. This procedure was carried out in stages on a year to year basis and was completed in 1988. In 1989, with the implementation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (ICSS), ME was extended to all secondary schools also on a year to year basis.

I was one of the pioneer teachers given the mandate to teach ME in secondary schools. The course given was very simple, directed to teacher trainees and inadequate to prepare teachers to teach the subject in depth. By 1993, all primary and secondary schools had ME as a core subject in their school curriculum.

At the end of 1993, the first cohort of Form Five students sat the centralised examination for ME. The examination paper and method of assessment has been revised several times. The issue of ME being assessed as a public examination has often been critiqued (Gayatri, 2008) but being a government policy, it is clearly stated that all those who take ME must sit an examination. Since ME is a core subject in the secondary education syllabus, every non-Muslim student must take the subject and sit the examination. Because morality itself is so subjective, assessing it as objectively as possible is a continual challenge. After several revisions, the assessment has been divided into two sections (Vishalache, 2004). One tests the knowledge and the other is project work where students' commitment to the affective and the physical domains of morality is assessed.

The first ME syllabus emphasised the spiritual, humanitarian, and social aspects in the total development of the individual. It stressed the instillation, inculcation, and internalisation of the noble values found in Malaysian society based on various religions, traditions, and cultures of the different communities and which were also consistent with universal values. Values taught were values that were accepted by all ethnic groups.

The general objective of ME in the primary and secondary school is the development of an individual who recognises, accepts and internalises his or her role as a responsible decision maker pertaining to moral values in a democratic society such that his or her actions are governed by moral principles in all situations. The first curriculum for ME consisted of values to be observed and upheld by the individual and society. These values were considered essential to ensure the healthy interaction between the individual and his or her family, peers, society, and the institutions of which he or she was a member (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools, 1988). In the first syllabus, the total number of values taught in secondary school was 16. These included:

1. Compassion
2. Self-reliance
3. Humility
4. Respect
5. Love
6. Justice
7. Freedom
8. Courage
9. Physical cleanliness and mental health
10. Honesty
11. Diligence
12. Cooperation
13. Moderation
14. Gratitude
15. Rationality
16. Public Spiritedness                    (My translation)

The values to be included can be seen in the spiral or widening relationship with those closest to the student namely his or her family, peers, and school. These relationships which are initially confined to the individual, his or her society, and its institutions, are then expanded to include national and international levels.

One of the main weaknesses of the first ME syllabus was repetition of content. The other was that the value clarification and cognitive development strategies failed to recognise the sociocultural richness that students brought into the ME class. Teachers teaching ME also talk of reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable. The teacher often thinks his/her task is to fill the students with the contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality (Freire, 1993). With all these challenges and complaints the CDC decided to revise the ME syllabus.

### 2.4.3 Revised ME syllabus

In the first MOE, ME Syllabus (1988), the National Philosophy of Education, the Federal Constitution, and the *Rukun Negara* provided basic guiding principles for a faith-based ME. In the revised MOE, ME Syllabus (2000), the Malaysian Vision 2020 has been included. Vision 2020 is an ideology developed by the previous Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and includes nine challenges that the country foresees towards national and global building (Mahathir, 1991). They are: to form a nation that stands as one; to produce a Malaysian community that has freedom, strength, and is full of self confidence; to develop a mature, democratic community; to form a community that has high morale, ethics, and religious strength; to cultivate a community that is mature and tolerant; to form a progressive science community; to cultivate a community rich in values and loving culture; to ensure the formation of a community with a fair economy; and to cultivate a prosperous community. The essence of Vision 2020 is included in the content of the revised ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools.

According to the Malaysian Country Report presented in the 'Values Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy and Sustainable Development for the Asia-Pacific Region' in Bangkok, 1998, ME in Malaysia is based on certain basic assumptions:

1. Values are not passively received, but are actively built up by the cognitive learner. In other words, values are socially constructed over time.

2. Values are not a collection of isolated rules and facts. Instead, they can be perceived as a network of ideas, where each idea is connected to several others. To be useful, values should be taught as a unified body of knowledge.

3. God has a major influence on people's lives and, thus, there are absolute values based on the teaching of religion, and relative values created by human minds.

4. There are some parallels regarding what is perceived as good by the different religions. Since Islam is the official religion in Malaysia, non-Islamic values could also be viewed in the light of their relationships with Islamic values.

5. School is not neutral, but a value-loaded enterprise. Teachers need to play the role of moral educators, instructors, facilitators, and exemplars.

6. God creates human beings for specific purposes, and values education should stress an integrated view of man, in as much as human character involves the interplay of four basic elements: spirituality; knowledge; attitudes and values; and action.

(Learning to live together in peace and harmony, 1998, p. 119-120)

Instead of following a specific aspect of psychology, several approaches like cognitive developmental, values clarification, and character education are combined to form the epistemology of the syllabus. I consider it an integrated ME syllabus which complements the National Educational Philosophy of Malaysia.

One major difference between the first moral syllabus and the revised version is the wider scope of the latter. With globalisation and associated concerns about it, wider and more critical issues were covered in UNESCO meetings and workshops and as a result the ME syllabus was also revised to suit the current needs. The ME curriculum aims to develop responsible individuals with high moral standards, who are able to contribute towards peace and harmony of the

country and the global community (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary School, 2000).

The focus of teaching and learning is based on several main principles assumed to deliver holistic individuals physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.  The principles include:

     i.    Being responsible towards self, family, and others

     ii.    Being steadfast towards one's religion

     iii.    Being caring towards the environment

     iv.    Sustaining peaceful and harmonious life

     v.    Being patriotic

     vi.    Respecting human rights and

     vii.    Practicing principles of democracy in life.

     (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary School, 2000, p. 1: my translation)

The principles clearly guide the content of the revised syllabus. The content of the syllabus is divided into several learning areas which give priority to aspects of spirituality, humanity, society, and culture. Learning fields given prior importance are:

     (1)   Values related to Self Development

     (2)   Values related to Family

     (3)   Values related to Environment

     (4)   Values related to Patriotism

     (5)   Values related to Human Rights

     (6)   Values related to Democracy

(7)    Values related to Peace and Harmony

The values included in self-development are belief in God, trustworthiness, self-esteem, responsibility, humility, tolerance, self-reliance, diligence, love, justice, rationality, and moderation.

The values related to family are love for the family, respect and loyalty towards family members, preservation of family traditions, and responsibility towards family.

The values relating to the environment are love and care for the environment, harmony between man and environment, sustainability of environment, and sensitivity towards environmental issues.

The values included in the learning area related to patriotism are love for nation, loyalty to the King and nation, and willingness to die or sacrifice for the nation.

Values to be learnt in human rights are protection of child's rights, respect for women's rights, protection of labour rights, respect rights of disabled persons, and protection of consumer rights.

The values included under democracy are respect rules and regulations, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, participation in nation building, and open-mindedness.

As for learning area seven which focusses on peace and harmony, the values are living together in harmony, mutual help and cooperation, and mutual respect among nations.

In the revised syllabus, though the learning areas and the values are the same for each form, the scope and emphasis for each is different because moral issues which are discussed become more complex, according to the needs and maturity of the students. Furthermore, emphasis is also provided for students to acquire various skills like generic skills, critical and creative thinking skills, conflict resolution skills, and social skills. The hope is that these skills will

prepare students to face the world of information technology and communication with confidence and also to have social and moral responsibility. The skills are also expected to help develop resistance in students facing pressure and challenges in their student life. All planning is based on the assumption that these are what the students need. The one issue of listening to the students' voices, and planning according to their level of needs, was never addressed in either the previous or the present syllabus.

By looking into the various types of students' real-life dilemmas and how these link with the syllabus, my thesis may bring challenges to the present syllabus. However, the complexities within ME are great and worth discussing.

## 2.5    Other aspects of complexities within ME

ME in Malaysia has always been a challenge ever since it was implemented as a formal subject in school. The complexities involved in ME are considerable and need to be clarified and understood in my thesis.

### 2.5.1  Government and constitutional setting

The Constitution of Malaysia is the supreme law of the land. It provides the legal framework for the laws, legislations, courts, and other administrative aspects of the law. It also defines the government and monarch, and their powers, as well as the rights of the citizens. The laws of Malaysia are mainly based on the common law legal system. This was a direct result of the British colonisation of Malaya, Sarawak, and North Borneo. The dual system of law is provided in Article 121(1A) of the Constitution of Malaysia (Mohamed Suffian, 1976). Article 3 also provides that Islamic law is a state law matter with the exception of the Federal Territories of Malaysia. Islamic law refers to the *shariah/syariah* law.

The intention of having law is to ensure good behaviour action within a community. Green (1964) based the distinction between behaviours and actions on the variation between conforming to a law and obeying a rule or principle of action:

> To learn to obey a rule is not simply to acquire a disposition to act in a certain way, but a disposition to act because it is the correct way. … a rule of action is intended always to discriminate between right and wrong, correct and incorrect performance. … Action is always never merely habitual. …action, as opposed to behaviour, is always principled, always norm-regarding. (pp. 509-516)

Students in ME classes are exposed to the different laws and know that to be a civil citizen, they have to abide by the law at all times. Other than law, cultural complexities also affect ME in Malaysia.

### 2.5.2  Cultural Complexities

Cultural complexities have always been part and parcel of the Malaysian society. Malaysian students are taught to give and take and be tolerant with students from other cultures. In schools, students are taught to be aware of the needs and differences of their friends. Types of food consumed, clothing, and speech norms vary from culture to culture.  What is a norm for one culture can be taboo or sacred for another. Cultural complexities are becoming less obvious in the younger generation who have more interests in common with each other and less concern for deep-rooted traditional culture. However, to avoid ethnic clashes, biases and prejudices among themselves, it is important that every student is nurtured and taught to respect and understand each other's cultures.

### 2.5.3  Ethnicity

Malaysia constitutes several ethnic groups (see 1.3). The Malays were the earliest known settlers of the country with indigenous people deep in the jungles and on the mountainsides. Following the Malays were the Indians and Chinese who first came as traders and later came in greater numbers as migrant workers. All three ethnic groups have been living together in Peninsular Malaysia for more than half a decade now.

As for Sabah and Sarawak, the two states had their own indigenous peoples. Today the five main ethnic groups in Malaysia are the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, and the Kadazandusuns (see Figure 1.2). There are more than

80 other smaller ethnic groups, some of which have retained their ethnic identity and the rest have been lost in time. The compilation of the different ethnic groups makes up the essentially unique, pluralistic society in Malaysia which needs to be understood by all living within such a paradigm.

### 2.5.4  *Masyarakat majmuk (Pluralistic society)*

Malaysia is well known as a pluralistic society which consists of different ethnic groups, cultures, and religions. Political and community leaders have always used the term *masyarakat majmuk* (pluralistic society) in their formal and informal speeches and emphasised how we should live together as one big family. However, my understanding is that pluralism is understood differently by different people in Malaysia.

According to Hill (1991, p. 75), at the level of policy there are "three options of looking at pluralism". One is to accept the fact and get on with the business of learning to live with it; the second is to deplore the fact and seek ways to restore the hegemony of our way of life; and the third is to promote the idea with enthusiasm under some rubric such as "cultural diversity". Ideally, in the Malaysian scenario Hill's third level should be applied but different people accept it differently.

A *masyarakat majmuk* like Malaysia consists of a society with different mind sets. The "pluralised mind accepts the fact that a burden of proof rests on every believer" (Hill, 1991, p. 76). According to Hill, a pluralised mind acknowledges at least four dimensions of the fact of pluralism. Firstly, pluralism is recognised as ubiquitous, meaning a world-wide phenomenon that affects all aspects of our thought and practice. Secondly, pluralism is irreversible, meaning it is not a temporary condition preceding a new intellectual monopoly. Thirdly, pluralism is morally ambiguous, meaning it has good and bad potentials. Finally, Hill states that pluralism is politically unstable because even though the human consciousness is pluralised, there is no guarantee that the society will accept the logical implication that no one has a moral right to impose a particular world view on another person by means of political coercion. Thus the diversity within

a pluralistic society like Malaysia needs in-depth understanding especially in teachings of humanity subjects like ME.

## 2.5.5  Cultural norms

Culture is commonly used to denote complex networks of cognitive and behavioural dispositions (Geertz, 1973). All "societies may inculcate ideologies in children, but not all ideologies inculcation are equally suitable to every sort of society" (Alexander, 2005, p.3). Culture has been a lifeline in Malaysia because differences between ethnic groups are always attributed to cultural differences and have been widely accepted without specifically understanding the actual meaning. Some people even incorrectly use cultural difference for ethnic difference. Culture does not have just one real meaning, it has several real meanings. Culture is used to mean "a set of social customs and tastes that individuals have in common with each other because of their association, now or formerly, with a particular type of society" (Dummett, 1986, p. 11).

Culture is a psychological construct; that is, a socially learned set of constructs encompassing "affective styles and values regarding personal control, communication, familial patterns, and societal norms" (Betancount & Lopez, 1993, p. 631). Gladding (2001) defined culture as "the shared values, beliefs, expectations, worldviews, symbols, and appropriate behaviours of a group that provide its members with norms, plans, and rules for social living" (p. 340).

Basically cultural norms change as value systems change. One clear example is the loss or lessening of extended family. About 20 or 30 years back in Malaysia, practically every couple who got married, irrespective of which ethnic group they belonged to, lived with their paternal or maternal parents and raised a family within an extended family. But nowadays, due to demographic factors like occupation and social factors like being independent, more and more young couples are living on their own and bringing up their own families. Another example is how the *Orang Asli* (aborigines) have slowly changed their lifestyle to the modernisation that is taking place in Malaysia. They used to live in the tree tops, hunting animals and passing down skills for living from generation to generation. Now most of the *Orang Asli* tribes are in settlements

and they are adopting modernisation slowly though their rich culture continues to be respected by other ethnic groups.



Figure 2.2: Father of an *Orang Asli* boy on a hunting trip and skills on hunting is learnt by observing the father.

Cultural norms are an important factor to take into account when ME is taught or being implemented. Brown and Brown (1997) see cultural development as involving values, beliefs, attitudes, and customs which form the basis of identity and cohesion in social groups. If students' cultures are not understood and ME continues to be taught the way it is done now, there will always be a mismatch between what is implemented and what the students expect. And now with regards multiculturalism, the cultural influences stretch beyond the nation and have become global.

### 2.5.6  Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism has evolved from the initial consideration of culture - defined as ethnicity and race in different contexts and parts of the world. The concept of multiculturalism involves inclusion of different cultures and diverse groups.  In

Malaysia, there is a drive to create a uniquely Malaysian culture which incorporates the traits of the indigenous culture and other multicultural facets. Parekh (2000) states:

> Multiculturalism is … a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives. Unlike differences that spring from individual choices, culturally derived differences carry a measure of authority (pp. 2-3).

In Malaysia, though the people come from different ethnic groups, they are supposed to share one common culture - a Malaysian culture. However, this process is one of evolution and does not happen overnight. Furthermore culture, according to Parekh (2000), cannot be seen as a "tightly knit and tensionless whole informed and held together by a single overarching principle or spirit" (p.73). Ramsay (1998), on the other hand, is not particularly concerned with such uniqueness. For her:

> Multiculturalism at its best supports the development of identity, solidarity, critical thinking and libratory action. … We must use it as a tool to educate ourselves and our children to work to make deep and lasting changes in the basic structures of our society. (p. 33)

Thus it is a very complex situation where, on the one hand there is the drive to see culture as one, and on the other hand there is the need to cultivate and preserve the different, existing cultures in the country. In a pluralist society, students would have to be prepared for life to respect beliefs and values of other students that differ from their own, and be able to see "diversity as a source of enrichment" and be open to different ways of perceiving the world (Halstead, 1996, p. 118). No matter what the ends are, the means to achieve such aims are equally important. For example, if ME aims to educate students about human rights, it's equally important to understand the different faith that students embrace and what human rights means to their own faith. This brings me to the issue of spirituality which is part of the Malaysian society.

## 2.6     The spiritual path of ME in Malaysia

Spirituality is an important aspect of the moral life of Malaysians, irrespective of which ethnic group they belong to. According to Hull (1996), spirituality may be the essence of religion; on the other hand, religion may become unspiritual and there may be non-religious spirituality. Spirituality is a concern of every adolescent who undergoes ME in secondary school. They may or may not be spiritual but their moral decisions are usually affected by their spiritual background.

In my research (Vishalache, 2006) about the moral decision-making of people from different religions, all participants (sample size: three children from different ethnic groups and faith in the children category, and three adults from different ethnicities and faith) that I interviewed responded that they do look up to God or a higher spiritual power when they are in dilemmas, pain or hurt. The younger group (6-13 years) were a hundred percent confident that God or the higher power helped them in their daily lives but the older group (20-45 years) were less confident in that matter. However, they all had a belief in that superior power.

In Malaysia, religion is part of life for practically every citizen in the country irrespective of which faith they believe in or were born into or converted to later in their lives either through choice or marriage. Spirituality is thus an important part of morality in Malaysia. Within this paradigm is the diversity of understanding God.

## 2.7     Diversity of understanding of God

*Tuhan* or God is a general term used and understood by practically everyone in Malaysia. It can be seen in the Federal Constitution which upholds the law and stability of the country, in the first principle of the National Ideology which is "*Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan*" or Belief in God, in educational documents, government documents, and the media. However, the word "*Tuhan*" or God has different meaning for different faiths practised in Malaysia.

For the Muslims, God refers to *Allah*. For the Buddhist, it refers to a higher spiritual realm. For the Christians, God is the Trinity which is God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For the Hindus, it is the *Parathma* (One God) who exists in different forms. For the Sikhs, spirituality is to understand and be aware of *Waheguru* (God). For the Taoist, their spiritual guide is based on teachings by Laozi and Zhuangzi. With all these different understandings of *Tuhan* or God, the term itself is vast and complex. Yet the complexity is never a problem in the ME class because when God is mentioned, every student will refer to God according to their own faith and belief. Below are illustrations of places of worship in Malaysia.
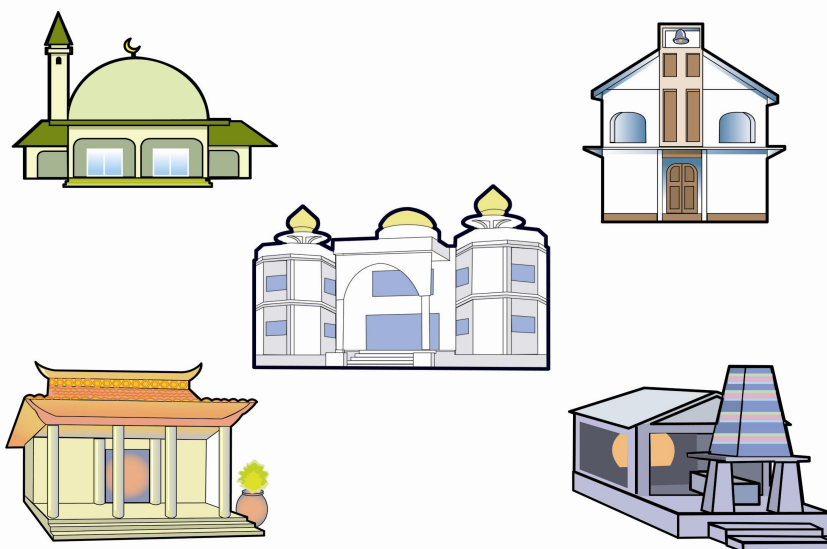


Figure 2.3:  Top left shows a *masjid* where Muslims pray. Top right figure shows a church where Christians worship. Centre figure shows a *gurdhwara* where Sikhs pray. Bottom left figure shows a Taoist temple where Taoists pray, and bottom right figure shows a Hindu temple where Hindu devotees pray.

## 2.8  Religion in Malaysia

Due to the multiethnic composition of Malaysia's population, religion is very influential and it is of great importance to my thesis that major religions in Malaysia are clearly understood to provide a clear picture of the cultural background of students in Malaysian schools. This understanding will, in turn, help provide a clear picture of why students from different faiths describe their moral choices (see Chapter Nine) in their own special ways.

### 2.8.1 Islam

The Muslims in Malaysia make up nearly 58 percent of the gross population of about 26 million people (Malaysian Government Census Figure, 2005). Though the Muslim students do not form part of the ME cohort that is my focus, it is important to understand the practice of Islam in Malaysia. It provides a good insight of how the students study together in peace. Muslims in Malaysia accept Muhammad as their prophet. They strive to attain the best morals and manners. They try to strike a balance by living a good life, while also remaining mindful of their duties to Allah and to others.

Morality and moral education for Muslims are strictly prescribed in the *Qur'an* and *Hadis*. Islamic values like moderation, honesty, and loyalty to God, oneself, society and environment are some of moral values absorbed into the present moral education syllabus in Malaysia.

### 2.8.2 Buddhism

Buddhism in Malaysia is embraced by several ethnic groups, mainly Chinese, Sinhalese, Thai, and Eurasians, making up 22.9 percent of the total population of 26 million people (Malaysian Government Census Figure, 2005). Buddhism is based on the teachings of Buddha. Buddha has been likened to a present-day psychotherapist who helps people to overcome crises in life, to understand the causes of suffering and so cope with it, to be content with their limitations, finitude and morality (World Religions, Universal Peace, Global Ethic, 2005, p. 12). Morality in Buddhism refers to "the avoidance of what is evil; the undertaking of good; the cleansing of one's mind; this is a teaching of the awakened ones" (Dhammapada, v.183). In the Four Noble Truths, Buddha taught insight into the cause of human suffering and with the Eightfold Path he showed a way towards overcoming it. The Eightfold Path comprises the right view, right intentions, right word, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Morality for Buddhists takes on a philosophical perspective and moderation is one value present in the ME syllabus.

## 2.8.3  Taoism

Malaysians who practise Taoism and Confucianism make up 2.6 percent. They are mostly from the Chinese ethnicity. Taoism is a philosophical school of thought based on Tao te Ching. Taoism literally means "path" or "way", for example living in harmony with nature and taking care of human interaction with nature in order to live a harmonious life.

The Chinese community in Malaysia also focusses on filial piety as an important aspect of morality. This was introduced by Confucius. Other important values are respect for family, respect for nature, and respect for the governing body. All these values have been included in the ME syllabus directly or indirectly.

## 2.8.4  Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the earliest religions in Malaysia. Hinduism was prominent in Malaysia very early on and was very important in palaces and among royal families until Islam arrived in the 15th century. Hinduism was brought by the Indian traders who came in the early days to trade in Malaysia. Today about 6.3 percent of Malaysia's population are Hindus and most of them are of Indian origin.  Hindus believe that God is present in the material world in many forms, and they are not compelled to worship one form only (Bowker, 2007). Hindus believe that there are many paths to God and bad karma is caused by immoral acts. Moral acts are acts of *dharma* (righteousness earned by performing religious and social duties) which refers to the value of responsibility and a sense of duty; showing responsibility towards the religion, God, *guru* (teacher), and society. Responsibility is considered as one of the important values in Hinduism and is included in the ME syllabus.

## 2.8.5  Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Malaysia by traders who came to Melaka even before the Portuguese conquest in 1511. Currently Christians form about 11.1 percent of the population in Malaysia. Mostly they are of Chinese, Indian and Eurasian origin. There are also quite a number of ethnic groups in Sabah and

Sarawak who are Christians. The Christians in Malaysia are mainly Roman Catholics or Protestant. They use the New Testament or the Holy Bible in their pursuit of a spiritual life. They believe that they should follow Christ's commands and example in their own daily lives and everyday actions.

Christians in Malaysia place emphasis on love and forgiveness as two of the most important elements in their daily lives. They gather for communal worship on Sundays but also pray together at home as a family or in a group. Some of the Christian values included in the present ME syllabus are love and concern for other people.

*2.8.6  Sikhism*

Though the Sikh community forms a small percentage of the Malaysian population, Sikhism is strong in Malaysia and is recognised as one of the religions practised by the Punjabi community. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak. Looking at the environment of religious conflicts at the time he was in India, Guru Nanak taught religion as a way to unite people and was distressed that the opposite was taking place in India (Khushwant, 2006).

In Sikhism, community is emphasised. Every Sikh temple in Malaysia has a big kitchen and free food is offered to whoever is in need of it. Morality for the Sikhs is about community and working together for spiritual and communal growth. Co-operation is a value essential in Sikhism and is being absorbed into the Malaysian ME syllabus.

## 2.9    Importance of diversity and listening to students' voice

Based on the explanation above, the diversity in Malaysia is vast. Our actions follow social or cultural norms informed by reasons, evidence, attitudes, emotions, customs, and values (Alexander, 2005, p. 6).

With such diversity, the challenge to morally educate secondary school students in Malaysia is indeed something to investigate. I take the view that teachers listen to students in order to acknowledge their vision. A sympathetic

teacher is one who listens to the child's talk in order to discover "what the child is already blindly striving to do" (Dewey 1890/1900, p. 129). Following this, it is important that ME encourages students within their sociocultural domains to discover the needs of the state, their culture, and the changes within a global community. Juggling all the factors that I described above is no simple task for any adolescent striving to be a moral citizen. Coming from many different faiths and sociocultural backgrounds, it is important that students' voices are heard during the implementation of ME. Here the challenge lies in looking into pedagogical aspects of ME as I will demonstrate in my next chapter. Starting with the different approaches which have been used to teach ME in Malaysian secondary schools, I will present my suggestions for an alternative approach which investigates the use of real-life dilemmas. I will end the next chapter by linking ME in the classroom with the altered version of the Vygotskian perspective which informs the approach taken in my research project.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**ME in Malaysia: Pedagogical debates**

**3.0     Introduction**

ME is a core subject in Malaysian secondary schools. The transmission of the subject has been a challenge for the policy makers, teachers, parents, community, and the students. Knowing that the subject consists of more than solely a cognitive component and that there is a need to be sensitive towards the cultural diversity in Malaysia (see 2.6), teaching ME is always a challenge.

**3.1     Challenging debates on pedagogical issues of ME in Malaysia**

Teaching ME in Malaysian schools has always been a "hot topic". Often secondary students grow into young adults filled with "contradictory values and inconsistent beliefs and behaviours" (Kirschenbaum, 1977, p. 8). In Malaysia, it is considered essential that adolescents are exposed to the different norms of a multicultural society so that they are able to behave morally within the society. ME is intended to bridge the gaps between adolescent values and those of the nation.  However, based on issues raised by the media, it now appears that ME needs some restructuring if it is to fulfil the objectives mentioned. (See 1.4)

A student wrote to a local paper, "After studying this subject for five years in secondary school, I can safely say that I have learnt nothing. How can remembering the definitions of moral values make you a moral person?" (Neorewarp, 2007). Students of ME are even punished if they cannot memorise and remember the moral values spelt out in the ME syllabus (See Tho, 2008). Another student expressed in the media that "Adults should stop regarding students as nothing more than innocent vessels to fill with half-truths and propaganda" (Jo, 2007). All these comments require reflection on my part as a researcher and a ME teacher trainer. Apparently, several students are lacking in awareness of ME and ME teachers are also implementing the subject in a

regimental manner. There is crucial need to explore ways and means to bring "life" to ME from the students' perspective.

Investment into researching different approaches that suit the pluralistic nature of Malaysian secondary students has been greatly debated over the years; for example, the shift from survey-based research which generalises every student, to qualitative research such as action research which allows data from the classroom to unfold naturally. This shift conflicts with the mindset of certain academics. In a National Moral Seminar held in 2007, one of the comments made was that any teacher can teach ME without taking into consideration the ethnicity or the background of the students (Syuhada, 2007), suggesting students are seen as generic, which they clearly are not. They are individuals with their own cultural upbringings; they need to collaborate with other students to ensure harmony and integrity takes place naturally and not from being filled up as vessels in the manner mentioned by one of the students above.

Another challenge of ME involves moving away from behaviourism and cognitivism, which assumes that the individual is doing the constructing within the mind, perhaps in relation to others. For example, in the earlier stage of ME in Malaysia, students' ME assessment was solely based on examination results which only indicate the measure of cognitive ability of the moral domain, but now the shift is towards whole-person assessment which includes cognitive, affective, and moral action (Vishalache, 2004). The cognitivist perspective "does not include a theory of culture", and assumes "individual differences to be capability differences" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 11 & 12). With the most recent general election held in Malaysia on 8 March 2008, where the majority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups discussed the importance of shared power, it is appropriate that the cultures of the different ethnic groups is also considered when deciding on pedagogical matters of ME since ME is focussed on the non-Muslim cohort (see 2.4).

In the 1980s, when ME was first implemented, the cognitive moral development approach and values clarification approach were mainly applied because those two methods were popular then. Later, following the revision of the syllabus in 2000, the character education approach advocated by Lickona (1991) was

implemented. Here I would like to argue that each approach had its weaknesses and suggest an eclectic approach to teaching ME in the Malaysian setting.

### 3.1.1 Cognitive Moral Development Approach

When ME was first formally introduced in all schools in Malaysia, models of Kohlberg's moral development procedure were used widely without culturally appropriate adaptations. It has been proposed (Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1932; Turiel, 1983) that cognitive moral development or thought precedes a progression through a sequence of developmental stages. Kohlberg's (1984) model of morality has its theoretical roots in Piaget. To investigate moral development, Piaget and his colleagues observed children at play and later interviewed them about short issues involving moral/immoral acts such as cheating, obedience, responsibility, and punishment (Krebs & Denton, 2005). Based on his findings, Piaget (1932) described the moral stages as: a *pre-moral stage*, where an individual does not have obligations towards rules and regulations; a *heteronymous stage*, where something that is right is seen as the honour to that principle; and an *autonomous stage*, where an individual has the ability to weigh up the aims and the consequences of a certain rule.

The theory of cognitive moral development was developed by Dewey (cited in Kohlberg, 1975). This theory is cognitive-based because it claims that moral education has the basics in sparking students' active thinking, with its "philosophical emphasis on justice and psychological emphasis on reasoning" (Walker, Pitts, Henning, & Matsuba, 1995, p. 371). It is considered as developmental because it considers moral education as a process that flows through the moral stages (Kohlberg, 1975). Dewey identified three stages of moral development which are the *pre-moral or pre-conventional stage*, where an act is motivated by biological and social desires; this leads to the *moral, conventional stage*, where an individual accepts standards or societal norms without much questioning; and finally the *autonomous stage*, where the act of an individual is guided by his or her thoughts and reasoning, whether the aim is good or bad.

In 1955, Kohlberg (1975) took the initiative to explain and reconfirm through longitudinal studies the moral development stages that Dewey and Piaget initiated. Through extensive research, Kohlberg identified and confirmed the categories and different stages of moral reasoning in two studies. First, research was carried out over 20 years amongst boys of 10-16 years of age from the middle and working class of Chicago. They were interviewed again after an interval of three years. Second, longitudinal research was carried out amongst boys of about the same age from urban and rural areas of Turkey. Based on his research, which, as Gilligan (1982) points out, excluded girls, Kohlberg affirmed that moral development theory is universal and cuts across cultures. He said:

> All individuals in all cultures use the same thirty basic moral categories, concepts or principles, and all individuals in all cultures go through the same order or sequence of gross stage development, though they vary in rate and terminal point of development (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 36).

Kohlberg made those claims based on empirical findings that he collected from research carried out among students from different cultural backgrounds. They included subjects from the USA, Taiwan, Turkey and Mexico. From the analyses of responses provided by children, adolescents, and adults to a series of hypothetical moral dilemmas, Kohlberg (1958, 1963) developed his initial five stage moral theory.

| Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development | |
| --- | --- |
| Stage 1 | Morality is defined in terms of avoiding breaking rules that are backed by punishment, "obedience for its own sake," and "avoiding damage to persons and property". |
| Stage 2 | Morality is defined in terms of instrumental exchange, "acting to meet one's own interest and needs and letting others do the same," making deals, and engaging in equal exchanges. |

| Stage 3 | Morality is defined in terms of upholding mutual relationships, fulfilling role expectations, being viewed as a good person, showing concern for others, and caring for others; trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude are important moral values. |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stage 4 | Morality is defined in terms of maintaining the social systems from which one benefits. |
| Stage 5 | Morality is defined in terms of fulfilling the social obligations implicit in social contracts that are "freely agreed upon" and a "rational calculation of overall utility, 'the greatest good for the greatest number. |

Ref: Colby and Kohlberg (1987, pp.18-19)

Table 3.1: Kohlberg's stage theory on cognitive moral development.

Kohlberg created a cognitive-developmental model of morality. He termed the theory cognitive development because he thought morality stems primarily from structures of moral reasoning (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), and developmental because he thought that structures of moral reasoning change in a stage-like fashion as the child "develops" (p. 2). Kohlberg (1975) defined moral development as a process which is expected to change according to moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg (1984), each new cognitive structure transforms and displaces the structure that defines the previous stage, causing stages to develop in an invariant developmental manner. However, Kohlberg's emphasis on reasoning is not enough and does not necessarily foster the other ethical components like sensitivity, judgment, motivation and action (Rest, 1983; 1986). The reason for the gap between moral reasoning and moral action is because the other ethical components are not considered in Kohlberg's theory.

Critics of the Kohlbergian stage model, such as Krebs and Denton (1997), pointed out that it is not possible to predict moral behaviour from a stage of

moral development, because according to Kohlbergian developmental theory, people at different stages of moral development may make the same moral choice when facing conflicts and people at the same stage may make a different choice.

Another version of cognitive development in ME is by Rest (1985) who argues that the theoretical points about the cognitive developmental approach below are important. For Rest, the individual cognitive developmental approach is fourfold:

1.  Development is characterized in terms of a person's progressive understanding of the purpose, function, and nature of social cooperation, instead of in terms of learning more social rules, or being more willing to sacrifice oneself.

2.  The lasting effects of social experience are portrayed in terms of understanding of the rationale for establishing cooperative arrangements, particularly as to how each of the participants in the cooperative system are reciprocating the burdens and benefits of the system.

3.  There are a finite number of basic schemes of co-operation these can be identified, and are essentially like Kohlberg's descriptions of the six stages.

4.  When a person is faced with a particular new social situation and is trying to figure out what would be the moral course of action, the person recalls from long-term memory those general knowledge structures in order to aid in identifying the most important considerations, to prioritize the conflicting claims of various people, and to judge which course of action best fulfils one's ideal of justice. (p. 16)

Whatever the rationale may be in the Kohlbergian and Rest explanations of unfolding the cognitive development approach, there were gaps when applied to Malaysian schools which have been more influenced by Kohlberg. There

was a mismatch due to the fundamental theoretical incompatibility between the individualistic perspective and the collective perspective that characterises the educational dimension (Reed, 1998). Kohlberg's theory does not account for the socially-located moral outlook of non-Western countries such as Malaysia. For example, when deciding whether the person should steal the drug for his wife as provided in *Heinz Dilemma* by Kohlberg (1984), values like stealing is taboo in all religions or faith is in the hands of God are considered, not just in the form of justice as described in Kohlberg's MJI (Moral Judgement Interview) scales. As stated by Walker et al., (1995, p. 383), "Kohlberg's model failed to handle appropriately many individuals' reliance on notions of religion, faith and spirituality in resolving real-life moral conflicts". Students in the ME class in Malaysia come from different religious and cultural backgrounds and this has caused misinterpretations within the teaching-learning process when students were assumed as generic in nature, without considering their religion, ethnicity, gender and other characteristics.

In addition, Kohlberg's theory is focussed on moral thinking, but there is a vast difference between knowing what should be done and actual moral actions, though Kohlberg defended his theory by stating that higher moral thinking will lead to moral actions (Kohlberg, 1984).

Objective questions asked during examinations in the Malaysian system cause a lot of dissatisfaction among ME students because there is more than one way to resolve a moral dilemma due to the different moral frameworks of different ethnic groups. As described in Chapter Two, Malaysia is a pluralistic nation that requires a multi-pronged rather than linear stage model of ME. Research conducted in the 1990s found that adolescents in ME classes, whether they are from urban or rural schools, score similarly for their moral judgement test based on Kohlberg's MJI but in real life, they face completely different problems and make different decisions (Loganathan, 1995).

Criticisms of the moral developmental and moral dilemma approaches include concerns that individuals do not inevitably pass through all of the six stages that Kohlberg outlines (Ling & Stephenson, 1998). In the Malaysian scenario, students of different cultures face conflicts in different environments and

settings. Thus they learn to approach and resolve moral dilemmas there and then. No setting can be measured or compared with another based on stages and scales.

Marsh and Stafford (1988) criticised Kohlberg's approach and claim that hypothetical moral dilemmas created in the classroom oversimplify the real-life dilemmas that students face and that it also requires considerable skill and sensitivity to recognise that there is a moral conflict that needs to be resolved. This again is significant and a continual debate. At times, what is considered normal in one culture conflicts with another. For example, calling adults by first names is common and normal in Western culture but to Malaysians, calling elderly persons by their first names is considered rude and immoral. Conversely, when Western moral conflicts are presented to Malaysian students, they might not accurately identify if there is a conflict.

According to Krebs and Denton (2005), the moral issues in Kohlbergian and real-life dilemmas differ in at least five ways. First, in real-life, students are the ones facing moral conflicts and they need to make a moral decision based on the conflict faced. They share a relationship with the conflicts, have feelings for them, have a history of past interactions with them and expect to interact with them in the future, and expect reactions and repercussions from the behaviour they emit (Krebs, Denton, & Wark, 1997). Second, students who make real-life moral decisions are usually involved in the moral conflicts. The process of students making decisions about what they should do may be quite different from the process of making decisions about what other people should do. Third, most real-life moral dilemmas involve consequences for the parties involved, and the parties have a vested interest in the outcomes (Krebs et al., 1997). Fourth, real-life moral dilemmas often evoke strong emotions, which may affect the students' moral decision-making. Fifth, real-life dilemmas almost always are precipitated by behavioural acts and usually require behavioural decisions (Krebs & Denton, 1999) from the students. Thus, in Malaysia in the early stage of ME implementation, students were discussing moral dilemmas without being part of the situation. They were learning values and how to use such values in their own lives. This is significant because learning values is just knowing the

values whereas learning about values would involve educating students about how to apply them in their daily lives.

During this time, the values clarification approach was also implemented. Shared values are considered part of the Malaysian culture and having a top-down education system entails values being taught in ME to aid students with local and global values as well as to be familiar with the multicultural values accepted within the Malaysian context and based on law, religion, and cultural norms (see 2.5).

### 3.1.2  Values Clarification Approach

According to Shaver and Strong (1976), "Values are our standards and principles for judging worth. They are the criteria by which we judge 'things' (people, objects, ideas, actions and situations) to be good worthwhile, desirable; or, on the other hand, bad, worthless, despicable" (p. 15). By the definition above, values can be subjective and are based on what a certain community understands and judges as good and bad, right and wrong.

Certain characteristics of value clarification are of importance to ME in Malaysia and to my thesis specifically. Included in values clarification approach are the skills of thinking on various levels (Bloom, 1956), critical thinking (Raths, Wasserman, Jonas & Rothstein, 1967) and divergent or creative thinking (Parnes, 1967).  The very term "value clarification" has contributed to some misunderstanding. The goal of value clarification is not to simply clarify or be clear about one's values whilst displaying a hedonistic lack of interest in anyone else's values. It is to be clear about one's own values and be concerned for the consequences of one's position - both personal and social.

From the beginning, value clarification has discouraged a static "clarity". It is the ongoing development of one's values, including actions taken on them, that is valued (Kirschenbaum, 1977).

The valuing process is a process by which we increase the likelihood that our living in general, or a decision in particular, makes sense; first, have positive value for us, and, second, be constructive in the social context. The use of the

valuing process does not guarantee a good decision for us or society; it merely increases the likelihood (Kirschenbaum, 1977). Here is another "catch" in the value clarification approach which contradicts the MEM philosophy. Students of ME are expected to develop into citizens who are responsible towards their family, society, and nation and acquire noble values accepted in the Malaysian society (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools, 2000).

This particular approach was popular during the first phase of ME in Malaysia. Value clarification is an approach that utilises questions and activities designed to teach the valuing process and that helps people to skilfully apply the valuing process to value-rich areas in their lives (Kirschenbaum, 1977). Raths, Harmin and Simon (1966) explicated the process in their book "Values and Teaching", in which they described seven sub-processes that lead toward value clarity: to be chosen from alternatives, to be chosen after thoughtful consideration of consequences, to be chosen freely, to be prized and cherished, to be publicly affirmed, to be acted upon, and to be acted upon repeatedly and consistently. Raths encouraged his students to use these processes to develop their own values.

This is where the complications started in Malaysian schools. Through the process of value clarification, the idea of allowing students to develop their own values caused some concerns. Malaysian and American cultures are different. Studying MEM must be seen in the context of several assumptions such as every student has a religion in which religious values are absolute, the rule of law through the Federal Constitution is to be strictly followed and the *Rukun Negara* and Vision 2020 are guides, and the students are heavily influenced by cultural norms and traditions although students are free to develop their own values which are confined to the above factors.

According to Kirschenbaum (1992), value clarification is based upon the importance of communication. Values do not develop in a vacuum, but through an ongoing process of social interaction and appropriate sharing of feelings and thoughts.  Another valuing process here is empathy, active listening, or taking another's frame of reference. Conflict resolution is a third valuing process under this dimension and can end with several outcomes: none of the parties may

actualise his or her values; one party may win and the other(s) lose; or all parties may achieve a satisfying solution, with all realising most of all the values they desired for that situation. However, in the Malaysian scenario, when it comes to matters of law and constitution, conflicts like drug trafficking or environmental destruction end with one outcome; if one commits the crime, one faces the judiciary and the consequences of committing the crime.

Values clarification involves recognising the values that others hold and recognising one's own values. As a result of such activity, students might modify or confirm their own values. It is not about situational ethics or relativism; and cultures as well as religion need to be taken seriously (Buchanan, 1997). In Malaysia, though teachers teach value clarification, cultural and religious factors are not given priority. Values are taught with the assumption that all students see the different values as the same. But in reality students are not the same and teachers have to respect that diversity.

Values clarification does not assume that all systems are equal, nor does it judge any set of values (Beller, 1986). Complexities in Malaysia (which I described in 2.5) make such an approach not appropriate in the ME classroom. There are certain value judgements implicit in each process. If we urge critical thinking, then we value rationality. If we support moral reasoning, then we value justice. If we advocate divergent thinking, then we value creativity. If we uphold free choice, then we value autonomy or freedom. If we "encourage 'no-lose' conflict resolution, then we value equality" (Kirschenbaum, 1977, p. 13). People who feel good about themselves tend to be more effective by almost any set of criteria (Combs, Avila & Purkey, 1971).

People who are aware of their feelings are psychologically more mature and tend to achieve their goals more readily (Rogers, 1961). People who have learned a process of discharging stressful feelings have greater access to their full problem-solving capacity and are freer from the grip of patterned distress (Jackins, 1965). Some of these values are instrumental values and others are terminal values (Rokeach, 1971). For instance, the instrumental value of rationality is a means toward the terminal or end value of justice. Here again arises the issue of how values are clarified in the Malaysian culture. Moderation

is considered the most important value of Buddhist followers. Moderation is one of the many values in other religions like Islam and Christianity. This is an example of how difference in religious and cultural norms can cause contradiction and challenges when using value clarification to teach ME in Malaysia. Though the focus is on the process of value clarification, students in a ME class in Malaysia can also become confused with the values they try to uphold of their family and society, especially if personal and communal values conflict.

During the revision period for the ME syllabus, there were complaints about the use of cognitive developmental theory and the value clarification approach which ended in students concentrating too much on exams in the ME subject (Prasad, 2006, Vishalache, 2002). The complaints included issues such as too much importance being given to cognitive development, students not seeing the relevance of learning ME in the classroom, and being unable to connect it with their real lives, as well as an over-emphasis on ME as an examinable subject in upper secondary ME classes. This led to the revision of the ME syllabus and the implementation of character education in the year 2000.

### 3.1.3  Character Education Approach

Character education was indirectly involved in the first phase of ME in Malaysia but after the revision of the syllabus, it was given full focus. Generally, character education in the American context means everything a teacher does to influence the character of the students he or she teaches (Lickona, 1991). Since this approach was adapted in MEM, character education in Malaysia takes a similar approach. During the syllabus revision period, the character education approach was popular and introduced about one decade after ME was implemented.

Character is derived from a Greek word which means "to mark" as on an engraving. One's character is typically seen as an indelible mark of consistency and predictability (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). According to a liberal humanistic view, character is deeply rooted in personality and includes behaviour, attitudes, and values. Character is anyone's approach to the daily dilemmas

and responsibilities and duties in life, pro social skills, knowledge of social conventions, and construction of personal values (Hay, Castle, Stimson, & Davies, 1995). Thus in the teaching and learning of moral education character education integrates all that is necessary to build good character.

In Malaysia, Lickona's holistic model of character education is being applied in the present day ME syllabus. Lickona (1976) argues that in order for a student to be morally acceptable in society, he or she needs to have moral thinking, moral feelings and moral action. According to Lickona (1991), "character education is the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values" (p. 51). According to Lickona (1991):

> When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it's clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right - even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within. (p. 51)

Lickona's model describes a developmental process that involves knowledge, feelings, and action and which provides an integrated foundation that engages students in activities that make them think critically about moral and ethical questions, inspire them to become committed to moral actions, and provide them vast opportunity to practise moral behaviour.

This is also in line with the National Philosophy of Education in Malaysia which aims to develop a holistic person at the end of 11 years of school education. During the progress of the ME subject, the core set of values is introduced under the umbrella of a thematic approach with the assumption that they would be internalised and make students moral citizens (see 2.4.3). "The idea that there are traits of character children ought to know, that they learn these by example…." (Kirlpatrick, 1992, p.15), without focussing on the sociocultural needs of the students does cause some concern. Kirlpatrick challenges this idea because over time, external factors can influence the students and the actual values or traits might be distorted. Thus in the ME classroom, confusion about how much cognitive, affective, and psychomotor moral skills are taught

and complement each other to produce a holistic moral student becomes an issue.

The cognitive component is overwhelming and students are unable to appreciate the moral feeling and practise the moral action aspects. Teachers of ME in Malaysia are so absorbed with the ME textbook and preparing examination questions that they hardly have space to reflect and allow students to reflect on their ME subject (Rosnani, 2007).

According to Halstead (1996), there are two main problems with the character education approach. The first is the problem of identifying suitable values and making sure a consistent approach is taken within the school; there is no shortage of lists of values especially in a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, but often little agreement between them. In the Malaysian ME syllabus, values are identified from the different ethnic groups but they stay as values on paper without much appreciation in real life. The second problem is that the approach pays too little attention to, and may be in direct conflict with, values that students learn outside the school: the home, the media and their peers. This again applies to the Malaysian scenario where values at home might conflict with values learnt in school (see 1.5.8).

Character education has not dealt with the holistic growth of students. Simply exposing students to standard moral dilemmas and moral stories which are mostly hypothetical, combined with the strict teaching of moral, plus "right" and "wrong" answers on moral cognition examination papers may not help students to develop morally as a whole; this indicates that the Kohlbergian cognitive developmental approach still strongly influences the character education approach. A student wrote to the local newspaper, "Having a good grade in ME does not mean you are disciplined. There are lots of students who behave badly, and are top scorers in ME. This goes to show that memorising values does not mean we will practise them" (Gayatri, 2008). Character education, which focusses on the three moral domains (moral thinking, moral feeling and moral acting), does not seem to be workable in an exam-oriented, cognitively monopolised system which is the present reality for MEM.

The traits that the MEM system strives to instil in every student need to specifically include developmental progress as well as the skills and knowledge to apply classroom learning and link what is learnt to real life.

Campbell and Bond (1982) claim that there are four major questions to be addressed when focussing on character development. What is good character? What causes or prevents it? How can it be measured? How can it be developed? These components need to be analysed in the Malaysian context to ensure that good character as defined in Malaysia is accepted locally and globally. Campbell and Bond propose the following as major factors that influence the moral development of students in contemporary America which are likely also to be relevant to Malaysian students: heredity, early childhood experience, modelling by important adults and older youth, peer influence, the general physical and social environment, communications media, what is taught in school, and specific situations and roles that elicit corresponding behaviour. This thesis investigates the factor of peer influence which is a major factor affecting morality among secondary school students in Malaysia.

According to Berkowitz and Bier (2005), effective character education involves a transformation of the culture and life of the school. To enable that transformation to take place, several approaches might be combined to suit the culture and climate of providing ME in Malaysia.

## 3.2    Alternative approach to teaching ME in Malaysia

There are various approaches to the practice of moral education (e.g. autonomous versus heteronomous (Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999; Kohn, 1997) and indirect versus direct (Benninga, 1991; Dewey, 1977; Lickona, 1991). There are also various approaches to the study of moral education and development such as rationalism, empiricism, cognitive developmentalism, social learning theory and personality approaches. The moral domain may be conceptualised based on different theories. For example, morality "as a realm of caring relationships; obligations made explicit in a set of universal principles; or ideals of virtuous conduct, character and a good life" (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005, p. 57).

In Malaysia, sociocultural factors and factors of religion and law are also to be considered when dealing with ME. Current thinking about values education favours eclecticism (Harmin, 1988; Kirschenbaum, 1992). It is an approach which combines or integrates different approaches for some sound reasons. An alternative way of presenting ME could be to combine the cognitive learning approach in value clarification with character education and present a comprehensive approach to ME; an approach that takes into consideration the uniqueness of every student in class; an approach that enables the child to learn and develop from teachers and peers; an approach that explores and combines the debates for cognitive learning with value clarification and character education. Literature about education for character has spelt out that values clarification and cognitive programmes have failed to educate students morally and in the way society wants them to be (Beller, 1986). Kirschenbaum (1992), who at one time promoted value clarification, is suggesting a comprehensive model for values and moral education.
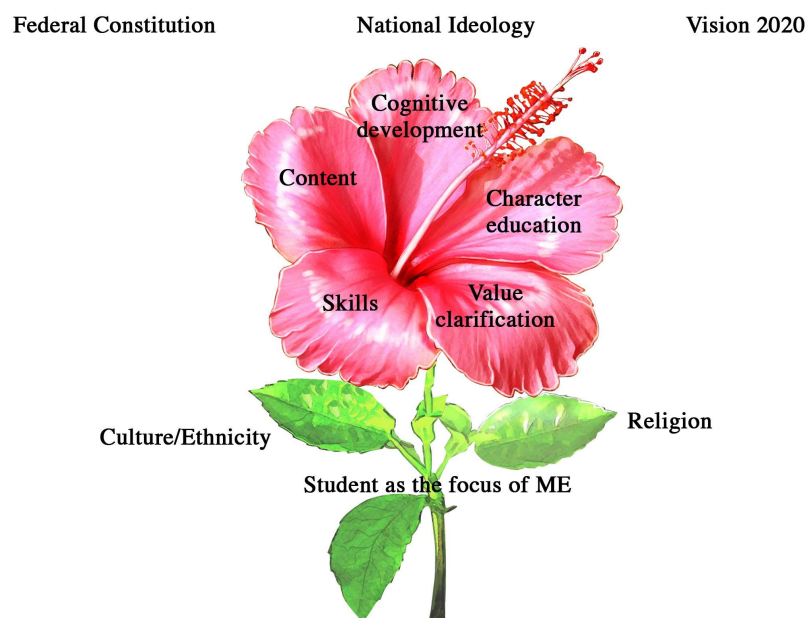
Figure 3.1: A comprehensive-eclectic approach for ME in Malaysia.

The approach that I suggest is a comprehensive-eclectic one where students become the focus of ME and approaches like cognitive development, value clarification and character education become feeders to the process of developing a moral student.

The use of a *bunga raya* (hibiscus) as my metaphor acknowledges the national flower of Malaysia. Its five petals (acknowledging the five main ethnic groups, see 1.3) represent unity in diversity among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Each petal is special in its structure. In each petal are the different approaches of ME which have been discussed above. However, the student who is the stem and the filament of the *bunga raya,* is free to suit him/herself with any approach that he or she feels comfortable with. The swaying of the filament due to environmental factors like the wind, and opening of the petals with the sun is also symbolic in the sense that students may be influenced by state law, cultural, religious, and ethnicity factors but still stay firm, strong, and intact. When dealing with moral issues, content and skills, placed on top of the fourth and fifth petals, play an important role. Students of ME need to share a common understanding of the aspirations of the country where education is concerned (content) and be able to use tools acquired during their school years to apply when dealing with moral conflicts (skills). My research focusses on the student as the means to the end and investigates whether the use of their real-life dilemmas as an alternative pedagogy to learn ME in secondary schools in Malaysia is feasible.

Solomon, Watson and Battistich (2001) advocate:

> Regular and meaningful class meetings, opportunities for students to practice perspective-taking, the use of literature to stimulate moral discussion, thinking and reflection; and a general increase in the level of the student autonomy and participation or … giving students opportunities to learn to reason and to be of service … and engaging students in their own formation of character. (p. 582)

Such activities enable students to become moral citizens. Students "become active participants in democratic society and develop into principled and caring community members" (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005, p. 59). This is the outcome

I hope for from my research project, though the challenges of balancing the tensions between national expectations between communal and individual perspective will be an ongoing debate.

## 3.3 An introduction to the use of moral dilemmas in teaching ME

With a very strong neo-Kohlbergian approach still dominating ME pedagogy in Malaysia and also other parts of the world, one method of teaching ME in the classroom is to present a moral dilemma. Students discuss, debate, reflect, and finally reach a way to resolve the dilemma given. There are two ways in which students make moral decisions (Lapsley, 1996). In the first method, people decide what is morally right by gauging the consequences of each decision. For example, utilitarianism is the best-known form of consequentialism. According to Lapsley, if choosing Action X results in the best consequences for each and every one involved, then Action X is the morally right choice.

In the second method, students decide what is morally right by applying some socially defined template of moral rules for behaviour. So if Action X would entail breaking a rule while Action Y abides by the rule, this second philosophy would recommend Action Y as the morally right choice, even if the consequences of Action Y are not as good as the consequences of Action X. Traditionally, the philosophy that assesses the morality of an act by gauging its consequences has been called teleological reasoning. The philosophy that assesses the morality of an act by applying a rule, principle, or ethic has been called deontological reasoning (Frankena, 1973). Whatever the solution is, both are closely related to the moral development of an individual.

### 3.3.1 Moral dilemma

A moral dilemma is a situation in which an individual or society faces conflicting situations in which there are a few alternatives to choose from to make a moral decision. The moral dilemma exists because of clashes in values between one or more persons (Vishalache, 2008b). At times, the moral dilemma is within the individual. At other times, the moral dilemma involves individuals, groups, society, nations, and the entire world.

Usually, a moral dilemma consists of one issue, involving one or more characters where one has to face the issue and make a decision. The decision made is based on several factors such as rational reasoning, justice, and care. Moral dilemmas of two types have been used in ME: hypothetical moral dilemmas and real-life moral dilemmas.

### 3.3.2   Hypothetical moral dilemma

A hypothetical moral dilemma can be defined as a situation which might be true or created and contains conflict or moral differences. Presentation of such dilemmas can be ended with questions such as: What is done by the main character in the story provided? What would you have done in that situation? Kohlberg (1975) used hypothetical moral dilemmas widely in his research to identify the moral development stages of children. According to Kohlberg, children and young adolescents showed pre-conventional moral thinking based on obtaining rewards and avoiding punishment, while older adolescents and adults revealed conventional moral thinking which is more indicative of a self-ethical code based on principles of justice, care, and equality.

The use of such hypothetical moral dilemmas requires students to understand and take the third person's perspective and to use their cognitive reasoning. They have to make decisions based on the situation given.

Kohlberg (1984) assumed human beings processed all the information in moral dilemmas through cognitive structures that brought them to their moral development stage. In his theory, Kohlberg (1975) admitted that moral education has the basics in activating thinking in a person when he or she is making decisions regarding social issues. The moral stories used by Kohlberg were all hypothetical dilemmas which discussed different moral issues and involved conflicts in values regarding rules, regulations, the social order, and authority commands.  According to Zeidler (1990), the role of the educator is to provide the moral dilemma and encourage responses which are reasonable and not answers that are correct from the students. The main weakness of using hypothetical moral dilemmas in teaching ME is that the dilemmas stay as

dilemmas and when students face actual dilemmas of conflict they are unable to make mature and wise decisions (Krebs et al., 1997).

One of the main weaknesses of the use of hypothetical moral dilemmas is that students make decisions or resolve conflict from a third person perspective. For example in the *Heinz Dilemma* that Kohlberg created, the respondents have to decide whether the act of Heinz who stole the medicine for his wife who was seriously ill was moral or otherwise. In real life, moral decisions made are for real, followed by actions, not what should be done by a certain fictitious character. Kohlberg's assumption is that the decision made in the hypothetical dilemma is the same as the decision made in the real-life dilemma. But Wark and Krebs (1996) who conducted research on a group of university students found that their moral decisions for hypothetical dilemmas were different from those made in real-life dilemmas. In my research (Vishalache, 2002), twenty-four 16-year-olds underwent a series of formal ME lessons in the classroom for a period of six months and discussions were held from time to time on the different pedagogical ME issues. Students admitted that they answer questions about hypothetical dilemmas according to what the ME teacher guides them to answer in order to obtain the maximum score in their written examination. However, in real life, their decisions might differ according to the current situation and parties involved in the dilemmas they were facing.

In the pluralistic Malaysian society, using a limited stereotypical dilemma is not realistic. For example, in the *Heinz Dilemma* the use of concepts like "drug-store" and "cure for an incurable disease" can cause conflict among students of different cultures and beliefs. A strongly religious Buddhist student may decide that it is the *karma* of Heinz's wife to have that disease and Heinz should provide her with moral support to ensure that she leaves the world peacefully. An *Orang Asli* student may argue that visiting the village healer would resolve Heinz's problems. The concern here is that these hypothetical dilemmas focus on fictional characters that may be unfamiliar or irrelevant and under such circumstances may minimise the individual's cognition and emotional involvement with the task.

### 3.3.3 Real-life moral dilemma

Real-life moral dilemmas are conflicts faced by respondents or other people in their everyday lives. Gilligan (1982) showed that the use of real-life moral dilemmas is more practical and realistic in understanding the moral perspective of a respondent. She found that each individual differed in the way they interpreted a moral problem and that moral dilemmas in real life were unclear and complex. It is seen as one thing by one individual and another by someone else. Thus, when human beings are facing moral dilemmas in their daily lives, they interpret those problems according to their own moral orientation and level of moral development, and particular context and experience. In Malaysia, students in ME classes are capable of sharing their own moral dilemmas (Vishalache, 2002) and interacting with others to resolve such matters.

According to Wilson (1972), one effective way of teaching ME is to put students in a real-life situation. This calls for moral educators to create real-life situations within the four walls of the classroom. Students need to feel what is being discussed. They need to be part of the process too. However, in the Malaysian ME class it is not a simple task. Having classes of students from different cultural backgrounds, to undertake such a task involving so many cultural factors may present difficulties for teachers. An alternative would be to allow students to share their own real-life dilemmas and to proceed from there.

As an alternative to the hypothetical dilemmas of the MJI, some researchers have presented actual dilemmas as stimuli (Walker et al., 1995). These dilemmas may be factual, more realistic, and more relevant to the respondents. However, they are usually raised as moral conflicts by the researcher and not the participants. My thesis aims to challenge this aspect and encourage students to share experiences of confronting their own moral dilemmas or issues that people confront in their everyday lives.

## 3.4 Bridging ME in the classroom with application of Vygotskian perspective on ME

It is important to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of moral functioning that entails the interplay of behaviour, thought, and emotion (Walker et al., 1995).

The cognitive-developmental approach has emphasised cognition, the values clarification approach has emphasised cognition and behaviour, and the character education approach has tried to deal with cognition, emotion, and behaviour. What I am visualising is an approach that is flexible (see 3.2) yet organises some structure to entail students to speak for themselves and be heard in the ME class. I plan to apply a Vygotskian perspective to ME.

According to Tappan (1998), what might be called a Vygotskian perspective on ME (though Vygotsky never mentioned ME in any of his works) offers a vision of ME that integrates educational and developmental assumptions in ways that are lacking in other current models of ME. In this perspective is the assumption that moral functioning is a cultural practice or practical activity (Rogoff, 1990) which is mediated by language and forms of discourse and situated in a socio-cultural-historical context. This moral language is shared by people who share the same activities and who are engaged in similar social or moral practices. If they did not share these activities, they would not share this common moral language (Tappan, 1997).

Based on my suggestion for a comprehensive-eclectic ME approach in Malaysia (see 3.2), I see a promising method in the application and extension of a Vygotskian perspective. This thesis explores what happens when students are collaboratively engaged in the cognitive process of moral development with space for value clarification and development of their internal values as the process repeats. Though I am not a full Vygotsky disciple, I see that a Vygotskian perspective could create an alternative path for ME in Malaysia.

From a Vygotskian perspective, ME entails a process of guided participation where students are helped by more capable peers to attain new and different perceptions in their mental cognition. Though Vygotsky's focus is on mental cognition, which I am unwilling to embrace totally I am going to use that theory as a jumping point to further develop Vygotskian theory to link with the three moral domains; moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action. The essence of moral education or moral learning from a Vygotskian perspective is that students collaborate and develop their learning, and this sets the stage for the theoretical framework for moral education that this thesis explores

In the next chapter I introduce Vygotsky and his works, the theoretical framework that I am working upon, the specific use of ZPD introduced by Vygotsky, weaknesses in ZPD in the Malaysian setting, and how I delve into a Malaysian version of ZPD which I call the Zone of Collaborative Development (ZCD).

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development extended to**

**Zone of Collaborative Development**

## 4.1    Introduction

I now turn to Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky's (1896-1934) theory of developmental psychology. Cognitive and social developmental and character education approaches are important in ME (see 3.1) but it is equally important to consider the perspective of students and how they react when they decide upon real-life moral dilemmas that they encounter daily. I intend to explore whether cultural and collaborative solutions may be drawn upon based on Vygotskian developmental principles. I see an opportunity to apply relevant aspects of Vygotsky's framework where students can decide for themselves in taking action by collaborating with one another.

## 4.2    Why Vygotsky?

During Vygotsky's time, the citizens of Russia and around the world were reconstructing and renewing their society. It was during this post-revolutionary period that Vygotsky began his quest for a new psychology that brought together a unified notion of how students learn and develop (Vygotsky, 1978). It is also likely that after 50 years of independence in Malaysia, the notion of education and ME should consider pedagogies that put students in the forefront rather than repeatedly applying content and values that become a mismatch in reality (Vishalache, 2004).

Vygotsky's social, cultural and historical perspective was evident in his conviction that all learning was first accomplished through the language that flows between individuals. Language and action, for Vygotsky, were tools of mediation for learning. Speaking reorganises students' thinking, and their language comes to them as a cultural heritage through their interactions with

others. Because they actively use language, it changes their thinking - and actions change language. This belief is the "cornerstone of the difference" Vygotsky made in conceptualising how "students think, learn, and develop" (Wink & Putney, 2002, pp. 28 & 29). It is my hope that through this thesis the students of ME may experience and put into practice in the ME class what Vygotsky conceptualised.

The work that Vygotsky began in post-revolutionary Russia is still relevant and informative today. Three reasons exist for the popularity of Vygotsky's work among intellectual circles: (1) his focus on the active contribution of humans to the development of their own consciousness, (2) the importance of social interaction in development, and (3) the notion of the mediation role of language in the communicative process (Emihovich & Lima, 1995).

Vygotsky focussed on the notion that "concrete historical activity is the generator of consciousness" (Emihovich & Lima, 1995, p. 376) and that humans use tools and sign systems in order to transform themselves to reshape cultural forms of society. Therefore, talking about past and present events might be a useful approach to addressing moral problems. The analysis and design of my thesis is informed by Vygotsky's work. The three intellectual circles mentioned above may help explore the notion of ME in Malaysia (see 3.2) in class activities.

Vygotsky also sought to address four major areas of reductionism in psychology: that of reduction to the rational, to the individual, to the internal, and to the innate (del Rio & Alvarez, 1995). With regard to the rational, Vygotsky insisted that emotion was a crucial part of understanding consciousness. He "emphasized the development and cultural construction not only of meaning, but of emotion and directivity" (del Rio & Alvarez, 1995, p.386). Emotions and cognition are domains of ME in Malaysia and in the philosophy of Malaysian education. It is hoped that through these two domains, the moral actions of students become acceptable and guide them into becoming moral citizens.

Regarding the individual, Yaroshevsky (1989) noted that "the individual constructs the idea of his own person in the likeness of another individual, receiving his speech reflexes, and thus 'settling' the other in his own organism" (p. 87). In ME, individual ideas need to complement collaborative ideas from the others. With regard to the internal, Vygotsky also addressed the notion of reducing all of development to the internal with his own construct that learning takes place first on what he called an interpersonal plane (Vygotsky, 1978), through interaction with others, then moves to what he called an intrapersonal plane, as concepts are internalised by the individual.

The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one was seen as the result of a long series of developmental events (Vygotsky, 1978). The issue of innate reductionism was met with his construct of the "social-cultural-historical construction of higher functions" (del Rio & Alvarez, 1995, p. 386). In Vygotsky's view, mental functions are socially, culturally, and historically constructed rather than genetically determined. According to Wertsch (1991), Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development claims that an individual's mental functioning derives from participating in social life, and that what occurs in internalisation is not a mere copying of socially organised processes, but involves transformations of processes at an individual level.

Why would Vygotskian theory be useful in ME in Malaysia? Vygotsky sought psychology that would take into account the role of consciousness in development, while recognising the cultural, social, and historical basis of psychological functioning. He recognised language as both a psychological function and a cultural tool with which students can communicate thoughts as well as emotions to themselves and others, thus allowing for a transformative notion of learning and development to emerge in the field of psychology.

As discussed in section 3.2, a comprehensive-eclectic approach to ME appropriate for Malaysia is likely to consist of a combination of cognitive development, values clarification, and character education. This combination allows the development of moral consciousness in the development of ME without ignoring the cultural, social, and historical backgrounds of students. The

use of language in communicating moral thoughts, moral feelings, and moral action is embedded within. These can be applied in resolving real-life moral dilemmas of students within their capability with the collaborative help of their capable peers.

Schools in Malaysia have a challenge to cater for individual difference in students in a dynamic way. Since students are different in so many ways, schools need to cater to all these differences. Vygotsky recognised this challenge. According to him:

> The goal of the school is not at all a matter of reducing everyone to the same level, on the contrary, one of the goals of the social environment that is created in the school is to achieve as complex, as diversified, and as flexible an organization of the various elements in this environment as possible. It is only necessary that these elements not be in any way irreconcilable, and that they be linked up together into a single system. (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 79)

Vygotsky's vision of schooling and ME and the Malaysian school system have similarities. Vygotsky warns of the dangers of reducing every student to the same level and the Malaysian school system wants every student to grow into socially responsible individuals to form a moral and civilised society (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary School, 2000).

It is a challenge to teach ME in an environment where students are pluralistic in every sense (Vishalache, 2006). Furthermore, the top-down system which spells out every detail of the curriculum and syllabus challenges my thesis which is exploring from the other end of the spectrum and places students in the forefront. However, the potential advantage is that by looking at the differences it will be possible to create a curriculum that caters to each student's need. It seems to contradict current pedagogies but that is the challenge faced in the Malaysian ME classes. Students need to develop individually without forgetting their roots, their cultural values, and traditions. They also need to abide by community values and the laws of state. Vygotsky has suggested that "teaching means relating to students and relating the curriculum to their lives" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 83). It is important that ME reaches out to the students and makes a difference. By enabling them to

resolve their own moral dilemmas, students may realise that ME makes a positive difference to their lives.

Another reason why I think Vygotsky's approach may be useful in Malaysian ME is the rationale for his theories. Vygotsky began his work in psychology because of persistent questions he had as a teacher. He was always concerned with the application of theory in practice, and he directed his development constructs toward pedagogy and learning. He wondered how students learn and develop, and he wondered why some students seem to develop faster than others who seemed to require more assistance. These underlying questions led him to theorise in new and different ways to those published by his contemporaries in psychology.

For Vygotsky, learning is more than just passively receiving information and responding to it; learning includes the ideas generated in the process of dialectical discovery. From a Vygotskian perspective, "learning and development are tied to the sociocultural context" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 10). This is relevant in MEM as students in ME classrooms come from different cultural and ethnic groups.

Vygotsky turned to psychology so that he could combine scientific knowledge of the discipline with his own common-sense knowledge, intuition, and inspiration from his experience as a teacher. He was so convinced that theory and practice are interrelated, he declared that the motto of his new psychology would be "practice and philosophy" (Yaroshevsky, 1989, p.15). As I mentioned previously (see Chapter One), ME is partly philosophy and partly psychology. In this work I concentrate on the psychological perspective which focusses on the pedagogy component.

## 4.3    Social constructivism versus social constructionism

Although Vygotsky did not use the above terms, neo-Vygotskians tend to place their theories within a social framework. Duran and Syzmanski (1995) differentiate the terms "social" or "cognitive constructivism" and "social constructionism" as two distinct perspectives. Social constructivism is derived

from Piaget's developmental theory while social constructionism is more linked with Vygotskian theory.

The social constructionist theory places emphasis on learning as a process that includes appropriation of cultural beliefs about the world and how to function competently in activity settings that constitute the "lived experiences of particular communities of practice" (Duran & Syzmanski, 1995, p. 150). A common distinction made by constructionist is that knowledge is not what individuals believe, but rather what social groups or knowledge communities, believe. The social constructionist position is that people have ideas but these are given meaning by their social context. It is important to recognise this difference because in ME, the cognitive development theory that Kohlberg (1984) advocated has its roots in Piaget's (1932) theory, but Vygotsky has added the influence of social aspects which involves inter-personal and intra-personal relationships in the students' lives.

Some social constructionists would go further and elaborate on the origins of knowledge at both the personal (ontogenetic) and the collective (phylogenetic) levels. Bruffee (1993) cites Vygotsky and shows that cognitive development is essentially a reciprocal, interactive, social process from the beginning. According to Bruffee:

> Vygotsky confirmed this view by showing that reflective thought is social conversation internalized. We first experience and learn what Oakshott calls "the skill and partnership of conversation"… what I call here the craft of interdependence…in the arena of direct social exchange. Only then, Vygotsky demonstrates, do we learn to displace that skill and partnership by dramatizing and playing out silently within ourselves the role of every participant in the conversation (1993, p. 114).

Vygotsky's theory requires the teacher and students to play non-traditional roles as they collaborate with each other. The teacher should collaborate with his or her students to create meaning in ways that students can make their own (Hausfather, 1996). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning which is oriented towards developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the point of view of the child's overall development. This is because it does not aim for a new stage of the development process but rather lags behind this process.

The developmental assumptions of character education programmes are not clear, though Vygotsky attended to development clearly in his theory. A study conducted by Brown and Palincsar (1986) showed that the Vygotskian approach with reciprocal teaching methodologies proved effective to teach reading programmes. Another study of cognitively guided instruction where teacher and students explore maths problems and then share their different problem solving strategies in an open dialogue proved successful (Hausfather, 1996). However, in ME, the challenge is greater as it involves moral thought, feeling, and action (Lickona, 1991). Students from diverse backgrounds need to learn about the differences within a specifically Malaysian context, where rules can be absolute and have their own social, cultural, and historical foundations. It is indeed a challenge for the students to be able to sit together and discuss matters of the heart and the environment which are complicated but yet need to be resolved amicably and collaboratively in most instances.

Students' life experiences influence their learning. They talk and listen to their friends and teachers. They develop new thoughts and ideas. When they do not understand something or have a problem, they discuss it with a friend and often are able to resolve the problem, which leads to higher and deeper cognitive processes. Vygotsky goes on to challenge learning, not only in relation to and in cooperation with others, but also in the process of individualisation of thinking which enables students to internalise what has been learned through interaction with others.

## 4.4    Moral Education and Vygotsky

With regard to research and the unfolding of Vygotsky's vision of his pedagogy, little has been pursued in ME in Malaysia. Vygotsky's ability to combine two seemingly opposite elements into one distinct entity (Wink & Putney, 2002) is a key notion in my research. His approach seems to provide an avenue for students' views to be heard. At the same time, different cultural beliefs and ethnic morality can be understood together as one moral language. The other reason being students in ME are from various backgrounds yet they come together in a communal setting to be educated in ME. This is clearly explained in the metaphoric description of water below.

Vygotsky's (1986) use of the metaphor of water to explain his perceptions of teaching, learning, and development within the sociocultural context is very relevant for ME and learning and development in the Malaysian context. Water, when separated into its parts, is qualitatively changed. The separate atoms of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen are not water; it is their union that creates water. As hydrogen and oxygen unite to create water, students from different ethnic backgrounds come together to create a "Malaysian-ness" moral environment. Thus, the role of the ME teacher is to help students move out of their "ethnic comfort zones" into this new "Malaysia" space.

Societal needs to think and work together on moral issues has increased tremendously (Austin, 2000), shifting the emphasis from individual efforts to group work and from independence to community (Leonard & Leonard, 2001). As one cannot separate water into its distinct parts (hydrogen and oxygen) and still maintain the integrity of water, so, too, one cannot separate the individual from the context and still have a complete understanding.

 The unification of a person within that social, cultural, historical, and political context informs our understanding of this dialectical relationship. This Vygotskian metaphor of water can be applied to the process of a teacher teaching and the process of a student learning as a reciprocal relationship between teaching and learning. As Vygotsky (1977) put it, "Education is just as meaningless outside the real world as is a fire without oxygen, or as is breathing in a vacuum. The teacher's educational work, therefore, must inevitably be connected with his creative, social, and life work" (p. 345).

To see the union of teaching and learning ME and achieving its objectives (see 1.4), it is important that the teacher understands the students and their perspectives of the real world. Most important of all, students need to share a common frame though they come from different cultures, histories, and sociocultural contexts. They need a common moral language in order to understand the complexities (see 2.5) and find the means to a future of collaboration within the diversity of living in a pluralistic environment.

Simultaneously, they need to self help and internalise values that would help them live a harmonious life in the Malaysian context as well as globally.

Tappan (1998) considers a Vygotskian perspective on moral education as one that integrates educational and developmental assumptions in ways that are lacking in other current models. The assumption is that moral functioning is a cultural practice or practical activity (Rogoff, 1990), mediated by language and forms of discourse and situated in a socio-cultural-historical context. This moral language is shared by people engaged in the same activities and in similar social or moral practices, though they may be different in many ways. This is a great challenge in the Malaysian ME classroom where students and teachers have vast individual differences yet are under the same roof to receive knowledge to become morally educated. From a Vygotskian perspective, it would appear that ME entails a process of guided participation where students are helped by teachers, parents, and capable peers to attain new and greater potentials of moral thinking, feeling, and action. This is the essence of ME from a Vygotskian perspective, and sets the stage for my thesis.

## 4.5    Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky introduced the notion of ZPD in relation to learning and development. It is based on his theory that learning is, at its core, a largely socially-mediated activity, and that real learning takes place in students' ZPD. According to Vygotsky (1986, p. 188), "What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it…"

Having rejected both the view that development precedes learning and vice versa, Vygotsky proposed a new approach that focusses particular attention on learning and development in school-age children. He saw learning and development as an interrelated, dynamic process (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 86). In the process, the students become active participants in their learning through the use of language and interaction with others. Wells (2000) refers to this process as an active minds-on activity and indicates that the tool of greatest importance is language, the pre-eminent joint activity is that of discourse, and

the purpose of the activity is to create common knowledge and enhance understanding. This exchange of ideas relates to ZPD and ME in my thesis as students engage themselves in a common ground to resolve their real-life moral dilemmas.

Vygotsky (1978) conceptualised ZPD as a way of viewing what students are coming to know. The key to this approach is Vygotsky's claim that in order to match instructional strategies to a student's development capabilities accurately, what must be determined is not only her "actual developmental level" but also her "level of potential development" (p. 86). The actual developmental level reflects what the student knows and is able to perform at the moment. But Vygotsky argued that it "only captures mental functions that are fully formed, fully matured, fully completed – the end products of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Vygotsky (1934/1987) argued that the actual level of development finally provides an inadequate measure of the state of the child's development:

> The state of development is never defined only by what has matured. If the gardener decides only to evaluate the matured or harvested fruits of the apple tree, he cannot determine the state of his orchard. Maturing trees must also be taken into consideration. The psychologist (similarly) must not limit his analysis to functions that have matured. He must consider those that are in the process of maturing. (p.208)

Vygotsky claimed that what must also be confirmed is what the students know and whether they are able to resolve problems beyond their actual development level if they are provided with guidance in the form of prompts or leading questions from someone more capable. This person, the more capable peer, could be another student, a teacher, or anyone who is able to help deliver the students from that problem. Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone as: "… the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86).

Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) named these distances the "buds" or "flowers" of development - to differentiate them from the "fruits" of development that are the functions and abilities that the child can produce independently. Vygotsky's framework indicates that after a student receives instructional support from someone more capable in that particular situation, the student internalises the new idea, knowledge, or skill and is more able to perform without help in the next similar conflict or problem-solving situation.

ZPD is a notion that takes into account individual differences and is focussed on the communicative nature of learning in which the students come to an understanding of the task they are performing. Continual guidance within the ZPD enables students to understand what is complex and move on to being able to know something well and share it with others. Just providing facts to clarify values or creating an ideal character that students are supposed to conform to, provides students with only a superficial level of learning ME.

Vygotsky related development of individuals integrally to development of the collective in which they learn and play (Lima, 1995). In the Malaysian scenario, the notion of collective development is most consistent with the pluralistic nature of the society. Individuals who collaborate engage in networking and discussion as a way to begin developing collaborative relationships (Himmelman, 1997). It makes them understand more clearly the world where collaboration is a social process in which meaning is constructed from discussion among group members (Vygotsky, 1978).

ZPD, as advocated by Vygotsky, reflects two foundational assumptions of his sociocultural approach to human development. The first of these is that higher mental functioning is mediated by words, language and forms of discourse which function as "psychological tools" that facilitate and transform mental action. The second assumption is that forms of higher mental functioning have their origins in social relations, as "intermental" processes between people and are internalised to become "intramental" processes within persons (Wertsch, 1985; Tappan, 1991, 1997).

Therefore, Vygotsky's approach focusses attention both on how such mental functions as thinking, reasoning, and remembering are mediated by language and forms of discourse, as well as on the ways in which such functions necessarily have their origins in human social life. Vygotsky's theory is complementary with the work of Bandura on the aspects of social learning and a major component of situated learning theory. His focus on cognitive development is also in line with that of Bruner and Piaget. Bruner (1987) stated, "Vygotsky's view of development was also a theory of education" (p. 1). In his view of development and education, Vygotsky placed great importance on the role of language - itself shaped by historical forces - as a tool for shaping thought.

Vygotsky's view of ZPD is also linked to the metaphor of the tidal wave. The idea is that the process of development can be both progressive and regressive (Wink & Putney, 2002). Likewise, the tidal wave moves forwards and backwards – progresses and regresses. This links with human experience which, according to Vygotsky, is both forward and backward movement that is finally progressive. Though the backward movement appears to be regressive, it is a time for making sense of the world and the conflicts within it. This approach seems to suit ME development which involves facing challenges and complexities in a nation of diversity and multiculturalism like Malaysia.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) use a four-stage model of ZPD to show how children develop speech and language and I have modified their model to show the teaching of ME using Vygotsky's ZPD. ZPD in ME can be seen as the gap between what students can morally decide and accomplish independently and what one student can achieve with the guidance of a more capable peer.

Figure 4.1: Modified version of Tharp and Gallimore's Four-Stage Model of ZPD (1988) relevant to the teaching of ME.

## 4.6    Weaknesses in Vygotsky's ZPD in the Malaysian setting

There is a gap that I see in the Vygotskian perspective. Though ZPD is the essence of my thesis, it holds narratives such as stories, myths, and poems as providers of powerful models of moral behaviour (Tappan, 1998). Here there is the possibility of using hypothetical stories and dilemmas which go back to the weaknesses of Kohlbergian's moral approach (see 3.1.1). Though Vygotsky stressed that students play an active role in their own development in the process of internalisation, he says nothing about the content of what is learned. This might lead to a problematic relativism when applied to the moral domain in the Malaysian classroom. For example, if students learning ME in class judge a moral dilemma without considering their religion and the law and norms of society, they can experience serious trouble. This is the emerging challenge of ME in Malaysia. The teacher's contribution and role in collaboration with the students play an important part in bringing out the students' voice.

Another weakness that I foresee in Vygotskian ZPD is the concern for individual action after experiencing ZPD. In the Malaysian scenario, adolescents in secondary schools are constantly challenging their own decision versus communal expectations. Thus the collaboration with more capable peers encourages students to take collaborative moral actions which fulfil the requirements of the nation in developing a "shared moral language".

The collaboration between teacher and students, and students and students, enables a vision of the fundamentally dialogic nature of all teaching and learning (Tappan, 1997). Without having an appropriate syllabus and some practical components to carry out the pedagogical component, whatever is suggested might be worthless. I have argued in Chapter Three that the use of real-life dilemmas is an alternative for students to be heard (see 3.3.3). It also addresses the gap in the character education model (see 3.1.3). By making that link coherent it addresses a link to the cognitive-developmental model and the values clarification model (see 3.2).

Wells (2000) spells out several characteristics of a Vygotskian class: constructing a collaborative community; engaging in purposeful activities involving whole persons actively forming identity; incorporating activities that are situated and unique; using curriculum as a means for learning, not just an end result; producing outcomes that are both aimed for and emergent; and constructing activities that must allow diversity and originality. The teacher is a facilitator who prompts and provides leading questions. Either teachers or students can take the role of capable peer. This is the main rationale of my choosing participatory action research (see Chapter Five) for my thesis and to help me explore the questions which are:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | What are the moral conflicts faced by a representative sample of 16-17 year old adolescents in a ME class in Malaysia? |
| 2. | To what extent do peers help these adolescents solve their moral conflicts? |
| 3. | How do these adolescents describe moral choices they make in their daily lives? |
| 4. | What are the moral orientations used by these adolescents to solve such moral conflicts? |
| 5. | What are the implications of using real-life dilemmas in the ME classroom in Malaysia? |

Table 4.1: Research question for the PAR.

**4.7    Vygotsky and Participatory Action Research**

It is my hope that the use of participatory action research (PAR) coupled with the application of real-life moral dilemmas, will enable ME students to collaboratively find their own resolutions to daily moral dilemmas and to see an alternative dimension in learning ME. From his own experiences of learning to his early career as a teacher and teacher educator, Vygotsky's work touched and changed lives in his own sociocultural context as it does in ours today. He was working with students and at the same time reflecting on theories to bridge theory and practise.

Luria (1979) stressed Vygotsky's insistence that research should never be limited to laboratory work and divorced from the real world. In his work with children with impairments, Vygotsky "rejected simple quantitative descriptions of such children in terms of one-dimensional psychological traits reflected in test scores, instead he relied on qualitative descriptions of the special organisation of their behaviour" (Luria, 1979, p. 53). Likewise, students in ME classes in Malaysia should not be assessed solely on cognition, i.e. written examination results. They also need to be able to share their emotions and behavioural conflicts within the ME class.

**4.8    Zone of Collaborative Development**

According to Wink (1997), the ideas of Vygotsky empowered her learning of the thought and language of critical pedagogy. As she learned each new word and/or thought, new links grew to her prior knowledge and existing experiential base. She always knew that by using the language of critical pedagogy, her thoughts would deepen to new understandings. The most important lesson she learned was that she had the ability to create new knowledge by using what Vygotsky had taught her about the relationship between thought and language. By metacognitively using her knowledge, she created new knowledge that was meaningful and purposeful at that time. I hoped that the undertaking of this journey would also enable my students and me to do the same and explore the research questions mentioned above. However, for this purpose I extended the Vygotskian ZPD to construct a Malaysian version of ZPD which I name the

Zone of Collaborative Development (ZCD). The rationale for this approach was based on my belief that ZCD would fit well into my research for several reasons. First, my research would be located in a collaborative environment within the four walls of the ME classroom. Most of the time, students would be collaborating in the research process though they would also have reflection time to write their own thoughts into their reflective journals (see 5.4.2.1).

Second, the backgrounds of my participating students are diversified. They come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. ZCD encourages the participants to use their cultural backgrounds and differences to express themselves during the moral dilemma discussions. ZCD would therefore also provide the opportunity for participants to learn from each other's cultures and experiences because of the equality in power sharing implicit in the process of collaboration (see 4.6). The complex cultural identity of Malaysian students (see 2.5.2) makes it even more challenging for students to understand and resolve their real-life moral dilemmas within a collaborative setting. Even within one ethnic group there are many clans and diversities. Students are influenced by their own culture and traditions as well as other cultures and the popular global youth culture that is emerging.

Third, it was intended that the real-life moral dilemmas would emerge from the participants. The dilemmas might cover a vast area of issues that students would be looking into in a collaborative manner. ZCD had the potential to encourage students to be responsible for their own dilemmas and that of their friends. They would be able to use their own funds of knowledge within the focus group discussions and ideally transform their thoughts and feelings into moral actions as aspired to in the ME philosophy. Rather than "correct" solutions, students would develop a shared moral language.

Finally, ZCD fits neatly into the methodology (PAR) that I am applying in this research. I would be undertaking this research to listen to the voices of the students. They would be collaborating and hopefully identifying moral solutions based on their own capacity and with the help of their capable peers, i.e. in a zone of collaborative development.

## 4.9 Process involved in Zone of Collaborative Development

I developed this model based on two other models. One is the ZPD in ME which is a four-stage model (see Figure 4.1). The second is the PAR research methodology (see Chapter Five). By merging both these components, I have constructed the model below to illustrate the process involved in ZCD. This model is generic in nature and can be utilised in any moral dilemma analysis process. But what is unique about it is the notion of being sensitive to contextual complexities when students undergo the process of ZCD. The process becomes the method by which dilemmas are analysed in the context of a respectful, caring relationship. Throughout the process, there is a need to build a safe environment for the students to operate in and to be able to resolve dilemmas without being threatened.
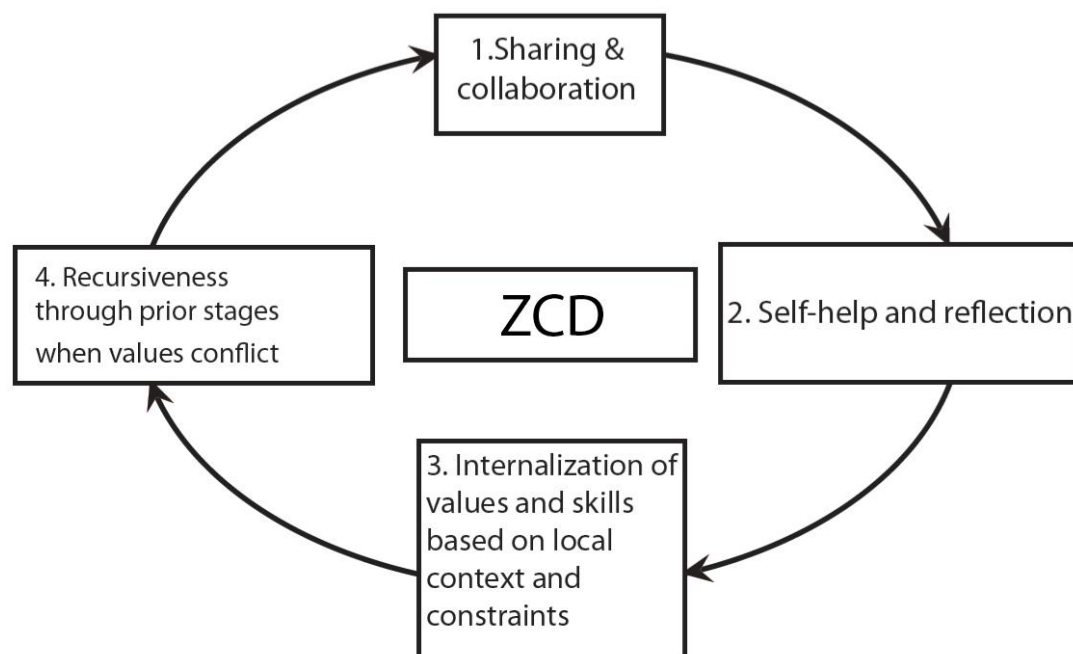


Figure 4.2: Process in Zone of Collaborative Development (ZCD).

The strength of ZCD is that the characteristics of collaboration are applied at every stage. After experiencing the ZPD, students are left on their own to face recurring dilemmas. In ZCD, the cycles of discussion make it feasible for students to come back together as a group, collaborate and proceed with moral actions where applicable. ZPD is focussed on mental cognition whereas ZCD also includes emotions and actions to complement the ME philosophy in Malaysia (see 1.4). Collaboration is the key point here and students share their experiences and knowledge and obtain help from capable peers to resolve the real-life moral dilemmas. They might progress or regress depending on the support from their peers.

### 4.9.1 Sharing and collaboration

The process of ZCD begins with building a safe environment for the students (see 11.4.2.4). Then it proceeds to the sharing and collaboration phase. Students share their real-life moral dilemmas and collaborate with their groups to analyse the conflicts from different perspectives. Capable peers help in bringing the discussions to greater heights. Moral thinking and moral feeling are integral to this phase.

Here too, social and cultural differences are evident and each and every opinion is as important as the other. Based on their experience and fund of knowledge the capable peer - who may be an individual, a group, or the teacher - would have skills to resolve any conflict that may arise.

### 4.9.2 Self-help and reflection

The second phase of ZCD begins when individual students start their own reflections and provide self-help. This has the effect of incorporating into ME the religious or cultural dimension based on the background of the students; until now strangely and sadly lacking in the literature. Each student has their own capacity to reflect and this is given priority in ZCD. The reflection process enables students to use their moral reasoning to think through moral choices and moral actions.

The reflective phase also allows students to compare and contrast resolutions suggested, resolutions applied, and future resolutions needed to be taken in order to be accepted as moral individuals. It is an important phase because differences in values and orientations are likely to disturb thoughts and emotions, but because of the earlier collaboration and cooperation phase, students are also in a better position to reflect upon the conflicts.

### 4.9.3  Internalisation of values and skills based on local context and constraints

The third phase of ZCD is the internalisation of values and skills based on local context and constraints. Without being sensitive to local context and constraints, moral actions can be ambiguous because as I mentioned in Chapter One, morality is very subjective and differs according to different cultures and ethnic groups. When values are internalised and skills are absorbed during the process of ZCD, students become aware of such differences and able to apply skills based on these differences.

I hope that my research would encourage students to take moral actions based on their previous experience in the two phases above. Every dilemma faced would be different and unique in its own way.

### 4.9.4  Recursiveness through prior stages when values conflict

The processes in this final phase in ZCD are applicable even when students are by themselves. It provides an opportunity for students to put into action what they have acquired and bring the ME philosophy of moral thinking, moral feelings, and moral action into perspective. The skills and knowledge acquired from capable peers may be applied directly or indirectly. At times these may not be applicable but the processes of collaboration, self-help, and internalisation of values can help the students face other moral dilemmas. They can ask for suggestions from groups of friends or other authorities. They can practice self-reflection and they can apply the ZCD in any other context.

These cycles of ZCD repeat themselves every time a moral conflict is discussed. Vygotsky (1978) related that development of individuals contributes to the collective development of those around them. It is essential that

developing collaborative relationships is considered in ME for secondary schools for Malaysia as it makes students understand both local and global contexts.

In the following chapter, I introduce my research methodology (PAR), discuss reliability/validity problems in PAR, and identify ethical considerations, I also describe procedures in PAR, methods to be used in my research, sequences for PAR methods in ME in a Malaysian setting, and how I recruited my participants and challenges in conducting PAR in a Malaysian ME classroom.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**Participatory Action Research in the Study of Moral Education**

**5.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the rationale for using participatory action research (PAR) - a form of action research - and describes the characteristics of PAR as used in my research, including problems of validity and reliability. It also describes the ethics for the research and methodology of PAR that I designed and implemented. The sequence of using PAR methods in ME in a Malaysian context and how participants were recruited is included. The chapter concludes with challenges that I foresee, such as translation and transcribing.

**5.2 Participatory Action Research**

The methodology I used for my research is PAR. Though it is spiral in nature, PAR differs from action research because it is undertaken collaboratively by co participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998). This collaborative social process of learning is described by Habermas (1994) as an open communicative process realised by people who collaborate to change the practices through which they communicate in a shared social world, and where they live with the consequences of one another's actions. PAR is a significant methodology for intervention, development, and change within communities and groups. PAR integrates research and action, and with the appropriate tools and information everyone is a researcher (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1996).

PAR is a recognised form of research that prioritises the effects of the researcher's direct actions of practice within a participatory community - in my case the ME students - with the goal of improving the performance quality of the community or an area of concern (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; McNiff, 1988; Hult & Lennung, 1980). According to Wadsworth (1998), PAR involves concerned parties analysing current action which is considered problematic in order to improve it. PAR hopes for action which is researched, changed, and re-

researched by participants within the research process. With regards to my research I hope the outcomes will enable the improvement of teaching of ME in Malaysian secondary schools.

Within a PAR process, people create knowledge which is simultaneously a tool for the education and development of consciousness as well as mobilisation for action (Gaventa, 1991). PAR is a participatory, democratic, practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). McTaggart (1997) used PAR to emphasise both authentic participation and relevancy of actions. Habermas (1987) is well-known for calling emancipation practice the life world (Kemmis, 2001; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003) where sharing power with poor and oppressed people gives voice to their decision-making and control to regenerate citizenship (Burgess, 1995; McKnight, 1987).

In my research, students are in the position of "oppressed" in the sense that they seldom had a chance to express their views, their problems, and their voices in the ME classroom. The underpinning ethic of open communication with the other (Habermas, 1987) contains a hope that the other will hold the same view. The process is also similar to the "just community" schools in America where students wrestled with everyday dilemmas, community decisions, empowering students, egalitarianism, caring community and democratic decision-making (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989). However, there are differences in the Malaysian situation such as ME framework, government policies and cultural differences. The hope in my research is that students will respond to ME and be part of the syllabus and be able to benefit from the ME subject not just cognitively but also through emotions and action. While students are always present in the ME classroom they are not heard. Information is not power but information that the students provide might be powerful. Boundaries become permeable membranes (Capra, 2002) where meanings and commitments flow between lives, and people perceive themselves not as separate entities (though still unique individuals) but as sharing the same life space as others (Whitehead, 2005).

Underpinning this research is the belief that understanding more about the unheard students voices in ME classes, and gathering information about students' real-life moral dilemmas and their way of resolving such dilemmas according to their individual and collaborative perspectives, might help organisational vision for a more meaningful ME syllabus. It is hoped that this kind of information may lead to more effective work in ME classrooms and result in power being shared - rather than relegated to the "experts" alone in a  top-down approach as it has been since ME was introduced in Malaysia.

### 5.2.1  PAR and Moral Education

PAR begins with issues that emerge from day to day living. PAR builds on Freire's critical pedagogy which responds to traditional formal models of education where the teacher stands at the front and imparts information to the students (Freire, 1986). In my research, students begin with their own real-life dilemmas, proceed through the process of PAR, and the expectation is that, with the help of capable peers as suggested by Vygotsky (1978), they might able to take action on resolving their own moral conflicts. PAR involves a broad range of community participants to choose the issue or problem that is within their sphere of influence. Kemmis (2001) speaks of opening communicative space for progressive mutual understanding, authentic engagement, and consensus on and about action.

Each phase of the unfolding inquiry process has iterative cycles of self-learning, reflection, and action (Heen, 2005; Koch, Mann, Kralik & Van Loon, 2005; Lewin & Greenwood, 2001). Throughout this study, students participate through active communication (Habermas, 1987) to mediate between the private concerns of their moral conflicts within self, familial, and social life contrasted to the demands and concerns of social and public life.

The process of PAR in this study uses several ideas of Habermas's (1987) model of communicative rationality that takes into account the effect of power sharing. He opposes the traditional idea of an objective and functionalist reason. Students involved in my research were offered the space to talk, discuss, and argue about how their real-life moral dilemmas can be resolved

within the constraints of a society with absolute cultural and historical norms (see 2.5). Students were invited to take charge of their own decisions.

Torre and Fine (2006) argue that PAR is a successful methodology for engaging the voice of youth in the classroom and service learning projects. ME objectives predict development in students undergoing ME though it is seen otherwise by students themselves (Prasad, 2006). My thesis aims to bridge this gap between theory and practice.

PAR has its critics. According to Chambers (1983), it is very difficult for PAR to fully extricate itself from the researcher-student relationship that in itself affects local power dynamics; usually a stronger person wanting to change things for a weaker person. In the Malaysian ME transformation, the notion of building students' capacity in the three moral domains (moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action) has always been the focus of the MOE, curriculum implementers, and academics. However, students have not yet been part of the process. In this case, the students are considered the weaker ones who need help from the stronger people, as argued by Berger and Chambers. Currently students lack a forum in which to represent themselves; PAR can help to a certain extent.

Chambers' critique carries weight but I argue in this thesis that students' participation in resolving their own real-life moral dilemmas provides an alternative avenue for them to engage in ME classes and achieve the desired outcomes of moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991) in a more meaningful way. The major challenge in my thesis was to design a process which could result in maximum creativity and imagination for teaching ME by combining ME approaches such as the cognitive development approach, values clarification approach, and character education approach (see Figure 3.1). The participatory process in my thesis is intended to trial a way for a new or alternative approach to the teaching of ME in the classroom in which students' voices are heard. It does not strictly follow the standard action research format of participation, followed by research, then action but comprises numerous tiny cycles of participatory reflection on action, learning about action, and then new informed action which is in turn the subject of further reflection (Wadsworth, 1998).

### 5.2.2   Characteristics of PAR relevant to the research

PAR includes several characteristics relevant for my thesis (Kemmis, 2001). Firstly, it is participatory. The aims of PAR are active involvement and shared power by participants, empowerment of participants, a commitment to action, and the researcher learning with participants (Hall, 1981; Brown, 1990). As researcher, I play the role of facilitator who encourages and asks leading questions to enable the students to proceed with their moral dilemmas resolution with the help of capable peers.

Secondly, PAR responds to a need for action. The students are encouraged to identify their own real-life moral dilemmas and address each dilemma to find resolutions. The research aims to be creative and transformative in that students, through the process of discussion, will try to reach their goal of resolving their own dilemmas with help from capable peers while continually reflecting on the usefulness of the process.

Thirdly, PAR creates knowledge that is useful and meaningful. My thesis is focussed on providing an avenue for students to be able to recognise ME as useful and meaningful. PAR provides the space for students in my research to analyse their real-life moral dilemmas and resolve them according to different perspectives but within the framework of ME in the Malaysian scenario. PAR recognises that knowledge is the meaning that students attribute to their experiences. PAR is therefore, reflexive about the creation of meaning. PAR requires the research team, which includes the students and myself, to question and reflect upon the purpose of the research here, asking: what are the real-life moral dilemmas they are facing, how do they describe the moral choices they make, what moral orientations do they use to solve the conflicts, how do peers help them, who benefits from it, and who uses it for what purposes?

PAR is also flexible and iterative. The shape and focus of the research may change as students focus and refocus their understandings of what is really happening and what is important to them. Throughout the process, students may identify new questions, and understandings and directions may arise and reshape the course of them solving their real-life moral dilemmas. The research

proceeds through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The assumption here is that when real-life moral dilemmas go through the PAR process, it will generate "possibility theory" instead of "predictive theory."

Why the use of real-life dilemmas in the PAR process? Gilligan (1982) claimed that the use of real-life moral dilemmas is more realistic for understanding the moral perspective of respondents. This is because decisions made by the students are decisions made for themselves and not for a third person. Therefore, real-life moral dilemmas - conflicts experienced and faced by students in their everyday life - can be used as a means of teaching ME, thus providing them with the tools to face dilemmas as students or later in life.  The use of real-life moral dilemmas is more meaningful because the students face such dilemmas in their daily lives. Based on complaints by students who have undergone ME (as described in Chapter Two), this might be an opportunity to view a different perception of ME students when their own real-life dilemmas become part of learning.

According to Smith, Willms, and Johnson (1997) there are several principles in PAR. First is the principle of intended transformation; the eventual achievement of equitable communities and societies based on values like justice, freedom, and ecological balance. Students in ME classrooms, through their application of real-life moral dilemmas hopefully can within their capacity and with help from capable peers be able to achieve the aims of ME.

The second principle is to develop a compassionate culture where participants care about each other and strengthen their commitment to a shared struggle, seek connections with each other, and build a sense of community, person, and place. This echoes one of the objectives of MEM (see 1.4) where the hope is that students will become moral citizens who care for their nation and themselves and be accepted within the society and globally.

The third principle of PAR is participation in cohesively dynamic processes of action-reflection (praxis) which are interactive and unique to each group. This is appropriate for my research where every real-life moral dilemma that students discuss is unique and the process will persist in time and proceed according to

its own cultural vision and political expectations until the proposed goals are reached.

PAR values people's current knowledge. PAR is based on the belief using participants' present reality as a starting point and building on it will be meaningful for the participants and the researcher. Believing that people's feelings, beliefs, and personal experiences are vital ways of knowing is the foundational assumption to my thesis. PAR also consciously produces new knowledge where, through the real-life moral dilemma discussions, students embark on a transformational path, making decisions, and taking on activities that are grounded in members' experiences. They seek new, in-depth understanding, using multiple - often creative - means for knowledge generation and documentation. Problem-posing as well as problem-solving techniques are used (Smith, Willms & Johnson, 1997).

### 5.2.3  Reliability/Validity problems in PAR and the planned research

Qualitative research is concerned with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The descriptions of "persons, places, and events have been the cornerstone of qualitative research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 69) including PAR and there is no one correct interpretation.  Wolcott (1990, 1995) argues that the term validity, which is over specified in one domain, has become complex and confusing because it is reassigned to another. He argues the absurdity of validity by developing an argument for no single correct interpretation. Donmoyer (1990) makes a similar argument rejecting traditional notions of generalisability for researchers in education and human services who are involved and concerned with individuals and meaning in their lives.

The notion that PAR researchers are actually co-learners and research with the participants creates the validity that all people are intellectuals who develop intricate philosophies - and in my thesis, moral philosophy - through lived experience. The authority here is Gramsci whose work is foundational to PAR and who argued that all people are intellectuals and philosophers. He provides the example of people taking their local knowledge from life experiences, and

using that knowledge to address changes and problems in society (Gramsci, 1971). The notion is similar in my thesis; students focus on their own real-life moral dilemmas and undergo a process of resolving such dilemmas and becoming moral individuals through that learning and experiential process.

Richardson (1994) offered the idea of crystallisation as a more effective way to analyse qualitative research designs. According to Richardson (1994), the crystal:

> …combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and alter, but are not amorphous… Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. (p. 522)

In this research project I apply several methods including dilemma analysis, participant observation in which journaling is a tool, and focus group discussions. I consider the usefulness of non-verbal gestures which might reveal thoughts and emotions not available in verbal data. Extra effort is required to ensure that the research is as complete as possible. The collection of data using crystallisation has required multiple tasks such as videotaping the entire research (after obtaining written consent from my participants), encouraging participants to use their own terms/language, transcribing the language used in the discussions, and later translating the whole data into English before I continue with the analysis process (see Table 6.1).

By consciously setting out to collect data and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, crystallisation is built into the ongoing data collection. During reflective sessions, students were provided the opportunity to validate their progress. Students were encouraged to raise, explore, and clarify ideas, emotions, and reactions during reflection cycles. At times, sessions were repeated to provide direction and maintain the planning cycle, creating expectations of trust, norms of participation, and a safe climate (Smith, Willms & Johnson, 1997).This process improves the validity of PAR

because it is based on real-life discussions and it happens as the PAR process proceeds.

## 5.3 Ethics in the research

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) differentiate between ethics in practice and procedural ethics. Procedural ethics are linked to compliance processes in conducting research (see 5.5.1) whereas ethics in practice refers to "everyday issues that occur while we conduct research" (Israel & Hay, 2006, p.140). This section focusses concurrently on ethics in practice and procedural ethics.

Three main categories of ethics are meta ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006). Metaethics deals with the logic or analysis of moral concepts (Nino, 1991; Proctor, 1998; Kimmel, 1988). Normative ethics provides the moral norms which guide or indicate what one should or should not do in particular situations (Israel & Hay, 2006). Applied ethics involves analysing how normative ethical theory can be applied to particular issues or specific situations and environment (Singer, 1993). My concern with this research is applied ethics with social ethics as my main focus. This is fundamentally important in research related to ME where the concern is not just with cognitive but also affective and moral action development.

### 5.3.1 Importance of ethics in my research

Discussion about research ethics is usually situated at the end of a methodology chapter. But because my research focusses on moral education, I argue that ethics is as important as the research itself particularly because I am using PAR as the methodology. Because of the focus on the holistic development of an individual in ME - including the cognitive, affective, and action moral domain - safe-guarding the participants at all times is equally important as carrying out the research.

Ethical behaviour may help assure a climate of trust in which researchers continue their socially useful labours (Jorgensen, 1971; Mitchell & Draper, 1982; Walsh, 1992). People may rely on researchers to recognise their needs and sensitivities if researchers act honestly and honourably. Participants will

consequently be more willing to contribute openly and fully in the research undertaken (Israel & Hay, 2006). Cultural insensitivity and incautious practice can lead to participants' withdrawal of support for social scientific research (Gibbs, 2001; Howitt & Stevens, 2005).

Researchers behave in ways that are right and virtuous both for the sake of those who put trust in them and their work, and for those who employ them, fund their research, and support their professional activities (Israel & Hay, 2006). On my part, I had to be ethical with my research and my participants to ensure the above. I had to build rapport (see 5.5.2) with the participants to establish that trust.

### 5.3.2 Ethics of care

My main focus here is based on ethics of care as proposed by Gilligan (1977, 1982) and later extended by Baier (1985), Held (1993), and Noddings (2003). The emphasis is on care, compassion, and relationships. My concern is with PAR participants' relationships with one another and the importance of context and nurturing relationships (Friedman, 1998). Beauchamp and Childress (2001) state that "Gilligan held that ethics of care has no central moral principle, caring refers to care for, emotional commitment to, and willingness to act on behalf of persons with whom one has significant relationships" (p. 369). Ethics of care is central to my research; students may rely on each other for support, or externally if the group lets them down, and the dilemma analysis takes the same approach.

### 5.3.3 Procedural ethics versus ethics in practice

In the initial stage of my research, I had to conform to procedural ethics such as gaining approval from Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee which sets a number of guideline for research conducted with human subjects; since I am in this institute I must abide by their conditions (see Appendix A). Then gaining permission from the Malaysian Educational Planning Unit followed since the research was to be conducted in Malaysian secondary schools (see Appendix B). Following these two approvals, I required further approval from the Perak and Selangor state educational directors and also the

Kuala Lumpur federal director because my research was to be held in those two states and one federal territory. Then, to complete the procedural ethics process, I needed to get approval from the principals of the schools and the Head of Moral Department.

Ethics in practice is where a project both shapes and is shaped by an ethic of care (see 5.3.2). Students were invited to be part of the PAR research group. To ensure the safety and confidentiality of all parties involved in the research, students and their parents were informed (see Appendix C) and given consent letters (see Appendix D) to read and sign. However, this is not sufficient. Morse and Richards (2002) argue that:

> Participants' rights include the following; the right to be fully informed about the study's purpose and about the involvement and time required for participation, the right to confidentiality and anonymity, the right to ask any questions of the investigator, the right to refuse to participate without any negative ramifications, the right to refuse to answer any questions and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also have the right to know what to expect during the research process, what information is being obtained about them, who will access to that information, and what it will be used for. (p. 205)

I ensured all the above were implemented carefully. To a large extent concerns about research ethics revolve around various issues of harm, consent, privacy, and the confidentiality of data (Punch, 2000). The fact that my research involved the students' real-life moral dilemmas was of great concern to me and to my thesis. As Babbie (1983) points out that as researchers we consider ourselves ethical though not perfect. But I was hopeful that through the "ethics of care" approach and the working agreement (WA) developed by each group, matters of daily ethics would be resolved.

### 5.3.4  Problem of assuring group confidentiality and working agreement design

Two matters of ethics needed attention in designing group confidentiality and the WA.  My role as a PAR researcher required me to provide a safe and conducive environment for the focus groups that I was working with and also to safeguard the process and products of the PAR. Students were given an

information sheet, a written consent form (individual and group), and developed a WA with me as the researcher which was to be of effect throughout the research process.

I spent time with the focus groups to emphasise and clarify matters of confidentiality and to finalise the WA to everyone's satisfaction. The WA was based on students' suggestions and formulated each initial at this meeting. It contained their own suggestions for what was expected of every group member during the PAR process. It was a document agreed upon by all group members before the analysis of the moral dilemmas begins.

Each student was free to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Ensuring anonymity for participating students requires more than merely changing their names (Morse & Richards, 2002). Although the "owner" of the dilemma would obviously know the dilemma was theirs, no one else would be able to identify the owners because dilemmas were written with pseudonyms.

During the briefing and ice-breaking session, I clearly explained the procedures in the research. The PAR process focusses on power sharing and openness in order to build trust between the researcher and focus group members. For example, the construction of a WA with the students before the cycles of real-life moral dilemma discussion began; the opportunity to re-visit and re-negotiate the WA; the requirement for students to type out their dilemmas to ensure anonymity and confidentiality; students' use of pseudonyms at the end of the given problem; strictly no use of real names to ensure a safe group discourse; allowing students to invent scenarios that reflect aspects of real-life dilemmas they are facing; and the possibility of accessing an external counsellor if participants feel the group is not working for them.

Since MEM is within the law and constitution, students were informed that it was the moral obligation of the researcher to report to authorities if matters concerning law arose. I explained to students the content and purpose of consent letters before they agreed to be part of the PAR team. Students had the

opportunity to discuss the study with their parents/care-takers and seek permission to participate in study.

## 5.4    Methodology of PAR

As one begins visualising how the research project will "unfold, cascade, roll, and emerge" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 210), one must also imagine what the data will look like. Using PAR as my approach, I planned to collect data using crystallisation (Richardson, 1998). Mills (2003) recommends the integration of triangulation into action research designs but I decided to challenge myself by also applying Richardson's notion of crystallisation which recognises the many facets of any given approach to the real-life social world. I draw on several method traditions in my PAR research. Based on the suitability of the different methods, I use dilemma analysis, participant observation which entails journaling as a tool, and focus group discussion.

### 5.4.1  Using moral dilemmas

According to Murrell (2007):

> Dilemmas are different from problems. Dilemmas involve choices in which each alternative has both positive and negative aspects. Resolving the dilemma of diversity is not a matter of coming up with a solution, as one would do solving a problem. Resolving a dilemma is a matter of determining whether your favoured choice has enough of the positive such that you can live with the negative. (p. 22)

However, moral dilemmas (see 3.3.1) are different from any other general dilemmas. They can be divided into hypothetical moral dilemma (see 3.3.2) and real-life moral dilemmas (see 3.3.3). Moral dilemmas are conflicts faced by individuals, society, and nations when facing clashes of values (Vishalache, 2008a). Moral dilemmas involve finding resolutions based on moral principles accepted by the local community. According to Gilligan (1982), moral dilemmas are more complex than hypothetical ones. From the Malaysian perspective, I believe that moral dilemmas exist due to clashes in values, belief systems, rules and regulations of the state, needs, traditions, culture and different individual and group perspectives.

In a diversified country like Malaysia, students in secondary schools face moral dilemmas daily in their lives. Not only do they have to see the positive and negative aspects of dilemmas as stated by Murrell above, but they must also react to these within the constraints and local culture as described in Chapter Two and clarified above. Dilemma analysis brings into focus respondents' reactions to situations that they cannot resolve; that is, dilemmas (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Finch (1987) used vignettes to discuss family obligation for caring and found that participants respond firmly about the responsibilities and challenges of vignette characters. In my research, the students' focus on real-life moral dilemmas are focussed one at a time which produces a thematic coherence that does not depend upon academic theories or hunches of the researcher (Winter, 1989).

Using hypothetical dilemmas, Kohlberg (1984) used this method to generate a theory of moral development. Gilligan (1982) critiqued Kohlberg's theory and methodology arguing that the theory was gender-biased and she devised data collection strategies that were more contextualised and more attuned to real-life. The real-life analysis in my thesis is based on the students' real-life moral dilemmas which were typed out with a pseudonym to safe-guard their confidentiality (see 5.3.4).

Moral dilemma analysis can be dilemma-laden, too (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As in the Heinz example, participants may not take the situation seriously and the data may reflect that. But the use of real-life dilemmas which the students themselves are facing justifies my rationale for using real-life moral dilemmas. The use of real-life moral dilemmas that the students provide in my research focusses on them as individuals in a group in the ME classroom. It focusses on their perspectives of undergoing the process in PAR to resolve the conflicts identified.

Methodological focus is on people's subjective experiences (May, 1997) meaning the focus is on how students "make up" the social world by sharing meanings and how they "get on" with each other (inter subjectivity) (p. 38). This is vastly different from the usual norms of resolving hypothetical moral dilemmas in the everyday ME classroom. The real-life dilemma discussion

process does not seek to find solutions to the real-life moral dilemmas beyond students' conceptions and everyday practices, but how truth is formed in a relationship between knowledge and power in social practices (Foucault, 1980, Barrett, 1991).

Habermas (1973, 1989) developed a theory to "diagnose the ills of society and form part of the process of understanding and explanation that has implications for political actions" (May, 1997, p. 37). According to Habermas (1984, 1987), there is potential for change in what he calls an ideal-speech situation in which individuals would discuss matters in a rational way, free from constraints and power relations and reach a consensus about the world and their lives. Pinker (1971) argues that social theory should be based upon what the members of society actually believe, not what the theorist tells them they ought to believe (May, 1997). I attempt to work towards dialogic retrospection which is defined as an open and active exchange between the researcher and participant in a partnership of co-research (Humm, 1989).

Part of the moral dilemma analysis in this study requires students to keep their own conflict resolution journal, in which they reflect on the research process. Keeping a conflict resolution journal is a rigorous documentary tool (Janesick, 1994). The students keep journals as do the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I also encouraged students to use techniques such as mind mapping, short essays, notes, and other ways to express themselves freely, appropriate to the PAR process.

### 5.4.2 Using modified form of participant observation

Participant observation is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data-gathering method (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Observation in PAR is ethnographic and will provide a picture of the process of using the real-life dilemmas offered the participants during the study. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), participant observation is a process for the notion of developing an understanding that is association based and scientific, where the researcher communicates and forms a many-sided, long-term relationship with a human association in participants' natural setting.

Gold (1977) identifies four options for researchers in the process of collecting field notes. The first is as complete participant who attempts to engage fully in the activities of the group. Second is participant as observer who adopts an overt role and makes her or his presence and intentions known to the group. Third is observer as participant. Fourth is to completely observe the participants without them knowing. I undertake the second role where I attempt to create relationships with the students such that they become respondents and informants (Denzin, 1978) and part of the PAR process.

### 5.4.2.1   Field notes and journals

In this study, observations were recorded by me, the researcher, in the form of field notes and journals. Students' journals are used to complement my own journal and note-taking.   As participants completed cycles of action and reflection, I was reflexive by regularly returning data to participants and critically reflecting on the developments of the research.   As Denzin (1994, p. 509) states; "A critical text is judged by its ability to reveal reflexively these structures of oppression as they operate in the world of lived experience". Some of the aspects of this method are first-hand involvement in the research setting, where the researcher is able to hear, see, and experience reality as the participants do. In this study, my sharing of my own moral dilemmas contributes to that. Such immersion allows the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from the experience.

Personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group, because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Glesne, 1999). My own reflective journal enabled me to record both what had happened, and also my reflections on what had happened. By observing my ME students throughout the research and also analysing the other data collection methods, I gathered insights into how the students react to resolving their own moral-dilemmas with the aid of friends and how they react to use of PAR in the ME classroom.

### 5.4.2.2   Audio and video recording

Video and other multimedia are used these days to "generate evidence from data" (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 74). They are very powerful because they help to capture the nature of reality which at times cannot be captured in words. According to Morse and Richards (2002), videotaping is becoming more commonly used in observational settings because cameras now seem less intrusive to participants and fear among researchers that the presence of the cameras causes participants to change behaviour is lessening. Videotapes also allow the researcher to review, examine, and re-examine the discussions slowly and even frame by frame. The use of non-verbal communication, possibly significant to my analysis, can be captured through the use of audio. However, to safeguard their rights and safety, specific permission was obtained from participating students (see 5.3).

Audio recording of natural conversations are typically used by conversational analysts as the sole source of data (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). Erickson and Mohatt (1988) describe their efforts to uncover cultural organisations of participation structure in classrooms. In my research, I assumed the use of audio and video should prove to be important and useful in capturing cultural aspects and body gestures which are not evident in words.

### 5.4.3   Using focus group methods

The focus group may be defined as "an interview style designed for small groups" (Berg, 2004, p. 123). Using focus groups, researchers strive to discover how truth is formed (Foucault, 1980) through discussion about psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes among various groups (Basch, 1987). Focus group interviews comprise either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher (Edmunds, 1999). Krueger (1994) suggests that for complex problems focus group size should be kept to no more than about seven participants.

A typical focus group consists of "a small number of participants under the guidance of a facilitator, usually called the moderator" (Berg, 2004, p. 123). The

informal atmosphere of the focus group interview structure is intended to "encourage participants to speak freely and completely about behaviours, attitudes, and opinions they possess" (Berg, 2004, p. 123). Focus groups that are administered properly are dynamic. Interactions among and between group members stimulate discussions in which one group member reacts to comments made by another. This group dynamism has been described as a synergistic group effect (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain:

> In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion. (p.140)

The advantages of a focus group is that it is highly flexible; permits observation of interactions; allows researchers to access substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, experiences, and attitudes; produces speedy results; samples a large population at a fairly low cost; is able to assess transient populations; and places participants on a more even footing with each other and the investigator (Berg, 2004). However, the disadvantage of the focus group is that it produces substantially less data than individual interviews (Fern, 1982) and it is not necessary for the group to reach consensus in their decision (Lichtman, 2006). It is a challenge especially when discussing sensitive issues but the ethics of care among group members should help address that short coming. Since my research focusses on the process of using real-life dilemmas ME, rather than content, the production of less data is not regarded as a problem. As the process proceeds, data unfolds. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990):

> The contemporary focus group interview generally involves 8 to 12 individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and assures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest…. A typical group session will last one and a half to two and a half hours. (p. 10)

To get a real representation of a ME classroom, participants in my study encompass different ethnic groups. They are of Chinese, Indian, Sikh, or any other non-Muslims who represent the ME cohort group.

Participants in the focus group should have opportunities to describe their experiences and present their perspectives on the issues discussed. Carefully devised question relevant to the research are asked to ensure students express their experience and perspective in their own terms, without the constraints of interpretive frameworks derived from the researcher perspective (Stringer, 2007).

Moser and Kalton (1983) suggest three necessary conditions for successful focus group interviews: accessibility, cognition, and motivation.

In this study, it was important that I, as moderator, was flexible when students expressed themselves in the focus groups and that the WA spell out how this expression could be done within students' most comfortable and natural way. The focus group was not simply a passive means of providing information; students role-played social encounters. The use of their own real-life moral dilemmas was intended to provide them with the sense of responsibility to take charge and be active participants. It was important that I, as, researcher, made the students feel that their participation and answers were valued and that their co-operation was most important to the conduct of the research

### 5.4.4  Usefulness of non verbal gestures

Due to the cultural diversity and differences in communicating with one another, I include the use of non-verbal gestures as part of my methodology and analysis. Non-verbal gestures differ from culture to culture and are worth analysing in my PAR cycles of discussion. As mentioned in 2.3, non-verbal gestures can cause confusion and threat between cultures. Thus, it was expected that considering non-verbal gestures would help to unfold issues not explicit in verbal data.

## 5.5    Sequence for PAR methods in MEM

The study is divided into five phases as suggested by Park (1993) who sees PAR as a process of recovery and discovery which "provides a framework in which people seeking to overcome oppressive situations can come to understand the social forces in operation and gain strength in collective action" (p. 3). Park's framework of PAR has been blended with my own suggestion of a PAR research for the purpose of obtaining the ideal framework for the study. The phases have been adapted and adjusted according to the Malaysian classroom setting. Below is a brief visual overview of the whole PAR process used for this study.

| PAR Process | |
|---|---|
| Phase | Brief description |
| 1 | Approval and recruitment of participants |
| 2 | Rapport building with my PAR participants |
| 3 | Problem formulation by my PAR participants |
| 4 | Procedures<br><br>Real-life moral dilemma discussions - within this phase there are reflective cycles at the end of each real-life dilemma discussion<br><br>For example:<br><br>Moral Dilemma 1<br><br>-      Real-life dilemma discussion (Cycle 1)<br><br>-      Reflection/Journal writing<br><br>-      Real-life dilemma discussion (Cycle 2)<br><br>-      Reflection/Journal writing |
| 5 | Reflective cycle<br><br>Final reflective cycle based on the whole PAR research process |

Table 5.1: A brief overview of the research design.

### 5.5.1 Approval and recruitment of participants

Phase One is the most challenging and innovative phase where I analyse existing knowledge and create new avenues to proceed with my thesis. "Where there is little shared life, participatory research must first create a community base before it can do collective investigation, not to speak of action and reflection" (Park, 1993, p. 18-19). After my proposal and ethics application was accepted by Victoria University of Wellington, it was necessary to explain the purpose of my research and obtain permission from the Education Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department in Malaysia (where my proposal underwent another ethics committee approval process) to conduct my research. I then proceeded to the State Education Department for ME and school administrators, requesting permission to conduct my research in the chosen schools. Next, I dealt with the school principals, ME teachers and students in the ME cohort.

Since the Malaysian school system has three different kinds of secondary schools – that is, all boys, all girls and co-educational - I conducted one PAR research (see Table 5.1) in each of the three different types of school. Participants had undergone nine years of formal ME, belonged to a certain ethnic group and came from families with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Before going to the assigned schools, I communicated virtually with the principals and ME teachers to inform them of my forthcoming research. The PAR process began when I made my first visit to schools as described in the phases above. The selection of participants was based on students' free will but because I wanted a good representation of the different ethnic groups studying ME, I needed to ensure that my PAR groups consisted of Chinese, Indian, and other non-Muslim students. Choice of participants also depended on the demographical setting of the school (see Chapter Six). Students wanting to participate in the study were provided with the information sheet (see Appendix C) and the informed consent letter (see Appendix D). Students were briefed about the research generally and provided sufficient time to share with their

parents or guardians the whole notion of the research and decide on whether to be part of the research team.

### 5.5.2  Rapport building with my participants

The second phase is to ensure the establishment of a safe environment for the students to work within - with other participants and with the researcher. Once students understood the information sheet, gained permission from their parent/guardians, and signed and returned the informed consent letter to me, the sessions proceeded. We began with introductions and a briefing session explaining the purpose of the research. Time was spent on mutual introductions involving the use of ice-breakers or a short introductory game.  There were opportunities for participants to withdraw at this point or at any cycle of the PAR process. From this moment until the next meeting, I communicated with participants via email and phone to build rapport with them. After a period of time when I felt the students were ready to sit together I called for the next session.

At this session, I worked with participants to develop a WA to ensure they felt safe and comfortable enough with each other to participate in the research (see 5.3.4). Participants were first asked to discuss in pairs what they would like from the group and to write this down in point form. This was collected and discussed with the group as a whole. The WA was intended to allow students to decide what would constitute a safe environment for them and how to deal with any difficulties that arose. See Appendix E for a sample WA.

When all participants were satisfied with the content of the WA, it was type-written and signed by everyone. It was made clear that participants could re-visit and re-negotiate any conditions as the group progressed.

Since the focus groups were made up of a diverse group of students from different ethnicities and gender, it was important for me as researcher to be able to communicate effectively with them and for them to communicate freely with their peers in the group. Use of several languages was allowed to create a more at-ease environment. Being multi-lingual helps me to probe the students but transcribing would be a challenging task as explained later in this chapter.

However, use the use of many languages was also important for the group to work as a whole.

To create the conditions for group learning, all participants including myself agreed on a constitution for collaboration, repeating cycles of discussing real-life moral dilemmas and reflection to generate learning in relation to ME and also reflecting on focus group processes. In acting on the process of using real-life moral dilemmas in learning ME, it was proposed that the research group put plans and designs into practice, keeping a reflective journal, respecting ownership of individual/group solutions, questioning and responding honestly, and practicing dialogue and reflection.

As a PAR researcher, it was my role to understand the process and experience; select suitable means and ways for interpreting diverse experiences; avoid common assumptions and question sensitive issues like clashing cultures and social norms; check validity by considering multiple perspectives and methods; and celebrate meaningful collaboration. Students were provided with tea and snacks in between cycles of PAR to allow for some space to celebrate and reflect upon the process they were undergoing.

### 5.5.3 Problem formulation

Following the students' introduction to each other and to the process, the study moved into the third phase where students were given time to think of a real-life dilemma which they were currently experiencing. To ensure that students wrote their own real-life moral dilemmas and not other dilemmas, I decided to carry out one or two cycles of analysing real-life moral dilemmas based on my own position as a researcher, sharing one of my own real-life moral dilemmas and allowing them to share their views on it. To enable the group to identify and understand individual perceptions of the real-life dilemmas that I was facing, I introduced problem-posing techniques and dialogue. This also provided an example of what a real-life moral dilemma could be.

Students were given the option of presenting a dilemma which was not from their private lives, but which they had encountered through discussions with

friends/media. Any dilemma which was "alive" for the students was assumed to provide sufficient material for the following process.

After providing time for students to reflect, they were asked to type out their real-life moral dilemmas. In schools with facilities such as a computer lab, students were allowed to use those facilities. Others used my lap top to key in their dilemmas. To protect privacy and confidentiality, students used pseudonyms in their real-life moral dilemmas. In these sessions I, the researcher, tried to be sensitive to students' privacy and allow them ample time to reflect and write out their dilemmas.

Since dilemma analysis would be one of the methods used to collect data, students were encouraged to write in detail all the information that they wanted to express. Students were asked to keep a conflict resolution journal to express their individual views or anything else which they missed out during the dilemma analysis and which might be too sensitive to share. The journal writing was an on-going activity for the students to express their personal views. Students were asked to write in the journal at the end of each session and encouraged to take the journal back home to reflect on the PAR process and express what they had learnt from it. I also had my own journal to write my observations, my reflections, and anything that was relevant to the research process.

### 5.5.4  Procedures

The fourth phase comprises the real-life moral dilemmas discussion and resolution according to the students' perspective. Participating students were taken to the room allocated by the school for the research.  In these sessions I distributed the typed up dilemmas and allowed time for students to read them and to understand the issues and the conflicts in them. Students were reminded again of the terms of the working agreement; that no names would be mentioned (see 5.3).

Students discussed the matter in *Bahasa Melayu* (the official language in which MEM is conducted) or any other language that was understood by the focus group. I observed the students and only interfered if the discussion needed further questioning or became too emotional.

Examples of investigative questions are given below:

---

1. Is there another way to solve the problem?

2. Is there a way to solve the dilemma so that all parties involved will be satisfied?

3. What do you think of that?

4. How do you think someone who solved the problem in that way would think about the problem?

5. Is there a rule you could use to solve the problem?

6. What is at stake for you in the conflict?

7. How do your friends help when you are in a moral dilemma?

8. What is your priority when you make a certain decision?

9. How do you feel about this process?

- about the problem etc.

---

Table 5:2: Examples of investigative questions for the PAR cycles.

When everyone had had their say, students pasted the dilemma into their journals and began writing in their journals; their resolutions, their feelings, and whatever their emotions were at that moment. When discussions did not bring any resolutions, students continued a next cycle based on the same dilemma, after which individual reflection and journal entry also took place.

Students then repeated the same process for all rest of the moral dilemmas. The number of moral dilemmas depended on the number of participants. However within each dilemma analysis, there were several PAR cycles to analyse and find alternatives to resolve the conflict discussed. As agreed upon when students and researcher developed the WA in the beginning of the

research (see 5.3.4), students were encouraged to take a break if they became tense or tired

Depending on the time and the depth of discussion, I, as facilitator took note and ensured that everyone's dilemma got a fair chance to be discussed. Based on my pilot study carried out in an all girls secondary school, each dilemma takes about 25-35 minutes to discuss, depending on the type of dilemma and the intensity of the discussion group. Once all the dilemmas were discussed, students returned to their normal classroom until a few days later when they met for one final reflective cycle.

### 5.5.5 Reflective cycle

The fifth phase is a reflective phase. After a few cycles of dilemma analysis and self-reflection as well as journal entries based on all the moral dilemmas presented, students met for a final cycle to reflect upon what the PAR process meant to them and how it had influenced their perspective about real-life moral dilemmas and the implications of using such a method to study ME in the classroom. Towards the end of the research, students viewed the selected video and listened to the audio to ensure face validity and to allow them to make changes to their decisions based on their reflection and moral actions taken during the PAR research process.

In the reflective session, students were encouraged to express their views of the PAR process and what moral action they took based on the dilemma analysis. Students were asked to describe the role of their peers in helping to resolve their real-life moral dilemmas. They were also asked to describe the implications of using such a method in the ME classroom. Furthermore, I also shared my own journal reflection and what I had observed throughout the PAR process. Students were also able to share their experiences based on the PAR process and any action taken based on the discussions.

The process and products of research can be of direct and immediate benefit to those involved, but this study asked students to describe the effects of the PAR process upon them and their peers. Students were encouraged to talk about the use of real-life moral dilemmas as a way of dealing with moral dilemmas and a

tool to teach ME in the classroom, how they evaluate the whole research process from their own perspective as students, and if they felt their voices were heard. Examples of questions asked:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | How was the process for you? |
| 2. | Did you find it helpful? |
| 3. | Were you able to resolve your "problem"? |
| 4. | What were the helpful things that other students said? |

Table 5.3: Examples of reflective questions for the PAR reflective cycle.

## 5.6    Other challenges encountered when conducting PAR in a ME classroom

I understand from the beginning that to get students for my research would be a challenge on its own. Realising the assumptions and thoughts of students about ME in secondary school, I hoped students would volunteer themselves for the research rather than be chosen by their ME teachers.

### 5.6.1  Language

Though *Bahasa Melayu* is officially used to teach MEM in schools and I intended using *Bahasa Melayu* most of the time, students were free to use the languages they are most comfortable with. I knew that, depending on their cognitive and social ability, students from vernacular schools (Chinese and Tamil primary vernacular) might be more at ease when using other languages. I decided that if I could understand the different languages students wanted to use, I would gather consent from the group and proceed with the process (see 5.3). My ability to converse in several languages spoken in Malaysia, (*Bahasa Melayu*, English, Tamil, and a little Cantonese) was a distinct advantage in this

research. I helped translate for the rest of the group when students could not express in the commonly spoken language.

### 5.6.2 Transcription of tapes

The process of transcription of tapes is, by nature interpretive and is under increasing scrutiny (Poland, 1995). Allowing students to use other than *Bahasa Melayu* was a potential challenge when translating and transcribing the discussions and the interviews. There are clear advantages of allowing students to use languages they are comfortable in, so creating a space for them to analyse the moral dilemmas to the utmost of their capacity. The disadvantage is that each language is influenced by culture and discourse which is particular to that language and I needed to ensure that no important facts were omitted during the analysis process. I transcribed all the tapes in the language spoken before translating the whole discourse into English language (see Table 6.1).

Documenting dialogue is difficult but it demonstrates a caring "ethic that values individual uniqueness and the expression of emotionality in the text and seeks writers who can create emotional texts that others can enter into" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 510). It was important to ensure that the PAR process reveal and reflect the students' voices as closely as possible.

### 5.6.3 Participants' names and school

Participants were given codes like alphabets or numbers to prevent identification in the different schools. This was to avoid stereotyping of ethnic groups with real-life dilemmas that have been attached to them within the Malaysian society. It was also to safe-guard the confidentiality of students and to avoid guessing of ethnicity related to the real-life dilemmas. For ethical reasons, schools were given a pseudonym; these were based on the flora of Malaysia.

**5.7 Analysis**

Analysis of my PAR research was based on the PAR cycles that had taken place as well as other data collected from video recording, conflict journal extracts, and focus group discussions. The multiple methods used to collect data would provide a comprehensive picture to begin analysing the research question (see 1.6).

*5.7.1 How to analyse PAR data?*

Making data in a PAR study like mine is a "collaborative, ongoing process in which data are interactively negotiated by the researcher and participants; the data are rarely fixed and unchanging, never exactly replicating what is being studied" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p.87).The research question determines the nature or type of research context the researcher must select and also indicates the type of participants and the form of data (Morse & Richards, 2002). It is a cognitive process that requires tremendous investment on the part of the researcher. It requires extraordinary concentration, and it is the nature of the questions asked and the attention that the researcher gives to the participants that determine the quality of the data collected (Morse & Richards, 2002). Since I am using PAR, the nature of my analysis is embedded throughout the data collection.

Analysis of data will be shared continually with participants of the research. Data analysis contains three linked sub processes (Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1994); data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involves reducing data in an anticipatory way based on research questions, case, and instruments. Conclusion drawing or verification is drawn and made sense from displayed data.  These processes take place before data collection, during study design and planning, during data collection as early analyses are carried out, and after data collection as final products are approached and completed.

## 5.7.2   Content/Textual Analysis

The primary method of analysis for this study is content analysis which is also known as textual analysis. Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as any technique for making inferences and drawing conclusions by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. The textual analysis was used to develop understandings and find meanings in the actions and words or participants (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). My analysis focusses on the field notes, audio and video recordings, and participants' dilemma analysis journals (see 5.4). An initial textual coding scheme was developed after reading and studying the focus group transcripts. By this method I hoped to collect some good, rich data for the process (see Table 6.1).

What is good data? The collection of good data requires the best possible collaboration with the participants (Morse & Richards, 2002). To ensure it is believable, trustworthy, and credible, from time to time I needed to share whatever I collected with my participants (Sandelowski, 1986). The researcher must find the right way to share with the participants what he or she is studying - not only for ethical reasons, but so the participants may trust and help the researcher (Morse & Richards, 2002). According to Morse and Richards, good data are focussed, have density, and are developed in careful recognition of participants' perspectives. Reflexivity is required by both myself as a researcher and within my PAR groups.

Reflexivity is the idea of being aware of one's own values, ideas and pre-judgements as a researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Since my focus is to enable students' voices to be heard in the teaching of ME, I have had to carefully capture the whole process to ensure rigour (check and balance between me, the researcher and the participants), reflexivity (maintain an openness in the PAR process), iteration (be able to move back and forth between data collection and data analysis), and maintain analytical memos at all times. "Data transformation" is seen as information that is condensed, clustered, sorted, and linked over time (Gherardi & Turner, 1987). In my case, I needed to continually share with my participants the importance of their

existence in the research and how important the whole process is to the research and to all involved in the research.

### 5.7.3  Crystallisation of analysis

Since my method of data collection used crystallisation (see 5.4), the same applies to analysis of data. In analysing several perspectives, the notion of reliability and validity were taken care of (see 5.2.3). It is very rare for data in PAR to be collected all in one go, then processed and analysed. The fact that participants were able to go through my transcription of the whole focus group and view the video recording enabled them to make changes if necessary and provided them with the sense of empowerment; this is the notion of the whole thesis. The analysis of other data (see 5.4.1-5.4.4) also provided believable, credible, and trustworthy analysis.

### 5.7.4  Fluency

To analyse text for meaning, I have to be fluent in the language(s) that my participants use. Not only the formal language but also the colloquialisms and the interchange of words in different language used in the process were recorded. The task of listening to more than one language brings its own challenges and diversity (see 5.7.1).

To gain an understanding of participants' motives, meanings and behaviours, required me to build rapport with them (see 5.5.2) and to clarify the different colloquial terms used for the purpose of communicating, reporting, and translating. The ability to understand and speak multiple languages on my part is a distinct added advantage for this study. Coming from a mixed parentage family (see 1.1), I had the opportunity to build my language and cultural sensitivity skills. The use of different languages, as encouraged during the PAR discussion would provide rich data to analyse.

### 5.7.5  Analysing non verbal gestures

As stated in 5.4.4, the use of body language was included in my analysis. Knowing that my students come from different ethnic groups, their body

gestures and non-verbal communication is worth analysing. I expected that being able to analyse the non-verbal gestures through the video recording would provide some insights based on moral thinking, feeling, and action. Non-verbal communication mainly constitutes (1) eye gaze, (2) facial expressions, and (3) gestures (Handel, Cahill & Elkin, 2007). These are expressions of emotions which I was able to observe and relate in the findings of my thesis. I also needed to identify the non-verbal gestures used within the cultural groups that my PAR students came from; this was challenging.

### 5.7.6  Ensuring the voice of the participants is heard

The whole notion of this thesis is to enable students' voices to be heard through the use of real-life moral dilemmas and resolving those dilemmas with the help of capable peers. Including representative quotations from the participants' talk to illustrate and make meaning was essential here. I analysed the data based on the research question and formulated themes of analysis (see 7.3).

In Chapter Six, I narrate my initial data collection process and the profile and setting of my three PAR research groups. The chapter details the demographics and setting of the different secondary schools that I researched. Other information includes the types of schools and participants that took part in my study. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the WA that we (researcher and participants) constructed as a group.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**Profile and Setting**

**6.1    Introduction**

The research was conducted in three different states in Peninsular Malaysia. Participating students were from three different types of secondary schools; all boys, all girls and co-educational. Once technical matters such as meeting the principals, ME teachers, and students were all completed, the research proceeded with some adjustments to accommodate time and logistics within the different schools. Because the students from one of the schools which I originally negotiated was busy with academic and co-curriculum activities and their own personal commitments, I had to agree to use a different all boys school.

**6.2    Setting**

I covered two states and one federal territory in Peninsular Malaysia where ME is taught to more than 50 percent of the students in secondary schools. The federal territory school was a boys school whereas the students from the two states were from the girls school and co-educational school. The notion of including the three different types of secondary schools is clarified and rationalised in Chapter Five (see 5.5.1).

*6.2.1  Demographic*

The types of schools in which I conducted my research also represent the different demographic settings. The map of Peninsular Malaysia (below) shows the physical location of the schools involved in my research.

Figure 6.1: Map of Peninsular Malaysia showing the location of schools.

(Note: In the two states and the federal territory in which I conducted my research there are several hundred secondary schools. Thus the confidentiality of the schools is protected.)

The school in Perak, which I call *Kekwah* (Chrysanthemum), is an urban school. Most students attending Kekwah live in the suburbs with a few coming from nearby villages and estates. Students come to school by public transport or are chauffeured by their parents.

The school in Selangor, which I call *Seri Pagi* (Morning Glory), is situated in a rural area. Though the town is developed, access to the outside world like the

cities is limited. Students here mostly walk to school or use the school bus and public bus services. Several students travel with their parents who are teachers or government office workers whose offices are located nearby to the school.

The third school is located in the centre of a federal territory where the hustle and bustle of life is at the maximum. I call this school *Orkid* (Orchid). Students in *Orkid* are exposed to city life and experience the latest developments in Malaysia. They come from diverse family backgrounds and economic status. Some live in bungalow houses and double storey terraces, others in flats or apartments, and several live in slum areas and the few shanty towns still existing on the outskirts of the federal territory.

### 6.2.2 Social

Most students from all three schools come from nuclear and extended family settings. They showed great competency in communicating with one another and with me, the researcher. They demonstrated open-mindedness and had their way of putting across their messages, ideas and opinions during the PAR process. Most of them can converse in *Bahasa Melayu* and English. However, because students from the rural school found it difficult to express certain personal opinions, I encouraged them to use either Cantonese or Tamil. I helped to translate to the others in the group.

### 6.2.3 Ethnicity and faith overview

The students are from the Indian, Chinese, and Punjabi ethnic groups. Two were from mix parentage families (Chinese-Indian and Punjabi-Indian). They belong to different faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism, and Taoism. Vygotsky (1986) argues that one's culture provides the basic tools for human transaction and managing daily psychological dilemmas. When the issues discussed were related to cultural aspects, my participants were able to express their own cultural perspectives and provide examples from their own culture focussing on certain moral-decision resolutions; these might not be familiar to the students from other cultures. However, they also shared a common culture which they had acquired over the media and internet.

As I reflected on the PAR cycles in the different schools, I realised that as well as ethnic culture, students also had commonalities and differences in social and "Malaysian adolescent culture". Thus, due to this complexity several different arguments, analyses, and enterprises - unique within the setting of Malaysian secondary schools - evolved within this programme of research.

## 6.3    Types of school and school ethos/culture

The three different types of secondary schools that I researched each have different school cultures and ethos. The way each school is administered reflects the culture and the ethos of the school. *Kekwah* and *Orkid* are missionary schools whereas *Seri Pagi* is a normal government school.

### 6.3.1   Seri Pagi



Figure 6.2: Illustration of *Seri Pagi*.

There are about 1500 students in *Seri Pagi,* a fully aided government school. Student life here is very structured by rules and regulations and this way of thinking is reflected in the WA developed by these participants (see Appendix F). Rules are rigid and certain traditional ways of disciplining students are maintained. For example, when I was there conducting my research, a group of Form Five students was caught playing truant outside the school. They were paraded onto the school assembly location, and photographed and videotaped with the whole school watching. I felt it was too embarrassing for 17 year-olds

to be publicly punished that way; when I spoke to the students in my research about it, they agreed that the treatment was harsh, but that they are used to the way disciplinary action is taken on those who break the school rules.

*Seri Pagi* students' concern with simple rigid rules was reflected when constructing their WA. They were concerned with clarity and values like punctuality for the research. For instance, one guideline, "Understand the moral conflict that would be discussed carefully. If we don't understand, then we shall ask Ms. Visha to explain further". They even had rules like, "Put your hand up when wanting to give a suggestion" later revised on the WA to "Raise our hands or give a cue when wanting to express an opinion".

*Seri Pagi* students are academically conscientious and stated, "Go back to class from time to time to find out if subject teachers are discussing important aspects for the coming examinations". Their concern for other members of the group is shown through, "Speak up and interact with every member of the group". Here it is like a "rule of law" stated for everyone which differs from *Kekwah* and *Orkid*.

*6.3.2 Kekwah*



Figure 6.3: Illustration of *Kekwah*.

*Kekwah* is an established school in the state of Perak. Students here are quite relaxed though the woman at the school guardhouse keeps an eye on them. Academic excellence is the main target of this school; students understood this culture and worked within the ethos of the school.

The participants from *Kekwah* were more concerned about relationships with other members of the group and devised several guidelines that emphasised this (see Appendix G). For example, there were calls for interaction with everyone, the need to feel comfortable throughout the process, to care about others' feelings, to protect others' secrets and confidentiality, and to be co-operative when discussing and resolving conflicts. But these participants were also concerned regarding their own individual rights as a member of the group. For example, guidelines such as, "Feel free to voice anything that concerns the issue being discussed", and, "Participants have the freedom to refrain from expressing opinions which are too personal/sensitive to themselves" show that much as the *Kekwah* students care about others, they also prioritise their own feelings as individuals within the interacting group.

This group of students developed the longest WA and kept to every guideline during the discussion sessions. For example, when a particular dilemma was discussed and some were feeling a bit restless, one participant asked permission to "take five" so that everyone could concentrate on what was being discussed. I thought that was both a very caring and conscientious act as the student later came and showed me the WA pointing out the "Need to care about others' feelings during discussions".

*6.3.3 Orkid*



Figure 6.4: Illustration of *Orkid*.

*Orkid* is a missionary school in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. There are about 2000 students in the school under quite a strict administrative regime. For example, during school hours, students who speak other than Malay or English are fined a certain amount of money. This practice has not only made the students proficient in both the languages but fights among students - arising from ambiguity and language conflict due to use of their own mother tongues like Chinese, Tamil, or Punjabi - have been reduced.

*Orkid* participants were simple, direct, and practical about regulations when it came to the WA (see Appendix H). They were straightforward and humorous. For example, they had regulations like "Listen and be listened to during discussions", "Be serious during discussion session though can joke once in a while" and "Be normal and treat the discussion as informal and friendly". They also included, "Trust your friends and be trusted when addressing confidential matters". They talked about being helpful to their friends and having a friendly atmosphere. Based on my written reflections, *Orkid* participants are very open and transparent. They could relate to anything and everything though they

comprised students from three different classes because ME classes in Malaysian secondary schools are always combined classes.

## 6.4   Participation

Students were invited to participate in my research, though before the initial meeting with them the direct gatekeepers who are their ME teachers had already informed them of my research generally.  Students who came to meet me were all keen to participate in the research though they all admitted bluntly that ME is a "boring subject". In spite of my informing them about the requirements of the research, including the discussion, writing in a conflict-resolution journal, keeping a personal dilemma journal, and sacrificing their after school time and weekends for the research, they were still keen to participate. Students were provided with snacks during the research process and given some tokens and a certificate of participation at the end of the research. Below is the description about the participants and research details:

| School | *Kekwah* | *Seri pagi* | *Orkid* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of participants | 8 | 8 | 6 |
| Gender | All girls | 4 boys, 4 girls | All boys |
| Age group (years) | 16-17 | 16-17 | 16-17 |
| Withdrew from research | None | None | None |
| Data gathered | Eight cycles of discussion and one final reflection through journals, field notes, audio and video recording | Eight cycles of discussion and one final reflection through journals, field notes, audio and video recording | Eight cycles of discussion and one final reflection through journals, field notes, audio and video recording |
| Transcription | Data collected was transcribed in the original form (Malay, English and mother tongue languages) and then translated into English language | | |
| Interpretation of data | Data was interpreted based on the themes verified (see Chapter Seven) | | |

Table 6.1: Description of participants, participating schools, data gathering, and analysis.

## 6.4.1 My reflection on the working agreement

It is interesting to analyse the WA at this stage because the students from the different schools had some common and some different rules that they set. All three PAR groups agreed to take breaks if discussion ever got too sensitive or too heated up and they voiced the fact that such opportunities were not provided in their normal classroom. Another interesting common factor was that all groups returned to the WA if there was anything they wanted to change. It is interesting to note that *Seri Pagi* participants renegotiated the original regulation of putting up their hands to just giving a cue when wanting to voice an opinion (see 6.3.1). This is the school which has strict administrative rules and where the disciplining of students is rigid and regimental.

All participants were excited to be part of the research as they could interact and at the same time be able to talk about their real-life moral dilemmas. Vygotsky emphasises the "dialectical relationship between the individual and the social, and the dependence on this relationship of the evolution of the culture and the development of the individual" (Lunt, 1994, p. 146). The participants in my PAR groups were all good communicators, though some were quiet, but as the cycles of PAR progressed, they became more active and the moral dilemma discussions were taken to different dimensions as everyone in each group participated and gave their point of view. They were also tactful regarding the differences that existed among them.

## 6.4.2 Interest

When I briefed the students, I explained their role as participants and my role as a researcher. I explained why I was interested in undertaking research on ME in secondary schools. The fact that I invited the students to use their own real-life moral dilemmas or any other real-life moral dilemmas that they were keen to discuss came as a surprise to them and they expressed immediate interest. They were also happy when I told them there was no need to memorise the moral values in the text book as they do in the normal ME classroom; rather they would discuss whatever values arose from the issues they themselves identified.

## 6.5     Students' real-life moral dilemmas/conflicts

In the next chapter, I describe the first issue involved in the research; the moral conflicts faced by the adolescents/participants. Here I use content analysis to analyse the types of moral conflicts faced by the students in my research and categorise them accordingly. To further validate the categories, I ask two independent authorities, a psychologist and a counsellor to confirm my final categories. Examples from focus group discussions are inserted throughout the following chapters to ensure that the voices of students are heard. Extracts from the participants' journal writing, my own observations, and phrases from my reflective journal are also inserted where and when it is appropriate.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**What are young people in Malaysia struggling with in order to become moral persons?**

**7.1    Introduction and surprises**

Young people in Malaysia face conflict when it comes to moral decision-making as there are so many factors to deal with. Moral conflicts which involve contesting ideas of what is right and wrong and good and bad becomes subjective according to the contextual complexities of the Malaysian educational realities. Students need to collaborate, negotiate their way through, and mediate between different values that inform different perspectives.

In the Malaysian context, many factors such as laws and regulations, tradition, ethnic culture, religion, and social norms need to be considered (see 2.5). Bruner (1996) characterises culture as a "toolkit of techniques" (p. 98) for coping with life situations. It is a challenge for adolescents in Malaysia to face daily moral dilemmas when they are pulled in so many different directions.

The students in the research were clear about what moral conflicts (see 3.3.1) were before reflecting upon the types of moral conflicts they faced or they knew that exist and would want further clarification on how to resolve those moral conflicts. Students were provided sufficient time to reflect upon one or two real-life moral conflicts which were disturbing and which they selected to share with their peers for discussion and direction.

**7.2    Factors affecting moral conflicts**

From their students' conflict journals students in my PAR identified several issues where values were in conflict. Pratt (1985) conducted a content analysis of his participants' dilemmas, categorising them as either relational or non-relational. He states that relational dilemmas focus on response and relationships, and non-relational focus on rights. In the real-life moral dilemmas presented by my research participants, all conflicts were relational. They were

conflicting relationships based on interpersonal or intrapersonal clashes in values and relationships. Using the distinction made by Walker, de Vries and Trevethan (1987), the real-life dilemmas were termed as relational - which includes an ongoing significant relationship - and non-relational, which involves persons whom the participants neither know nor are directly involved with.

Other than me, two independent raters (a developmental psychologist and a counsellor) were involved in generating the themes and the relational and non-relational dilemmas. Of the 22 moral dilemmas presented by my study participants, 19 dilemmas involved relational relationships with others whom they knew and 1 involved the environment which everyone is part of and 2 were not included as moral dilemmas. As far as my participants are concerned, they are more likely to identify relational than non-relational issues in their everyday dealings.

Later in the PAR cycles, students' voices reflected a consistency in relational values. This notion will be discussed thoroughly throughout the next few chapters.  Based on the moral dilemmas that the participants provided, several major themes emerged. These are identified in diagram 7.1 (below):
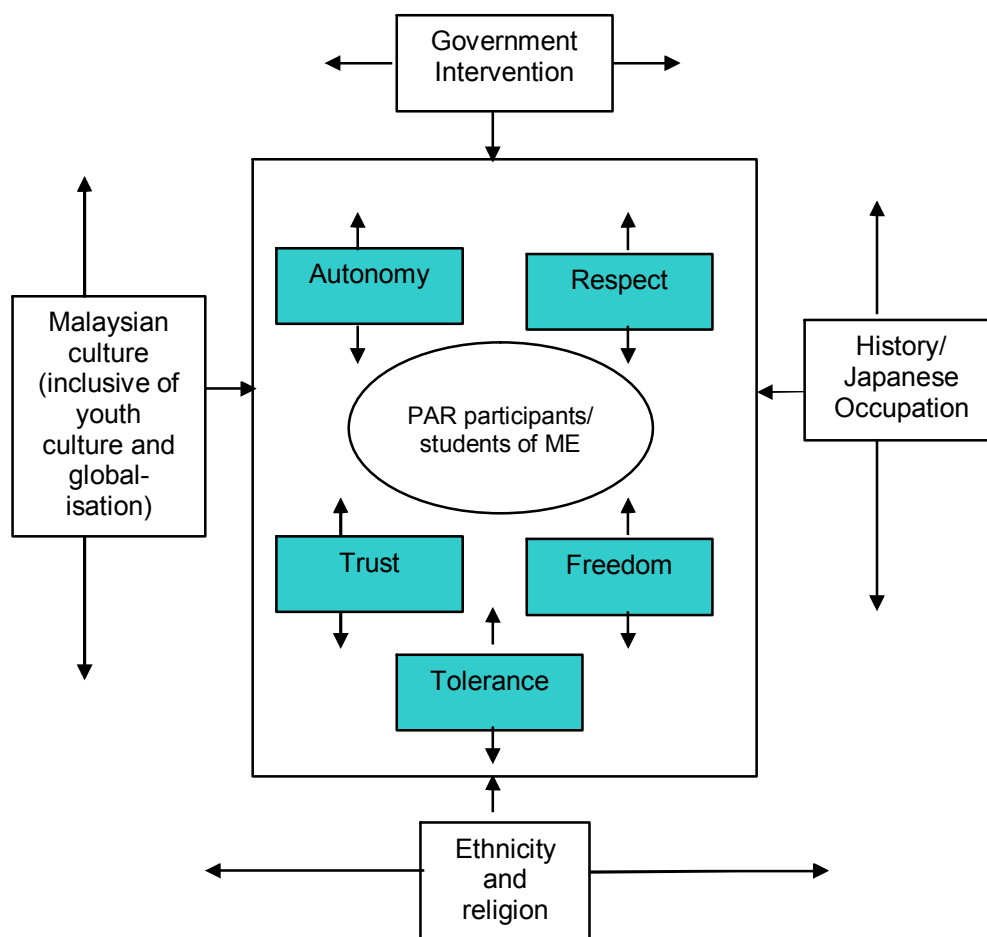
Figure 7.1: Types of moral sphere where students have moral conflicts.

In Figure 7.1, the sphere in the centre of the diagram represents my PAR participants who are also students of ME in secondary schools. The five major themes that repeatedly emerged in my research include moral conflicts involving autonomy, respect, trust, freedom and tolerance. The arrows from the five themes indicate overlapping between these themes. The themes have been analysed according to the different schools and presented in a table of conflicts (see Table 7.1).

Based on my findings of this study, four factors have had a particularly significant influence on morality and moral development for these participants at least. These include mainly the government, history/Japanese occupation (between 1942 and 1945), the culture of the students and the nation, and the existing different ethnic and religious groupings. It is important to understand

that these influencing factors are unique to the Malaysian setting and cannot be seen as generic or be generalised to other multicultural countries. The arrows from these four factors represent the potential for conflict between the four and with the five themes mentioned earlier. For example, the present culture might conflict with ethnicity and religion or values originating from the culture established during the Japanese occupation or the rule of law (government intervention). Before turning to the students' dilemmas, I will briefly review the four external constraining influences.

### 7.2.1 Government intervention

The government, through the MOE, implements ME in schools throughout Malaysia (see 2.4). The top-down system of implementing subjects in the education system, which is exam-oriented, makes students focus upon examinations even for subjects like ME. This is clearly seen in discussions presented later which show the students' struggle between the notion of expressing themselves as adolescents in the moral sphere, and the constraints of ME implementation as well as societal and cultural expectations within the moral domain.

### 7.2.2 The changing nature of Malaysia culture

The culture in Malaysia is unique and is changing every day. For example, findings of research carried out in 2006, investigating students' moral decision-making based on religion (Vishalache, 2006), seem to differ from my current findings. In 2006, most of the children and adolescents' responses or moral choices were directly based on religion but my current research shows that religion and culture are already a way of life for my PAR participants and they are more concerned about moral pluralism (see 9.3.2). Moral pluralism provides a comprehensive view of moral complexity and moral conflict (Strike, 1999). To further understand the moral conflicts faced by adolescents in Malaysia, an understanding of Malaysian culture (see 2.5.2) and how various current issues influence the cultural factors is important.

Almost all participants from *Kekwah*, *Orkid,* and *Seri Pagi* agreed that the culture and upbringing of their parents played a crucial role in most of the

conflicts that they faced now. The strict upbringing in certain families, due to cultural beliefs and tradition, and to the effects of the Japanese occupation (see 7.2.4) is seen as one of the reasons why there was such a conflict. The exchange below describes the participants' assumptions of their parents and the older generation:

> I:      Why is the student having conflict with his parents?
>
> J:      Maybe his parents belong to the last generation.
>
> I:      What do you mean by last generation?
>
> J:      It's like everything also cannot. They become over protective and life can be miserable. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Non verbal communication (Nvc): One participant looked behind and said "Last generation"; evidence from video recording (efvr)]

Participants were aware that their parents were in a different time when growing up and they have become accustomed to being over protected because of this. The following excerpt from a student journal relates the frustration that this participant had to convince parents about their school activities:

> No use talking to parents who belong to the last generation. It is better to get the sports teacher or the principal to send a letter allowing the student to take part in sports. Then parents might listen. (*Seri Pagi*)

As I have explained in Chapter One (see 1.3) and Chapter Two (see 2.5.5), the culture brought by the different ethnic groups from their land of origin blended with some of the local culture in Malaysia and has been a yardstick to set the norms for the younger generations. This culture is still changing every day due to the influence of several factors mentioned earlier. Furthermore, globalisation and youth culture in the Malaysian context also influence the dilemmas faced by my PAR participants and other adolescents. The influence of the internet and media has become the issue being discussed daily by religious bodies and the government. The wide spread of Western and other cultural influences

which conflict with the Malaysian way of life is constantly debated in public. Adolescents are caught in this conflict and are struggling to be global and local at the same time.

## 7.2.3 Ethnicity and religion

In my research, the participants outwardly mention ethnicity and religion during their discussions. Comments, examples, and opinions put forward showed the influence of ethnicity and religion. Being an Islamic country, students have been exposed to the Islamic code of conduct in schools and public places. Coming from different religious backgrounds, they are also exposed to their own religion and traditions through ritual and spiritual practices. The difference of practices and decision-making based on these two components should be clearly understood by students and teachers. Analysis in my next few chapters will focus on the richness of the data based on these differences.

The participants accept the notion that parents or other older members of the family seem to conflict with them due to different upbringing at different times. However, they feel the need to have more autonomy due to changing times and different culture. This leads to the conflict attributable to the different cultures and religions within the different ethnic groups and the arising "youth culture" that cuts across ethnicity, religion, and culture within the society.

The diversity of culture within the different ethnic groups in Malaysia (see 2.5.3) sometimes causes clashes between the participants and members of families, especially older members. In some instances, participants mentioned the issue of conflict in culture when I further questioned them about communicating with their parents over dinner:

> T:      For the Chinese, dinner time is to eat and you cannot talk. My grandma always asks us to keep quiet.
>
> U:      Why in Chinese culture can you not talk?
>
> T:      The fear that you can choke on your food. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Two participants showed how they choke and the rest laughed; efvr]

In traditional Chinese homes, members of families are not allowed to speak unnecessarily during meal time together unless they have something important to tell. However, in current times, meal times are one of the few precious opportunities for all members of the family to get together and communicating with others or sharing important family matters can take place. It is a situation of conflicting norms between traditional practices and current needs to communicate with family members. The "filial piety" concept comes into play. If parents or grandparents are authoritarian, then they might stick strictly to traditions as in the above excerpt. However, elder members of the family who are more open-minded may allow different practices like talking and sharing experiences and problems to take place.

During breaks, my research participants brought up interesting quotes which their parents use such as "Your wings are stronger, so you think you can fly off now" or "Don't try to teach your parents". Participants tend to talk only if necessary and do most of their sharing with their peers (see 8.2).

Young people's experience of "negotiating independence from parental support also varies according to cultural assumptions and practices" (Robb, 2007, p. 319). In many cases, my participants gave up on negotiating because their parents were authoritarian. The cultural crisis that participants brought up was use of proverbs and phrases that they felt should not be taken for granted:

> W: My parents always remind me that they have seen the sun first, they tasted salt first, and my grandma also always says such things.
>
> I: That is a Chinese saying right, what does it mean?
>
> W: It simply means don't try telling them things because they are more experienced than us.
>
> W: It is true to a certain extent but we also are learning lots of things which our parents and grandparents have no knowledge about. For example, use of computer and all. My grandma is always thinking that I'm playing games but she doesn't know that I'm finding information for my school projects. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Chinese participants were nodding their heads; efvr]

Being from an Eastern society, most of my participants are growing in and encouraged to absorb their own ethnic culture. For example, the situation above is very common when young family members try to express themselves or make suggestions. This can cause conflicts in values which I will discuss further in this chapter. The excerpt below shows how an Indian participant is under stress because of the culture followed in Indian families:

> *I:*      What about the Indians? Do you share similar conflicts?
>
> R:      *Munnerum irekila pellai ya pattae, pin irukum pillai todorum.* [Tamil language]
>
> T:      Meaning …, how the first child reacts and behaves, the other children will follow the example set by the first child.
>
> *I:*      Why is that so?
>
> T:      Because they are the elder child. And they set an example for the rest of the brothers and sisters. Because if they set a good example they are followed and if they set a bad example they are also followed.
>
> R:      But I wish it was not so because the younger ones have their own brains for them to decide what is good and bad. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Non-Indian participants shook their heads from left to right while one Indian participant nodded again and again; efvr]

(Note: It is interesting to note that in the Malaysian culture, nodding the head is often a sign of total agreement and shaking the head from left to right is a sign of disagreement. At times when individuals disagree or agree, they do not show any signs and it is taken as an agreement according to the context by the speaker.)

This is a further example of what my participants consider a cultural constraint. They feel each individual should have their own freedom to be what they want and not always be expected to be an example to the younger siblings. In traditional Indian homes, eldest children are always told to behave well, excel academically, and be role models. This puts stress on them and can cause conflicts in families. One unique aspect of my thesis is the richness of data

gathered, based on culture and traditions in the Malaysian context. The in-depth analyses add the depth of the voices of the students which I will highlight all the way through.

### 7.2.4 History/Japanese occupation

This is a newly identified influence which, to my knowledge, has not been previously discussed in research involving ME. To have several of my participants mentioning how their moral conflicts were linked to the Japanese occupation is worth discussing. Extended family members such as grandparents and older generations have been cited as using the values necessitated by the Japanese occupation to influence the morality of the present adolescents. Why values conflict today in Malaysia between the younger generation and those who survived the Japanese occupation in Malaysia is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. However, the most common dialogue about this, as indicated by what I wrote in my observational journal, is that most parents who complain keep comparing their hard times during the Japanese occupation in Malaya with the good times that the children are having now:

> T:   Yes, they always bring up the sufferings during the Japanese occupation. (*Others agree by nodding their heads*)
>
> W:   Every day.
>
> Q:   Yah, my father always brings up those days examples also. He'll say, "Last time we had 5 cents only; nowadays I give you Ringgit Malaysia 3 [currency equivalent to about NZD 1.50] every day and I don't know what you are doing with the money every day".
>
> I:   How do you respond?
>
> Q:   I've tried to explain that the price of things is different nowadays but he won't accept that. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Nearly all participants nodded their heads in total agreement; efvr]

Based on my own observations and reflections, I find the *Orkid* participants caught in this situation where they find parents difficult to communicate with.

They seem to connect the generation gap with the way their parents were brought up in Malaya during the Japanese occupation. During the Japanese occupation, life was hard and people were living in fear all the time. Some Japanese soldiers tortured and killed innocent people, raped young girls, and created havoc which is remembered until today by those who survived the occupation.

In *Kekwah* too, the impact of bringing young girls up strictly during the Japanese occupation is still felt by my participants, as exemplified by the excerpt below:

> B:    Mum is so set in her ways. Because she has been brought up the strict way, no one can change her set ideas and mentality. Because mum had, a strict upbringing, she tends to pass the same way of upbringing onto her children.
>
> F:    Unless we tell ourselves that we want to break away from such traditions and way of thinking, we might end up like them too. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: All participants were nodding their heads when B and F were talking; efvr]

In traditional Malaysian families, girls have always been brought up in a closed and less free environment compared to boys. This became worse during the Japanese occupation when girls became the targets of some brutal Japanese soldiers. The girls were practically hidden in hideouts during the entire Japanese occupation. It could be due to such emotional constraints that some mothers and grandmothers continue to enforce such a strict upbringing on their daughters and granddaughters thus causing conflicts. With all the above impacts on the moral domain I now go describe the main themes that emerged from all the moral conflicts written by my participants.

## 7.3    Conflicting themes

The moral conflicts presented by my study participants are mostly relational and evolve around their lives as adolescents at home, in school, and as part of a nation and a global society. The moral conflicts are either interpersonal or

intrapersonal in nature. The five main themes that emerged during my research in the three different schools are:

-   Autonomy

-   Respect

-   Trust

-   Freedom

-   Tolerance

These themes in the moral conflicts in the research were double-checked by two independent raters with 95 percent agreement. The 5 percent balance was discussed and after mutual agreement was obtained each moral conflict was then themed according to the mutual agreement.

It is important to note that based on the MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools (2000), except for autonomy, the other four themes of respect, trust, freedom and tolerance are all included in the revised syllabus (see 2.4.3). However, these values have been embedded within the content area which students study as "facts" (see 8.4). My research shows that participants reconceptualise these values within a relational frame, as will be discussed. The pedagogy of teaching and the lack of students' voices in exploring the values and conflicts thus constitute a gap as identified by which my findings.

At times, certain moral conflicts contain more than one conflicting theme. For example Dilemma 6# *Kekwah* revolved around the theme of respect versus autonomy. Dilemma 6# *Orkid* is about respect versus authority. It is important to note that conflicting themes are natural in the Malaysian setting given the different constraints and factors that cause such conflicts.

Here is a brief analysis of the different conflicts that my PAR participants faced:

| Theme/School | *Kekwah* | *Orkid* | *Seri Pagi* | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Autonomy | Dilemma 3 | Dilemma 2<br><br>Dilemma 7 | Dilemma 1<br><br>Dilemma 5 | 5 |
| Respect | Dilemma 4<br><br>Dilemma 6 | Dilemma 4<br><br>Dilemma 6 | Dilemma 6 | 5 |
| Trust | Dilemma 1<br><br>Dilemma 7 | Dilemma 3 | Dilemma 2 | 4 |
| Freedom | Dilemma 5 | Dilemma 1 | Dilemma 3 | 3 |
| Tolerance | Dilemma 2 | Dilemma 5 | Dilemma 4 | 3 |
| Total | 7 | 7 | 6 | 20 |

Table 7.1: Analysis of moral conflicts faced by the PAR participants.

### 7.3.1 Autonomy

According to Dworkin (1988), the core notion in autonomy is that the autonomous individual can make free choices and act on them. Autonomy seems to be the key conflict among the participants in my PAR research. They find themselves constantly battling with this moral conflict in interaction with their parents and with other members of society. An enriched understanding of autonomy must take account of "emotions, needs, attitudes, preferences, feelings and desires", as well as "community structures and social interdependence" (Kleinig, 1982, p. 71 & 76). My PAR students think that those around them do not understand their needs and this causes moral conflicts,

particularly with those in authority. The moral conflict can be summarised in the diagram below:
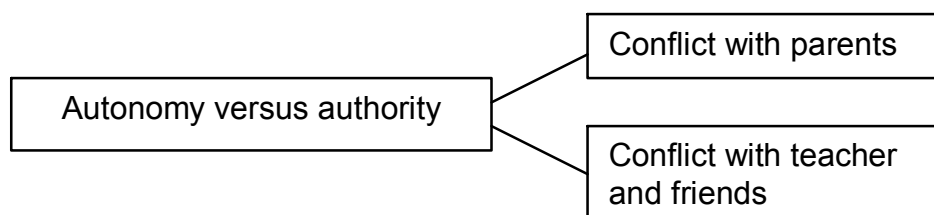


Figure 7.2: Conflicting issues in autonomy.

Based on my research, autonomy is a new finding and is different from the values covered in the curriculum whether the current or the previous one (see 2.4.2 and 2.4.3). It is also a finding that voices the students need for something that is not taught but is important for their present development.

7.3.1.1  Autonomy versus authority

One participant in *Orkid* raised the issue of autonomy in relation to his parents' authoritative ways in bringing him up, and put forward the notion of a generation gap. Below is the conflict:

> Why do people control my life? I want to do what I feel is right. I'm already a big boy, but I hate people telling me what to do. Especially my parents who are not open minded and always ask many questions if I want to do anything. There is so much difference between the past generation and the present. I don't mind them advising me like my brother. (Dilemma *2# Orkid*)

Based on my own observational notes, I find the participants caught in a conflict where the need is for autonomy in relation to the authoritative ways in which parents enact their responsibility. In Malaysia, parents play a crucial role in their adolescent children's lives until such time as the children are considered independent enough to stand on their own feet - which can vary from individual to individual and household to household. Another participant from the same school also presented a moral dilemma which showed that values conflicted with those of the parents:

> My parents do not give me priority. They force me to study for long hours but I only can concentrate and study for an hour. They must not force me to study. I know when to study. They won't let me make any decisions on my own such as going out in the evenings to play football and many more. (Dilemma *7# Orkid*)

This participant felt the need to decide his own daily schedule for himself. He feels frustrated when study becomes the main focus for his parents whereas he also wants to take part in other activities. Adolescence is a time of profound developmental changes (Hibino, Yukawa, Kodama & Yoshida, 2007). If adolescents are not given the autonomy to do healthy activities they enjoy such as sports, they face moral conflicts with their parents. This is exactly what my student is facing in the above dilemma.

A participant from *Kekwah* raised conflict resulting from a similar issue in which her father uses authority and his position to decide on her career:

> My dad pressures me about which college I would enrol in a few years time. Frankly, I have no plans for the future just yet but he is too impatient and worried that I might end up jobless or something. He loves to ask me about what things I'm interested in, like, what kind of course I wish to pursue. He does it almost every day and it is enough to annoy me. Don't get me wrong, I love my dad and I know he is doing this because he is concerned about me, but it's kind of frustrating, having to bear his never-ending lectures on the importance of career. I want some space to grow and later decide on my career but Dad says I'm out of time. (Dilemma *3# Kekwah*)

Having a good career is important for youths. Parents in Malaysia are very concerned with this issue; to the point that the children feel pressured and moral conflicts arise, such as the one above. The focus on the dilemma above is on achieving autonomy through "growing" based on her own time whereas Dilemma 2 and 7 in *Orkid* are talking about thinking things out for themselves. Dilemma 3# *Kekwah* also intertwines with the theme of freedom where the participant talks about space to grow and be able to decide for herself in her own time.

Frustrated autonomy in values is presented by a participant from *Seri Pagi* whose parents try to tell him what to do:

> My biggest conflict is studies and my interest in it. Its not that I'm not interested but when its examination time, I have to study day and night. This is because of my principle to study 'slowly but steadily'. I study slowly because I want to understand what I study well. I don't go for tuition classes because it might not solve my problem. My parents have asked me to go for tuition but I feel I want to resolve this conflict my way. (Dilemma *1# Seri Pagi*)

Tuition in Malaysia is becoming very important especially for students in upper secondary forms. At times, students are capable of handling the academic challenges themselves but parents still insist that they go for tuition because that is the common trend.

Other than a conflict of values with parents, the autonomy yearned for by participants is to be able to mature physically and decide for themselves on issues like love, career, and intimacy. The dilemma below discusses such clashes in values:

> I have fallen in love with a girl from the next class in school. I know that we are still schooling but my girl friend loves me and I care for and love her very much. The discipline teacher and prefects in my school always reprimand me and tell me that my relationship with my girl friend is too intimate on the school grounds. Friends keep telling me that I am spoiling my own future at a young age. I feel I am old enough to decide for myself. (Dilemma *5# Seri Pagi*)

In Malaysia, due to the government policy of implementing the Islamic code of conduct in public places, adolescents have limited autonomy to express themselves with their partners or friends. Indecent conduct based on the Islamic code is brought to court and those found guilty are fined or punished in several ways. Members of the Muslim community are taken to the *Syariah* courts whereas non-Muslims are taken to the civil courts.

During one of the focus groups discussion held in *Orkid*, participants spoke further on the conflict in autonomy versus authority which they face in their daily

activities. In the interview excerpt below, the participants shared how they yearn for autonomy from their parents:

> I: What are the things that your parents don't understand about you?
>
> T: Like studying and always asking us to think about our future. We know what we are doing but they keep nagging us and that is very annoying sometimes. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: One participant kept opening and closing his mouth as if imitating a parent nagging without any sound; efvr]

In almost all moral conflicts of autonomy participants had conflicts with their parents and one (Dilemma 5# *Seri Pagi*) with the school authority. Although desiring some autonomy to direct their own lives, participants still respected their parents and other authorities. This takes us to the next theme which is respect.

## 7.3.2 Respect

Although respect is included in the curriculum (see 2.4.3), as the following extract shows participants view this value as a two way process:

> Give a listening ear to the child, but the child too must be more patient with mum and tolerant and respect the mum's feelings. It's a two way-process and will take time for each party to respect the other. By then we will all be adults. Just hope we don't repeat the same mistake with our children… (*Kekwah*)

The above extract was taken from one *Kekwah* participant's journal. The participant talks about the two way process of respect which seems to be in conflict here. Respect constitutes another theme in which participants identify conflict in values. They respect their parents and others for who they are, but they also feel the need to have mutual respect from those they conflict with. The conflict in respect interfered with their other activities and made them feel the need to have more respect. They also wanted their parents to understand them and accommodate their needs.

## 7.3.2.1  Conflict of mutual respect

My participants focussed on the need for mutual respect. This covered not only the human relationship but also the relationship between man and nature. Though it may look non-relational in nature, the way my participants explained the conflict shows the influence of culture and religion and how nature communicates with man. What might seem non-relational is seen as relational in Dilemma *4# Orkid.* Here are some of the issues in the respect theme:

```
┌───────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Moral conflict of mutual respect with  │
└───────────────────────────────────────┘
   │           │            │            │
┌────────┐ ┌────────┐ ┌────────┐ ┌────────────┐
│ Nature │ │ Parents│ │ Teacher│ │Grandparents│
└────────┘ └────────┘ └────────┘ └────────────┘
```
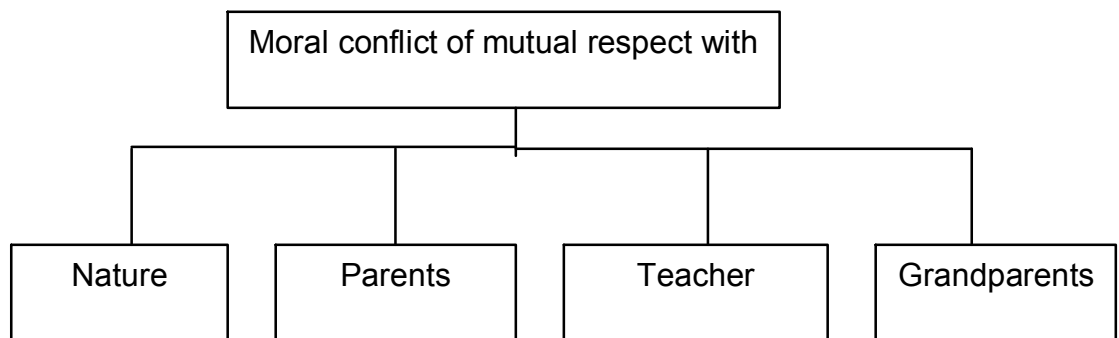
Figure 7.3: Conflicting issues in respect.

## 7.3.2.2  Respecting the planet

One participant in *Orkid* presented the conflict between man and nature and how it disrupts the balance in nature. "Mutual respect" here refers to how my participant saw the need for man to respect nature and how in return, nature protects man. By looking at nature in a relational sense, this is the odd one out of the 20 dilemmas presented by my participant:

> Since 1995, our world faced serious problems in climate change. Many natural disasters like volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and earth quakes occur. I feel humans are the main cause. God created nature for man but man is polluting and destructing nature. Man has no respect for nature. In 2008 several global nations met to resolve the global warming problem but not all countries want to co-operate. Some countries are only thinking of their own development and military force but ignoring the changes which are destroying the world slowly. I hope as students, we

can help ease this moral conflict which is getting more serious each day. (Dilemma *4# Orkid*)

For the Western world the above dilemma might look like a new form of respect but for Eastern culture, "respecting nature" is part of morality. The conflict is in line with the famous Taoist philosophy of living in balance with nature (see 2.8.3) and how the disrespect by one (man) or the other (nature) can cause imbalance (trouble) for each other. In other main religions in Malaysia like Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism too, students have been taught to respect nature for what it is. For example, in Islam it is essential to show love to all those surrounding an individual, including living and non-living things. The present ME syllabus has included one learning area related to environment (see 2.4.3). However, the way the content is arranged is very factual and non-relational. It can become complex especially if technical matters like "The Green House Effect" are learnt without seeing the relationship between themselves (ME students) and their voice in such an issue.

This issue of respecting the planet was discussed in *Orkid*. The participant felt that, because most nations of the world are concerned with economical wealth and military security, no one cared (Dilemma 4# *Orkid* 6):

> T:    Climate change is getting serious but nobody is bothered. Nations are only keen in their own wealth and interest.
>
> I:    Why do you say so?
>
> Y:    Everywhere we hear of pollution and natural disasters but very few nations want to take up the matter seriously.
>
> R:    In our country we always have problems of haze when the neighbouring countries set fire to their dried stocks. So many of us suffer from eye irritation and asthma but the same activity is repeated annually. Nobody cares.
>
> I:    Are you sure nobody cares?
>
> R:    Of course Malaysia and Singapore make a lot of noise because we become the victims but I feel the whole world must support each other to reduce the global warming effect. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: Participants T, Y and R were engrossed in the above discussion while the rest just observed and nodded at different times; efvr]

My participants feel that not much is done to respect the earth and environment. Due to development, nature is suffering and my students expressed an awareness of the consequences that are damaging the planet earth. According to Smyth (1996), tensions exist between humankind and nature, and between values relating to the orderly working of the living system and to human lifestyles within those human lifestyles. Thus this tension turns into conflicts if man and nature do not complement each other. It is interesting to note that my students brought up this conflict in relation to their beliefs; this differs from the way it is implemented in the ME syllabus (see 2.4.3).

7.3.2.3   Respect versus autonomy

Respect for parents and respect from parents is also seen as a moral conflict by several of my participants. They find this moral conflict difficult to digest when each party cannot see the perspective of the other:

> This dilemma is regarding my piano lessons. I've taken piano lessons since I was young and completed my Grade Eight piano exam last month. My piano teacher has suggested for me to continue on with my piano and do a certificate. I've thought about it and I want to continue on with my piano lesson and do a certificate. Here is where the problem starts, my mom. She flat out refused for me to continue on with my piano lessons, giving some nonsensical excuses like I can't cope with the stress. This is not due to financial constraints. My father has no qualms about paying the extra fees. My older sister has done this extra degree/certificate too and my mum and dad did not say a single word. There are many other excuses which I can't remember but are equally ridiculous, nonsensical and unsubstantial. [Not very respectful] My mom is judging me on what she thinks she sees. She's not respecting me for what I am or may become.  How is she so sure I won't be able to cope with the stress? I'm aiming to take the piano exam at the end of this year so as not to collide with my school exam. But the other part is I'm getting tired of the constant argument with my mum regarding this issue. (Dilemma *6# Kekwah*)

Indicated in the dilemma above, is the need for mutual respect and at the same time the clash between respect and autonomy. The participant respects her mother's decision but is also fighting for her own autonomy based on the reasons given in the dilemma. This situation represents a tug-of-war between parents who have authority over their children who they want to give their best to, and the adolescent who respects her parents for their support, but in return wants to be shown mutual respect and autonomy - to be heard.

### 7.3.2.4  Respect versus authority

In another dilemma, my participant wrote the conflict in getting mutual respect from parents and family members. In Malaysian culture, parents are placed high upon a pedestal. This is based either upon religious or cultural and traditional norms. However, the issue below challenges traditional thoughts in a social setting:

> My parents are busy at work every day. Sometimes, we siblings hardly see them for days due to their work schedule. My brother is always playing computer games while my sister is 24 hours hanging on the phone. They don't respect me as a younger child at home and I wish my parents spent more time with us than at work. (Dilemma *6# Seri Pagi*)

In the traditional family, mothers were always at home when children returned from school (Handel et al., 2007). This was also the case in Malaysia but now most mothers are working to help with family expenses and children are left to fend for themselves. This conflict may extend beyond parents to elder siblings, as in the example above where they were not giving mutual respect to my participant. According to Taylor (1996), a combination of the values of the home which students live in and their interests exerts a major influence on their personal development in early adolescence. In the example given, this student feels the need for respect within the family is not there.

Apart from family relationships, the need for mutual respect between students and teachers is another conflict brought up by the participants. Social relationships are considered important by all participants in my research. They want to be socially accepted among their friends and teachers. However, social

relationships turn into conflicts when the participants do not find solace in the relationship. One such conflict is with teachers in school:

> My Science teacher is my worst nightmare. She torments the minds of her students as half of us can't seem to understand what she talks about. She doesn't care about class discipline, or respect us as students. Half of the girls would be sleepy, half 'dead' or doing their homework during Science as they want to make the best out of time. It's not that we don't want to study… we want to… basically I love Science but this teacher makes me despise the subject. I've tried to listen to her and pay attention to her teachings, but I can't. Many students have tried talking to the teacher and politely voiced concerns about her teaching. But she doesn't seem to bother. She believes that passing the examination is good enough. But we want to excel and make use of the Science that we learn. I wish we could talk this out with her. (Dilemma *4# Kekwah*)

Listening is one of the most valued qualities of an educator – but is all too often lacking (Taylor, 1996). According to Shapiro (2008), "when you listen to the feelings of others in a respectful way, people will like you better and treat you better too" (p.7). The student in the above conflict feels that the lack of mutual respect between teacher and students is the cause of the conflict above. They want to be listened to and be respected in mutual ways. Here is an excerpt based on the conflict above which details why the participants are having conflict with the Science teacher:

> E: When we ask her, she writes concepts like "F=Ma", that's it…what it represents also we don't know. Instead of clearing our minds, she confuses us.
>
> F: She always says, "You're all intelligent students so you should find things out for yourselves".
>
> A: Because of her, Science has become a boring, rote learning subject. We don't go to labs to do experiments. We do badly in our examination and get scolded at home.
>
> C: She always says that Science is not a girls' subject. Even if we get minimal grades, she says it's good enough.
>
> E: But that's not fair because some of us love Science and want to excel in that subject.
>
> F: I feel there's no girl or guy subjects so the teacher shouldn't put such ideas into our heads. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: Several participants were giving piercing looks and nodding their heads every now and then; efvr]

In my own observational journal, I have written how the students were using body gestures such as nodding of head and *main mata* (showing eyes) to each other when they were discussing this dilemma and agreeing with each other that by just presenting content in the Science subject, the teacher concerned was not respecting them as students in the classroom.

Above is a contextualised moral conflict within Malaysia where students are expected to show respect to those (their *guru*) providing them with knowledge. *Guru* is a Sanskrit word for anyone providing knowledge in any form and it is also used in Tamil and Malay languages. In Chinese traditional culture, a *guru* (*se-fu*) is greatly respected. So are the Hindu traditional *gurus* who taught in *guru kulam* (traditional schools). In traditional days of schooling in Malaysia (see 2.2), *guru* related to their students in a one-way manner where knowledge was transmitted from the teacher to the student. However with more influence from the West and other cultures, *gurus* are beginning to play a more reciprocal role and the participants in *Kekwah* thought that their *guru* should also respect their point of view and not just teach for the sake of teaching.

Grandparents also play an important role in the lives of adolescents in Malaysia. The extended family, where the elderly live with their children and play a role in the development of the grandchildren growing in the family (see 2.5.5), is still being practised in some families in Malaysia. My participant who brought up the moral dilemma about the grandma belongs to this group of adolescents who are still living in the extended family environment:

> Several months ago, my grandmother had a medical check up She was told that she has Hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis B is contagious and can cause liver cancer. When everyone in my family knew about my grandma's condition, they were scared to touch or talk to her. I feel sad how poor Grandma has lost the respect she used to have after getting her illness. I hope she will be cured soon. I love you Grandma. (Dilemma *6# Orkid*)

The conflict with which this student is grappling concerns how to continue to show respect for an elderly person in the family who has an illness that has made her a victim, and has caused members of the family to isolate her. In the Form Five ME syllabus, under the theme of family relationships, one specific topic is on respecting elderly family members (see 2.4.3). Since the content is written comprehensively in the syllabus, students have no opportunity to relate their own moral conflicts with elderly people with whom they are in contact. What is in the syllabus stays in the syllabus while the adolescent come to terms with moral conflicts like the one above on their own. The participant is also in a dilemma about not being able to question authority (the other elder members of his family) and how to help the grandma he loves so much.

Equality of respect does not imply complete uniformity or identity of treatment or of achievement in every aspect (White, 1994); on the contrary, equality implies the welcoming of diversity. The diversity in moral conflicts based on respect shows that it is a conflict of reality and needs to be given serious attention. It is indeed an irony because the value "respect" is embedded in Eastern culture and religion but my participants still see it an issue in their daily moral conflicts. Maybe what was seen as "respect" in former times needs to be revisited based on the students' voices. The next value that was causing conflict among my study participants was trust.

### 7.3.3  Trust

In all three schools where I conducted my research this theme kept recurring either in the focus group discussions or in students' dilemma analysis journals. In my research, participants raised the concept of self trust - new to ME - because they are trying to find a balance between the requirements of societal norms and their own will power. Trust versus mistrust and trust versus care are seen as interpersonal or intrapersonal. In the present ME syllabus (see 2.4.3), trustworthiness is the value included in the learning area related to self development. However, the relational concept is lacking and the conflicts identified by my participants are all relational conflicts. Self-trust and mutual trust are two important conflicts presented by my participants in the dilemmas below:
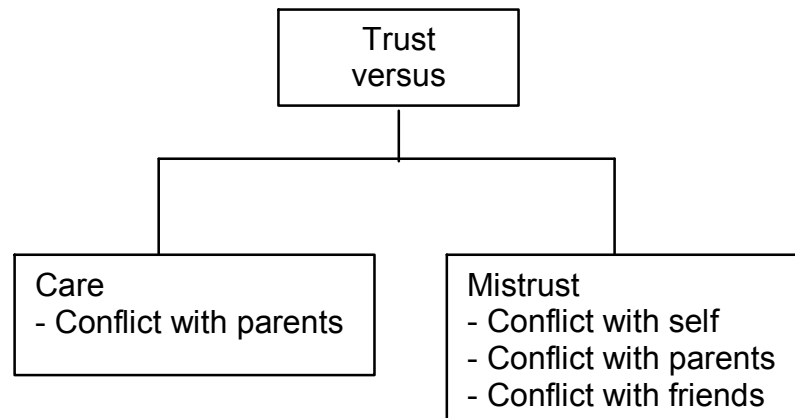
Figure 7.4: Conflicting issues in trust.

7.3.3.1 Trust versus care

When the participants conflict with parents, they find it difficult to build a trusting relationship with either parent who has been strictly brought up due either to the hardship experienced during the Japanese occupation or to traditions within the family:

> My mum thinks I like a guy. He's in my tuition classes and he's my friend. I don't have silly little feelings for him. We are close friends. My mum, however, confronts me and questions me pretty often about him. I don't mind it; after all I'll just let her clear her doubts. I text him and chat with him, just the way I do with other friends. I hide this from my mum. I can't tell her because if I do she'll make it a big deal. Our tuitions are held at my house and he comes over twice a week. I don't have the guts to interact with him too much at home as mum might just be eavesdropping. I am afraid this might spoil my relationship with him because sometimes I have to ignore him when my mum gives me "the look". She does suspect me of chatting with him so she deprives me from going online often. This is very unfair as I am doing nothing wrong! (Dilemma *7# Kekwah*)

Participants know that their parents care for them. However, participants felt that when parents don't trust them, they have to take precautions to avoid any misunderstandings in their parent-child relationships. At the same time, they also care for their parents who they know are trying to protect their children

from harm. This was prominent in *Kekwah* and *Orkid*. The excerpt below shows one *Kekwah* student's fears of getting into the "bad books" of her mum:

> E:     I keep my phone with me all the while or else my life is gone… Mum will start looking into my call register and see who I called or who called me, my missed calls and all. She will have the wrong impression and I will get into her "bad books". It is as if she does not trust me but she also wants me to have the phone so that if I stay back or have some activities in school, I can call up and inform her. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: The participant beside E was nodding and agreeing to everything that she said; efvr]

The issue of care versus trust is a very delicate matter. What parents consider as care is perceived by the adolescents as not being trusted especially when parents start investigating into their personal items. It is also a breach of their human rights as children according to human rights law but parents in Malaysia see it as a form of protecting their children against unwanted matters like boy-girl relationships or mixing with the wrong company.

7.3.3.2 Trust versus mistrust

In a conflict of trust versus mistrust, my participant is worried that her secret may be leaked by her friends one day:

> My problem is my wet hands. My hands sweat almost all the time. It gets worse whenever I'm nervous or excited about something. It's hard for me to socialise with people especially when it comes to shaking hands with them. My friends whom I trust know my problem because I've shared it with them. I worry they might tell others or make fun of me. (Dilemma *1# Kekwah*)

According to Handel et al., (2007), learning to keep secrets is an important social skill, expecting an understanding of social expectations and a capacity for self-regulation. My participant above is stressed because she thinks that her friends who she trusts might not be able to keep her secret. In the meantime, she is also trying to understand the social world around her and accepting her condition as it is.

At the intrapersonal level, the participants experience the moral conflict within themselves when conflicting values become a moral dilemma:

> My examination results are not as good as my friends' results. I aim for good marks but I can't get myself to concentrate on studies. I am interested in playing computer games which I know will not help in my results or career later on. I don't trust myself to keep to my study schedule. When I see my friends playing, I get distracted from my school work and would join them. What do I do? (Dilemma *2# Seri Pagi*)

By focussing on self-trust, the moral conflict above, introduces a new dimension into ME. Although trust is a value included in the current syllabus under the self-development theme, nothing much is mentioned on self and mutual trust (see 2.4.3) The conflict below involves a combination of trust issues at both the intra and interpersonal levels where the participant is unable to manage himself and at the same time does not want to let down his parents who have trust in him:

> I can't manage my time and I can't even keep to my own schedule. I spend most of my time playing football and other things. When it's time to study I don't feel like studying. If I do study, I will do Mathematics, Additional Mathematics and subjects that have something to do with calculation. I really hate subjects such as Biology and *Sejarah (*History*)*. I spend most of my time on subjects I like and I neglect the subjects that I don't like. My parents trust me and hope I'll do well academically. (Dilemma *3# Orkid*)

The conflict of self-trust and how the participant is in conflict with himself regarding all the subjects he has to study and excel at is a great issue for him. He knows he is expected to manage time and himself. Being an adolescent, his parents have indicated that they trust him to manage himself but self-trust is his problem now. The issue of his parents trusting him to excel academically is also a conflict that is taking place within him. From trust, I will now proceed to freedom.

*7.3.4 Freedom*

The conflicts concerning freedom as presented by my study participants are all relational in nature and involve family members except for one which has to do with academic freedom. The freedom-related conflicts are different from the autonomy-related conflicts (see 7.3.1). The autonomy-related conflicts comprise issues of personal independence, the capability to make moral decisions, and acting within the contextual situation. Freedom-related conflicts are related to the ability to exercise free will and make moral choices independently like the right to speak or act without restriction. However, there is a thin layer of overlap between the two.

In the current ME syllabus, freedom is a sub-value under values related to democracy (see 2.4.3). The two sub-values are freedom of speech and expression and freedom of religion. Because of the learning area and the way freedom is taught, the emphasis is more on nation-building and less on students' relational day-to-day conflicts. Below are some conflicting issues related to freedom highlighted by my students:
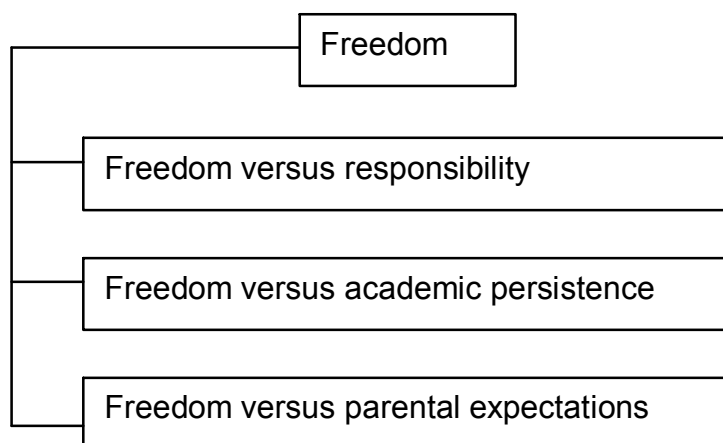


Figure 7.5: Conflicting issues in freedom.

7.3.4.1 Freedom versus responsibility

In the first conflict below, my participant knows his parents are responsible for him but at the same time he wants more freedom for himself. It is a conflicting situation and my student feels demoralised when freedom is not permitted by his parents:

> My parents don't understand me at all. I want more freedom in my life. I don't know whether it is good to think wrong of my parents. I wish they were more understanding of my individual needs. I feel whatever they think good for me is actually demoralising me. (Dilemma *1# Orkid*)

"Demoralising" is a very strong term and refers to scenarios where the participant felt that he was not treated an individual, his dignity was at stake and he had no control over his own self. Based on my observations most students felt they should not be told to follow everything that their parents expect and should have some freedom. This conflict has an overlap with the autonomy theme. Freedom of speech and expression is covered in ME but the students are unable to practise that at home due to constraints like tradition and culture. One of the reasons for them wanting more autonomy and freedom could be as a result of their feeling a lack of freedom in their relationships with their parents and other authorities.

In the interview excerpt below, students express why they have this conflict. It is interesting to note that they also demonstrated conflict between themselves about the level of freedom they would like to have:

> S: Sometimes when we're talking with our friends, our parents cut in and say don't waste time.
>
> P: They must give us space to grow or else we feel so bogged down by them.
>
> Q: But I feel the freedom should be controlled too.
>
> I: What do you mean by that?
>
> Q: Parents should give children freedom but they also have to monitor them or else children might abuse the freedom and parents will have more headaches.

> I:      There are two different opinions here.
>
> S:      I feel parents can keep an eye on their children but not to the level of monitoring the kids for 24 hours. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: A few participants were nodding their heads and several others were shaking their heads from left to right; efvr]

There were two different opinions expressed in the discussion above. The above conflict is discussed in further detail in Chapter Eight (see 8.3.4) to show the influence of peers in such a situation. In her journal another participant in *Kekwah* shared how adolescents feel pressured by parents:

> I have this friend who is always pressured by her parents to do well. She is not so good academically compared to her brother. She always feels pressured. Parents must be more considerate and the child should be given the freedom to voice out their feelings and opinions. (*Kekwah*)

According to Swanson, Spencer, and Petersen (1998), when adolescents are negotiating their desire and hope for greater freedom, they often experience increased conflicts with their parents. Responses from *Kekwah* and *Orkid* participants concur with this; students seem to be juggling with the need to have more freedom on one hand and the need to please their parents on the other hand. In the Malaysian scenario, adolescents are under great pressure to perform well academically, be responsible and good, and keep up the family's good name. Because of so many expectations from parents, adolescents are always monitored and pushed to the maximum. On top of that, the education system which is so exam-oriented adds to the challenges of these adolescents. Thus, they hardly have space to voice their opinion or suggest alternatives for their needs.

7.3.4.2 Freedom versus academic persistence

In the next dilemma, a participant raised the issue of freedom to choose subjects they want for their exam and their career later on:

> I am thinking of taking up extra subjects for my coming *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* [which is equivalent to O levels] next year but don't

seem to get moral support from my friends. In school, my friends are not interested to take extra subjects. I am also worried I might not be able to cope with too many subjects. But I wish I was free to take more subjects. (Dilemma *3# Seri Pagi*)

In Malaysia, the *SPM* examination is centralised and practices an open system. It means students can take as many subjects they want to study. However, while in theory it provides students the opportunity to choose what they want to study, in practice the schools usually set what subjects students can take based on the teachers and other basic amenities available in the school premises. However, the "paper chase" that gets into the students makes them compete and take so many subjects that it becomes stressful for some students. My participant who brought the conflict above is caught between these two and feels her freedom is restricted.

### 7.3.4.3 Freedom versus parental expectations

The notion of freedom presents conflicts when parental pressure increases and, in this case my participant had to shoulder other household responsibilities as well. The dilemma below explains the whole conflict:

> My life is too complicated. I am the second child in my family. I have two siblings. Both are girls. The problem is my parents put too much hope on me. Since my elder sister doesn't perform in her studies, they are pushing me to excel. This started when I got top three positions in my class for the examination. When I don't get the best results, there is a fear in me on how I am going to cope with all the things I have to do. It is hard for me especially when I am trying to study. My sisters will be happily watching television, chatting and playing computer games. At times, I feel that I study not for myself. It is merely to satisfy my parents. I don't have freedom and when my parents start comparing my marks with other girls in my class who did well, I can't take it. The one popular question my parents would ask is, "Why can she score 90 percent and above and why can't you score?" It is hard for me to explain to them that they come from different backgrounds. Maybe, they don't have to do housework nor have lazy sisters like I have. I feel so caught up and want some space to be myself. (Dilemma *5# Kekwah*)

Adolescents are sensitive to what they consider unequal treatment by parents (Downey & Condrin, 2004). In the moral conflict above my participant feels unequally treated because of the responsibilities put upon her. The expectation of parents on her compared to her other siblings is making the conflict crucial. It is quite natural for Malaysian parents to compare their children's academic performances with that of their cousins or friends. This creates another issue within this particular moral conflict; causes clashes of values between child and parents and child and siblings.

### 7.3.5 Tolerance

Tolerance is not a new value in the Malaysian scenario where people from different ethnic groups have lived together; respecting and tolerating each others needs and lives for generations. However in recent times, tolerance has faced its challenges in the Malaysian context where certain groups who believe they have been tolerant appear to indicate that they feel let down by other dominant groups. This scenario is reflected by my study participants. My participants indicated a preference for the idea of mutual tolerance; this has not been widely discussed in the ME scenario in schools. In my analysis, I found my PAR participants experienced moral conflicts on tolerance as below:

```
┌──────────────┐                              ┌──────────────┐
│    Care      │        ╭─────────╮           │   Autonomy   │
│   (Friend)   │────────│Tolerance│───────────│  (Parents)   │
│              │        │ versus  │           │              │
└──────────────┘        ╰─────────╯           └──────────────┘
                             │
                    ┌────────────────┐
                    │   Tradition    │
                    │   (Brother)    │
                    │                │
                    └────────────────┘
```
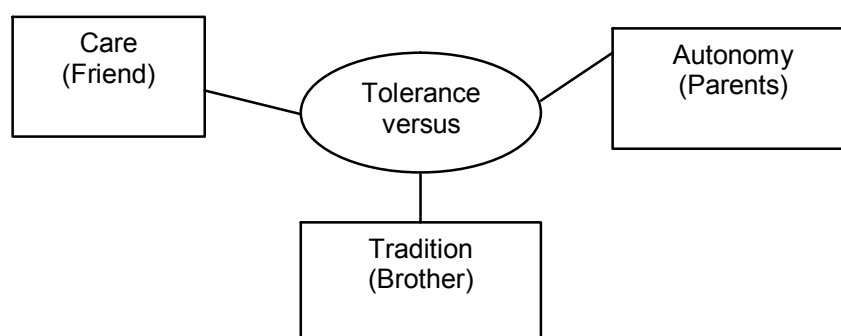
Figure 7.6: Conflicting issues in tolerance.

The value of tolerance is spelt out in the syllabus under values related to self development (see 2.4.3). However since it is categorised under the

intrapersonal section, my participants' responses indicate they did not see the relevance of the value to interpersonal matters. This is one serious observation that I made throughout my research. Though the current ME syllabus spells out many values to be taught, the way the values are taught does not seem to make them meaningful to my participants who respond to them more as facts to be learnt for examination rather than values for life. Values like tolerance stay as values in the syllabus and students' textbooks but are not seen as something relevant to be assimilated and applied in their daily moral conflicts.

7.3.5.1 Tolerance versus care

In a conflict of tolerance versus care, this participant is trying to manage her relationship with a friend for whom she cares but whose gossiping habits she cannot accept:

> My friend likes to gossip. She was in my class but now we are in different classes. Beginning of this year, we were okay and as usual during recess, we will talk until the bell rings. As time passed, I realised that every time she came to me, she started with "Do you know this girl/guy ….?"  I used to tolerate her habit earlier but I just don't like the way she keeps on gossiping about someone else. In my opinion, we don't need to care about others - like what they wear and what they do. I try to avoid her nowadays even though I still want to be her friend. I still meet her every time I go for tuition and this conflict is really bugging me. (Dilemma *2# Kekwah*)

According to Fine (1981), friends provide each other with a staging area, a context for acting in ways that allow emotional bonds as they support each other in their daily activities. The conflict above, as shared by my participant, is because she wants to be someone's friend but does not like her gossiping attitude. The conflict is between tolerating the friend's behaviour and caring for the friendship that they have established so far. She is in a dilemma because she is wondering if she should tolerate the actions of her friend which she considers not respectful.

7.3.5.2 Tolerance versus autonomy

Tolerance versus autonomy describes another clash of values experienced by a participant in *Orkid*:

> My parents are my main problem especially my father. If my father sees me doing something else besides studying, he will start scolding me. I don't like their attitude, always closed minded. Many things I can't do but my other friends are doing it and it's not wrong at all. I like to follow the current lifestyle but my parents don't like it. So I rarely talk to them unless I need something. I try my best to please and take care of their feelings. But it should be two ways. They are thinking that I am still a child and can easily become a "bad boy". (Dilemma *5# Orkid*)

Here is the conflict of child versus parents - father, to be specific, who uses his authority to confine the child to studying activities. As for the student, he finds this attitude suffocating and is tolerating the father. It is very common for Malaysian parents to ask their children to "study, study and study". For many parents, a studying child is a good child and vice versa. But for a child, it actually conflicts with his own beliefs and hopes.

7.3.5.3 Tolerance versus tradition

In the Malaysian tradition, elders whether in family, school, or society are more influential than younger members. In the dilemma below, this participant is experiencing a moral dilemma related to this and feels the need for mutual tolerance:

> My brother and I have never tolerated each other even though our mother used to advise us both. Because of our misunderstandings, my brother and I have not spoken to each other for some time even though we live under the same roof. The misunderstanding was about the television channels that each of us wanted to watch. Though it was a small issue, we did not tolerate each other and it has become real serious. I always have to give in and I feel it's time that he has some tolerance for me too. (Dilemma *4# Seri Pagi*)

Here is the clash between a brother and sister over the seemingly minor issue of watching television programmes. But further analysis will show that it is more

than that; the younger sibling is actually fighting against the normal cultural practice and traditions. This issue is analysed in Chapter Eight (see 8.3.5).

## 7.4　Peer influence on real-life moral dilemma discussions

In concluding this chapter, it should be stated that it is clear that my PAR participants related most of their real-life moral dilemmas to relational conflicts. They discussed conflicts within themes of autonomy, respect, trust, freedom and tolerance. The next chapter illustrates both the role of collaboration within the PAR process and the application of the ZCD tool as employed by participants to resolve their real-life moral dilemmas.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**Peer Pleasure**

## 8.1    Introduction

In ZCD, collaboration between students becomes the essence of studying. The learning becomes student-centered rather than teacher-centred; students, with the help of capable peers who sometimes take the teacher role, are central to the learning process. The space for students to collaborate with their peers in the classroom, continually using their own language, having time to reflect, to discuss, to organise thought and to generate resolutions through social interactions is conducive for the development of the ZCD. In this chapter, my focus is on the process of dilemma analysis based on the moral conflicts discussed in Chapter Seven.

In Chapter Seven, the moral conflicts shared by my participants are mostly relational in nature (see 7.2). The conflicts are influenced by local factors such as culture, ethnicity and religion, the Japanese occupation, and government intervention. Though many of the education policies in Malaysia are implemented through the top-down approach, students are striving for a relational perspective which calls for some serious re-evaluation of ME. Conflicting values like autonomy, mutual respect, and mutual tolerance are certain themes presented by my participants in the relational context. Values like <u>autonomy</u> and <u>self-trust</u> are new and not found in any of ME syllabus to date. Consideration should be given to new values identified by the ME students themselves, because ME is intended for their benefit -for them to develop and become moral citizens.

Though other values such as respect and tolerance are included in the current ME syllabus, these are not regarded in a relational perspective. For example, respect is included in the syllabus under values related to democracy whereby the value taught is to respect rules and regulations (see 2.4.3). But my

participants showed more concern with moral conflict dealing with mutual respect for nature, parents, teachers, and grandparents (see 7.3.2.1). It is clear that the syllabus focusses on the non-relational component of respect, that is, the regimented following of rules and regulations created by the state. Ironically, my participants are looking at the same value but from a relational perspective of care and concern.

In my ME research the help of capable peers is shown to be one way to encourage the development of the ZCD among students and for them to be heard. The Malaysian "self", as discussed in earlier chapters, is very influenced by the cooperative nature of being an individual in a communal setting. This communal setting is challenged by being comprised of diversified ethnic groups, various cultural norms, and government and constitutional influences (see 2.5). In such a setting, to be accepted as a moral citizen the Malaysian self gets help by collaborating with others. One way of collaboration is getting help from capable peers in school.

Who are "peers"? Does the word peer connote the same meaning in the Western countries as in Malaysia? It is worth noting that Malaysian culture might differ or share similarities with Western culture in this aspect. This is explained below.

## 8.2    Peer pleasure versus peer pressure

Peers are "simply people who have certain aspects of their status in common….friends are people with whom you develop a valued, mutual relationship" (Arnett, 2007, p. 238). In Malaysia, especially in *Bahasa Melayu*, the terms peer and friend have slightly different meanings. Friend is *rakan*, peer is *rakan sebaya*. So if I make a direct translation peer means "friends belonging to the same age group". Thus, the conclusion I make here is that most of my participants' peers are their friends too. They belong to the same age group; though some are from different classes they sit together at least two to three times a week to study ME in school. Therefore, for the purposes of my research and its findings, friends and peers are considered the same. When the participants expressed themselves by relating to their friends, they actually

referred to their peers in the group. My participants mentioned  only two moral conflicts dealing with peers (Dilemma *1# Kekwah* and Dilemma *2# Kekwah*, see 7.3).

As I have worked on this chapter, I find "peer pleasure" a more appropriate term than "peer pressure" where my participants are concerned. Students showed much in common throughout the research, though arguments did occur. But what was unique is that the different languages mediated and bodily gestures which I will discuss in this chapter, showed the sense of cooperation and collaboration among students themselves. Though in the initial PAR cycles they were very academically inclined (constantly referring to the values stipulated in the ME syllabus and talking about learning facts when relating to moral values), as the research proceeded, students became more engaged in deliberate discussion and expressing themselves as a group based on the real-life moral dilemmas they presented from their journals. During the final reflective stage, they reflected and described how they put their initial thoughts into action as well.

Harris (1999) argued that peers have a greater everyday influence on than parents in adolescents' development. Though to a certain extent, this is supported by my research findings, there are also contradictions such as where my participants acknowledge or remember their parents' advice, when making moral choices (see 9.2.1). This indicates that even though my participants found their parents authoritarian at times they still tended to value and respect their parents' wishes (see 9.2.1). The signs of respect and obedience towards parents also reflect on the culture and upbringing of children in Malaysia, no matter which ethnic group they belong to. In the revised primary school syllabus for ME, values like respect for members of family and responsibility towards family are inculcated in primary school pupils. In their various religious and ethics classes, children are taught to respect elders, to speak politely to them, and to be caring towards them.

From the developmentalist perspective, in order to reflect and confirm certain aspects of their own identity young people select friends on the basis of similarity, (Robb, 2007). This however, might not apply fully in the Malaysian

context. At I explained earlier about *rakan and rakan sebaya*, everyone can be a friend but the level of friendship may differ. Other than friendship and sharing, many other socio-cultural niche areas which I will be highlighting in this chapter also influenced discussions. I will also discuss the manner in which friends discussed and influenced moral decisions where autonomy, respect, trust, freedom, and tolerance (see Chapter Seven) were core issues.

In this chapter, my discussion draws on excerpts from students' focus group discussions. Towards the end of the chapter provide some analysis of ways in which participants got help from their peers in the dilemma analysis processes using the ZCD approach.

## 8.3    Process of ZCD in analysis of real-life moral dilemmas

In Chapter Seven, I discussed the moral conflicts faced by my participants. The excerpts used and the journal writings were taken randomly from the three different schools that participated in my research. In this chapter, I will use whole processes from one school based on the moral conflicts to show a development of discussions within the PAR cycles that took place. In each process, I include excerpts from the PAR discussions, journal writings of students, body gestures that influenced the discussions, my own field notes, and other significant evidence used to capture the real-life moral dilemma discussion (Re-LiMDD).

### *8.3.1   ZCD and peers in dilemma analysis concerning autonomy*

For conflicts involving autonomy, five dilemmas were presented by the three schools researched (see Table 7.1). While dilemmas concerning autonomy out-numbered most of the other themes of conflict, autonomy is not included in any part of the current MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools (2000). *Orkid* had the most dilemmas in this theme and, being an all boys school, it is interesting to note that the participants wanted their voices to be heard in an area which is meaningful to them and which has not been highlighted before. It is also worth knowing that in traditional Malaysian culture, boys were always given more autonomy than girls from pre-independence days. Perhaps it is to be expected that this group would first raise it as an issue.

To analyse the process of one of the dilemma analysis that the *Orkid* students were involved in, I will narrate and, where relevant, present excerpts from the Dilemma *2# Orkid* discussion. This dilemma shows how students facing moral conflicts in autonomy versus authority collaborated and later internalised what was discussed (the process of ZCD) as evidenced through their actions and reflections in their journal writing and interview sessions as well as reflective cycles.

The discussion below is based on the second cycle in which dilemmas identified in the first cycle were presented. Below is the initial PAR cycle discussion where participants found themselves engaged in the moral conflict presented by one *Orkid* participant. Based on my observation, though the moral conflict was written by one student, the other group members also shared equal pain and frustration of not having the desired autonomy. The excerpt below shows how the participants feel when they do not have sufficient autonomy in life:

> Q: We are big boys already but for everything we do at home we need to get permission. We get 'no' as a response most of the time. For example even if we want to go out with friends it is also so difficult to get permission from parents.
>
> S: It is always a 'no, no, no'. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Almost all participants nod their heads in agreement; efvr]

The discussion above continued when Y presented a different view point which made the other participants think:

> Y: But at times there are reasons why parents are strict with us. They don't want us to get into trouble.
>
> I: What trouble?
>
> Y: Trouble with the law or being bashed up by bad guys or even mixing with wrong company. I was once robbed in the bus stop outside my flat and have been extra careful with strangers since then. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Two participants act out to each other how a robber attacks and the participant whacks him in a friendly manner; efvr]

At this stage of discussion, Y takes the role of capable peer who understood why parents are being strict with their children. According to Vygotsky (1978), the capable peer can be anyone within the social group who has a fund of knowledge based on experience or other learning situations. Y provided reasons for why parents are strict and shared his own experience to make his statements valid. But the discussion went on to another direction; although some participants agreed with Y (efvr showed body gestures such as a nod or being silent - which indicates less than whole hearted agreement in Malaysian culture) they still wanted to be treated differently by their parents. The extract below shows how the students could accept the ways their brothers scolded or reprimanded them but not their parents:

Q:      My brother scolds me at times but my brother is very "cool".

S:      Brothers are cool. They advise us in a nice way because they too have undergone what we are going through. Parents can only see their side of the story and don't care about our side.

I:      What do you mean?

Q:      Brothers are more like friends and we share secrets together.

Y:      Then we should find ways to communicate with our parents too like how we communicate with brothers. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: All participants nod and agree with Q and S; efvr]


The notion of communicating with brothers and how that way of communicating could be extended to parents was again brought up by Y, the "more capable peer". Y suggested that his peers use the same form of communication with parents as how they communicated with brothers. He also wrote this extract in his journal after the second PAR cycle:

Today I found my friends really angry with their parents for not giving them chance to do what they want. I also was like that but now I understand why parents are strict with us. I hope they too will understand one day. (*Orkid*)

The participants had reflected on the moral conflict though not all of them wrote their feelings in their journals after the PAR second cycle. In the next/third PAR cycle, we had a reflective session based on the previous moral conflict. Y kept to the notion that communicating with parents was important for parents to see the children's side of the story. Q who was adamant in the beginning of the discussion about getting no autonomy from parents did some reflection after the first and second cycle of PAR and was less angry now. The excerpt below demonstrates Y's position as the capable peer and how Q and others were beginning to think differently:

> Y: I am sure we can work out something with our parents if we sit and talk to them.
>
> Q: Maybe you are right. I might try talking to them to see if they can see my side of the story.
>
> Y: You must also listen to their reasons too. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Q nods his head in agreement whereas the others gave a doubtful look; efvr]

At this stage of the reflective cycle Q was in the ZCD process of looking into his inner self for help. He felt that the idea of talking to parents seemed workable. Being the more capable peer, Y could relate to him and also made sense by making the other students look at two sides of a story. After this reflective cycle, Q wrote this reflection in his journal:

> I always thought that parents are a real pain…. However I think I might try out different ways to communicate with them. As Y says, they might see me as different and I might be able to get my way…once in a while at least. (*Orkid*)

The example above shows that the cycles of discussion in earlier sessions helped Q to see himself and his parents differently. He internalised the values and skills discussed in earlier discussions with his peers during the PAR cycles. ZCD as explained in Chapter Four can be achieved when individuals collaborate and reach levels which they might not have been able to reach on

their own. Q was thinking of using what he learnt in the discussions to help himself out. The dilemma analysis processes had helped him to self help and internalise values and skills learnt from the initial to the reflective PAR cycles.

Later on when I interviewed Y who I saw as the more capable peer in this dilemma analysis situation, I found that his daily experience had made him what he was. Here is an excerpt from the discussion where Y shares his experience on gaining autonomy from his parents and how he compromised with his father after communicating with him:

Y:      I used to rebel and hated my father so much for being so strict.

I:      What happened?

Y:      He will always sit and explain to me why he is like that. I live in *** flats where there's lots of drug addicts and he felt it was not safe for me to be out. I still argued and he compromised by taking me for football or games during weekends. I get my friends to go there too. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: Y was responding continuously, with expressive eyes and hand movements and every now and then he paused, thought about his experience and continued talking; efvr]

In this process, Y, the more capable peer can see the need for controlled autonomy due to two situations. One, he himself had been robbed in a bus station outside his home and two, his father communicated with him and came up with suggestions to allow him some autonomy but not complete autonomy. Through his sharing of experience with the group, the learning had taken place in an informal deliberate discussion but what the participants took back after the discussion was invaluable.

The participants had collaborated to create some meaning in their discussion, bringing to the process their own lived experiences from their own sociocultural contexts. Y for example lived in an unsafe area and knew the reason for parents being so authoritarian. He was in a more capable position to explain to the group why he felt parents did not provide them full autonomy. Q and the

other participants took part in the discussion. The internalisation of values and problem solving skills occurred as they were actively involved in the discussions. Q had the realisation that it might be a good idea to at least start talking and communicating with his parents – a course of action which he previously thought was hopeless but was now considering after collaborating with his friends.

The transformation from a collaborative discussion to helping a friend realise that he too can communicate with his parents is evident in two places. One is when Y communicated with his father and shared his lived experience with the other students in the PAR cycles. Next is when the interpersonal discussions among the students made Q realise that he too could try communicating with his parents. He learnt that Y's experience made sense of the autonomy dilemma that was discussed. Q initiated his own moral action by talking with his dad and shared this excerpt in his journal:

> I spoke to my dad last night and he seems to understand my feelings. It was a good start. (*Orkid*)

Learning is part of the problem-solving process and development will try to catch up (Wink & Putney, 2002). What Y, and Q and their peers in the PAR research group experienced was an interest level in authentic problem-solving activities dealing with someone's real-life moral conflict. But it did not end there. They had the opportunity to reflect upon their discussions and act on them later on. The philosophy of moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral acting was slowly taking form though a process in which the participants were taking control and finding voice.

With regard to the ME philosophy of learning, what started in the real-life moral dilemma analysis has all three moral domains within them. Moral feeling was involved in identification of dilemmas, thinking was involved when my participants were involved in the dilemma analysis, and action was seen when Q tried communicating with his parents and saw the advantages in doing so for further conflicts faced. ZCD therefore has had a wider than anticipated

influence whereby what was learnt within the classroom was brought to the home environment.

The type of decision making that the *Orkid* participants were involved in is congruent with the social constructivism model introduced by Cottone (2001). It refers to the interpersonal interaction and agreement that places decision in the social context itself. In this case, Y had knowledge which he shared with the rest of the group, and the interpersonal processes of negotiating, arbitrating, and finding consensus led them to their final decision.

### 8.3.2  ZCD and peers in dilemma analysis concerning respect

Between the three schools five moral conflict dilemmas were presented that together comprise the theme of respect; two dilemmas were from *Orkid*, two dilemmas from *Kekwah,* and one from *Seri Pagi*. My participants are aware that respect is a clearly spelt out value in Malaysia as a nation and within their sociocultural contexts but what they yearn for is mutual respect from the parties they deal with, be it humans or nature (see 7.3.2.1). To future elaborate the function of ZCD in this area, I will use the dilemma analysis process based on the Science teacher dilemma (Dilemma 4# *Kekwah*, see 7.3.2.4) from *Kekwah*.

In the first PAR cycle, students wrote their dilemmas down. In the second PAR cycle of discussions for this particular moral conflict, students shared much in common as they all had the same Science teacher and faced the same problems as their friends. But the real-life dilemma became more complex when some participants saw different perspectives of the teacher and of themselves which I will elaborate on further as I continue. Below is an excerpt from the second PAR cycle which shows their concern for the seriousness of the conflict and how they felt about the teacher and the need for mutual respect:

> C:      Teacher goes on teaching even if students are sleeping in class. At times we feel she doesn't even realise if we exist or not.
>
> E:      We wish she showed us more *TLC*.

I:      What is *TLC*?

E:      Tender love and care.

G:      If the teacher really cares, we won't have to go for tuition and we can clarify things with her. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: Two participants exchanging quiet glances with each other while the rest of the group made long sighs and gave sad looks as their friends were talking; efvr]

At this stage of the PAR cycle, I observed the students relating to each other in how they felt about the dilemma - they went on and on to express their feelings about a teacher who they wished would give them mutual respect. In this cycle there were two participants who just exchanged glances between themselves without contributing much to the discussion and I had noted that. By the end of this cycle, some students expressed how they felt about sharing with their friends during the PAR cycle. The journal extract below explains how relieved one participant was when she found that her dilemma with the Science teacher was not just her conflict alone:

> Since the start of this year, I have been stressed every time I go for Science because the teacher seems to be in her own world. I can't understand what is being taught. I have tried telling her but it was no use. Now I am relieved because some of my friends too have the same problem. I hope we can do something about it. (*Kekwah*)

In ZCD, learning and development does not always occur smoothly (see Figure 4.1). What is implemented in collaboration is later reflected upon by individuals who are able to self-help and internalise the values or skills learnt. In the above situation, the student is in the interpersonal process of collaborating with her peers. That was the end of PAR cycle two at which point I asked the students to go back home and reflect upon their discussion. In the following PAR cycle, students had just finished that particular Science teacher's lesson before they came to see me. They had more to say in this session:

H:      She says we are smart students so we should find things out on our own.

A:    She says Science is not a girl's subject so if we get minimal grades its good enough.

B:    But that's not fair because some of us want to excel in Science. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: The two participants who were changing quiet glances at each other in the previous PAR cycle kept quiet while the rest of the group got louder with their voices, heads nodding in agreement and piercing eyes with lots of hand and body movements; efvr]

At this stage, the participants (except for the quiet duo) were all getting very emotional about their Science teacher. They appeared unable to rationalise anything that the Science teacher does and feel that she is to be blamed for their boredom in class, their sleeping in class, and their minimal grades.

The two students who remained quiet, just observing their friends complaining throughout this and the previous cycle appeared to be disagreeing with the rest of the group. Based on video evidence, they were communicating with each other through body language - specifically, looking at each other and shaking their heads from left to right (as a sign of disagreement with the other members of the group). However, they were neither agreeing nor disagreeing with their friends verbally. From their body gestures (hardly any nodding but looking doubtful when other participants kept complaining about the Science teacher), I realised that they might have something to share with the group. So I questioned them specifically and here is part of their response discussion which indicates that they are the capable peers in this conflict:

F:    Maybe we should not sleep in class anymore but we need to get the message across to her about how we feel in class.

D:    We can talk to her as a class or send our class monitor as the representative. There are a few alternatives so we can try different ways and see which brings the best outcome.

F:    We've got to be patient with her too… poor old teacher. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: Two participants who had previously been silent spoke softly but looked at each other every now and then. As for the rest of the

group, they kept quiet and started to look less aggressive. Some even were looking down and reflecting on their own; efvr]

The above excerpt shows the input of the capable duo that was quiet in the earlier PAR cycle but who, after encouragement to talk, gave a different viewpoint on the whole dilemma. After these two participants gave their views, the rest of the group were not so emotional but started to complain less and reflect on the issue. Some even agreed with the first quiet duo as shown in the excerpt below:

A:     Maybe F is right. Maybe we don't understand the teacher.

H:     We might have to think of her too. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: The two quiet participants who gave their views earlier smiled and nodded, and the rest of the group were slowly nodding their heads; efvr]

After listening to the capable duo, the students were at their self-help and reflection stage. They were analysing the conflict within themselves too. We had to stop our session at this point and they filled in their conflict resolution journals.

What happened within the next two weeks was the transformation from moral thinking and moral feelings to moral action. In the next PAR cycle which was the reflective session for the Science teacher dilemma, my participants shared with me that they had spoken to the teacher concerned. She was shocked when they expressed that they cared and respected her but felt they needed it to be both ways. The teacher was not angry with them but welcomed more such open dialogue with the class so that they can progress together.  She apologised for being insensitive to their behaviours in class. She did remind them that she was going to be stricter but the group did not mind as long as she understood and respected them. It was a mature act on part of both students and teacher and it reflects how ME comes to life using Re-LiMDD. As for ZCD, the students had collaborated, got the help from the, at first silent, capable duo, internalised what was discussed and used the skills to resolve the dilemma amicably with their Science teacher.

During the initial cycles of my PAR research, the two capable peers who helped the group see alternatives within the conflict did not speak up. As the researcher I encouraged them to share what their stand was. This was based on my observation of their body language and in the video evidence (especially their facial expressions which showed anger and doubt) which indicated disagreement when the other members of the group kept complaining about the Science teacher. But because they saw and were able to present a different perspective from the rest of the group they seemed to be the more capable peers who in ZCD terms could start the others thinking and looking at the teacher from different perspectives.

According to Shapiro (2008), facial expression is an important way to communicate feelings with others. If an individual gives angry or mean looks to people who care about them or to people who are trying to help them, it is as bad as yelling at them. I noticed during the discussion session that these two *Kekwah* participants were passing such expressions to each other and other members of the group. When I later spoke to these two participants, they told me that the Science teacher was a nice person but because she could not deliver proficiently in English, she always kept to herself. Since 2003, subjects like Mathematics and Science have been taught in English in Malaysia, and teachers trained in Malay Language found this policy hard to cope with.

When my group and some of their other classmates had a discussion with the teacher, she was happy that the students cared and respected her. She understood the problems of the students and hoped to work with them. The other members of my group also saw the actual problem that their Science faced and had empathy for her. It is worth noting that what started as a group collaboration ended with the individual members reflecting upon the issue; and what is even more meaningful is the decision that they took upon themselves - to meet up and discuss the issue with the teacher. Feeling was involved in the identification of dilemma with the Science teacher, thinking was required for discussing the appropriateness of possible decisions, and action taken in the reflective decisions which led to real moral action taken and reflected upon again at another time. This, then, is an example of moral thinking, moral feeling

(capable peers explaining to other group members what the teacher might be going through and building a sense of empathy within the group), and moral action (meeting and discussing with the teacher what they felt and later reflecting during the PAR reflective cycle) come alive.

The *Kekwah* participants were engaged in a social constructivism type of decision-making (Cottone, 2001). According to Cottone, this type of decision making involves interaction with other individuals. The interactive process between the Kekwah participants that involved voicing issues, negotiating and reaching consensus led them to take the moral action which they reflected in the reflective session.

With the ZCD, the students' experiences expand and they are able to resolve more complex dilemmas but still within the relational perspective. This is one gap that I see consistently between my research and the current ME syllabus for secondary schools. The key difference between the present ME syllabus and the findings of my research is that the syllabus states values and learning areas in a non-relational manner far from the students' experiential daily lives.

### 8.3.3  ZCD and peers in dilemma analysis concerning trust

Within the theme for trust, four conflicts were presented by my participants. Two conflicts were from *Kekwah* and one each from *Orkid* and *Seri Pagi*. While the conflicts brought up by *Kekwah* and *Orkid* had to do with trusting others, the conflict from *Seri Pagi* was about trusting ones self in facing challenges in academic issues (Dilemma 2# *Seri Pagi*). This notion of self-trust is another new theme brought up by my PAR participants.

I will focus on a dilemma from *Seri Pagi* (Dilemma 2# *Seri Pagi;* see 7.3.3.2) to analyse the process whereby the participants try to resolve the conflict.

In the second PAR cycle - that is, after the initial one where the participants had presented their dilemmas - everyone in the group focussed on the dilemma. The excerpt below shows how those who did not have the conflict or had overcome such a conflict gave their views during the focus group discussions in the second cycle. The collaboration between groups of individuals who have

some funds of knowledge on how to overcome the weaknesses in self-trust was evident here:

> M:    I feel the best thing to do is sit together with either friends or teachers and discuss our needs where studies is concerned.
>
> J:    We need self-discipline. If we lack that, then encourage parents to remind us or sit with us and discuss school matters from time to time.
>
> L:    We must find ways to communicate with our studies. (*Seri Pagi*)
>
> [Nvc: K and a few other participants kept shaking their heads from left to right as a sign of total disagreement; efvr]

All three participants in the above discussion are providing different alternatives when analysing the dilemma. I consider all three as capable peers based on their own lived experience. M talks about reaching out to others when having academic or study problems. J is talking about developing self-discipline and inner strength but also reaching out to parents for help if necessary. As for L, the resolution is to find ways to interact with studies and resolve the conflict. These three students have provided several alternatives, and, therefore, in ZCD terms they are the capable peers for this moral dilemma.

After several alternatives were given as shown in the above excerpt, some participants who were facing the conflict appeared to completely disagree with their friends. Video evidence shows they were shaking their heads from left to right even when their friends were giving their suggestions. This can be quite disturbing because such body language shows a sign of resentment with what is being suggested. This other group had their reasons for disagreeing with those suggestions. The excerpt below shows their resentment though the other group provided choices to overcome the weaknesses in self-trust:

> K:    It is easier said than done.
>
> I:    Why do you say so?
>
> K:    Cannot resist.
>
> M:    If your friend is there, then go elsewhere. Go to some place where you won't be disturbed. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: At this juncture, K kept shaking his head from left to right more vigorously and I responded in body language by shaking my head up to down once as a signal to ask why; efvr]

K:      But I still can hear their exciting voices. I may not be able to see their faces but still I can hear their voices.

O:      At home also the television seems to be calling us and the computer game is also inviting us to play. [Every one laughs as K talks with sign language imitating the television and computer calling]

K:      Those days, during our parents' time, no internet, no chatting but now so many things exist to distract us from studies. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: K kept shaking his head from left to right while the other friends whispered that he should try to stay away from distraction and then see what happens; efvr]

The discussion ended at this point because it was time for some of the students to go for tuition. I encouraged my participants to think about the discussion and write their thoughts into their conflict journals. During the third PAR cycle, K, M, and O still argued that it was not easy to have self-trust and what was suggested earlier in second cycle could not be put into practice. As for the others in the group, they came up with different strategies and it shows in the excerpt below:

J:      Best is to think of the good and bad of a certain action. Sometimes the activity is interesting but not beneficial to us.

M:      For example, now we are addicted to video games but 10 years from now, the games will still be there. If now we miss the opportunity to perform in our *SPM* examination, 10 years from now we would have missed our opportunity to study when we were younger. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: all participants including K nodded their head to show agreement; efvd]

K:      We must be strong and persistent. That is what is lacking in us.

J:      When we have an inspiration to do something, make ourselves stronger and be persistent until we finish that chore before going on to the next one. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: All participants including K, M, and O nodded their heads to show agreement; efvr]

Because the ideas were coming from their peers, those who had disagreed in the beginning started being less defensive and began questioning their friends' ideas. As for the group of capable peers, they went on giving ideas to resolve the conflict and those who disagreed in the beginning added practical solutions, as shown by this excerpt:

K:      We need to think of our future. But it's a long way away.

J:      When some one thinks, he will be careful before taking an action. Anyway we are half adults so working life is not far away.

O:      Its strength that comes from within.

K:      I've got a practical solution.

O:      What?

K:      If I want to play game for two hours, I'll tell myself I need to study for two hours first. But first I got to start off with the studying then go to the more fun part. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: As J, K, and O spoke, the rest nodded their heads and were smiling; efvr]

However, after going through some of their journals, I realised that the collaboration worked well during the focus group discussions but the internalisation did not take place as progression but towards regression. Even the participant who I thought was a capable peer was experiencing regression. The journal below explains it all:

Today I tried to carry out what I discussed earlier in school. I planned my day well and wanted to study for an hour before playing video games. Half way through my friend next door came to invite me to play

badminton. So I played badminton for two hours and only managed to study for about 30 minutes. I could advise my friends but I could not keep to my schedule. (*Seri Pagi*)

What has happened here is recursiveness within the ZCD (see 4.9.4). Because the above participant was distracted by his friends and the excitement to play badminton, his initial planning did not work. However, the realisation that he was influenced by disorientated self might provide him another opportunity when he faces a similar conflict.

In the above process, the capable peers are a group of participants who had a fund of knowledge and experience to provide and advise those who had similar problems. However, the more capable peer can experience recursiveness. According to Newman and Holzman (1993), recursiveness might be a moment of reorganisation of thoughts, a moment just before a revolutionary point of understanding. In the participant's position above, it was a moment of distraction that made him abandon his actual plans. Thus the process and the conditions where discussions take place, as well as individual differences, are important factors in the ZCD (see 4.9.4).

During the reflective session in *Seri Pagi*, I found that every participant had tried out something or other based on their focus group and here is one excerpt from a journal entry made after the reflective session:

> I went home yesterday and started doing my homework. Usually I can't concentrate long and will do lots of unnecessary stuff like playing games and reading story books in between. But yesterday, I disciplined myself and completed my homework before even thinking of other things. I found that I can discipline and trust myself and do one thing at a time if I really want to. It's all up to me and the moral discussion we had in school helped me realise that. (*Seri Pagi*)

To emphasise a point I made earlier, ZCD is dynamic with progression and regression or recursive elements. It is more practical than Kohlberg's cognitive development theory (see 3.1.1) which defines moral development as a process that changes according to moral reasoning. It is clear above that my participant

had clear moral reasoning but the action did not reflect the moral thinking. The notion of new cognitive structure transforming and displacing structure of previous stages (Kohlberg, 1984) also does not apply here. Moral development in ZCD depends on risk taking. It may involve apparent failure which might be momentary as the regression in the form of transition may prepare the student for the development leap that follows (Wink & Putney, 2002).

The above process also shows the connection between moral thinking and moral feeling in relation to moral action. Moral feeling was involved in the identification of dilemmas; moral thinking in the discussion process; and moral action in what the participants did as a result of their collaboration. One student experienced a positive experience while another had a negative experience. But both students were in stages of ZCD which lead them to a higher level of development and learning based on their Re-LiMDD. The decision-making was of a utilitarian sort where students complied with happiness gained from and being with friends.

### 8.3.4 ZCD and peers in dilemma analysis concerning freedom

In the freedom conflict theme, participants presented four conflicts dealing with issues of freedom in relation to parents, siblings, and relatives. The *Orkid* participants were very involved with this theme and I will use an example from that school (Dilemma 1# *Orkid*) to analyse the notion of ZPD in the Re-LiMDD. The conflict is about parents not understanding the student and the responsible action taken by the parents being seen as demoralising the student's dignity. Below is an excerpt which shows the second PAR cycle of discussion for this conflict. In the first cycle, the dilemma was thought about and verbally expressed:

> R:    Parents are too strict with us.
>
> S:    We hardly have freedom to do anything.
>
> I:    What do you like to do?
>
> S:    Chatting, play football, meet friends.
>
> R:    But our parents are always watching us.

> W:      It's not all our parents. My parents are quite lenient. They have curfew time and all for me but I know how to manage my parents… at least for the moment. [All laugh] (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Participants who agreed that parents are too strict were shaking hands with each other and the others, who held a different opinion, just looked at them; efvr]

Here, the discussion took a turn in which participants expressed two different opinions. One group who was fighting for freedom was complaining about not having space to grow and feeling pressured by parents watchful eyes. The other group who had some form of freedom were trying to convince their friends that freedom was very subjective and parents should give them controlled freedom.

In this situation I consider both sets of voices as capable peers in ZCD; they are seeing the same conflict from two different perspectives. Though they are in the same group, they seem to have completely different opinions based on their experience and their knowledge. Why do I say so? From my observation it appeared that one sub-group of participants was yearning for the freedom that they never had. Now that they are teenagers, they find that the rules set at home are stricter and parents are firmer with them. The other sub-group of boys has more lenient parents. These boys had enjoyed some form of freedom which they considered should be controlled. The sub-group which never had freedom are the capable peers more able to talk about conformity and strict authoritarian parents.  The sub-group who have had some form of freedom were more capable regarding the risks associated with freedom which is not controlled and the consequences of such freedom. Each group collaborated within themselves and tried to show the other group their point of view.

This represents another example of students' contextual meaning or perspective being based upon the family background, the culture, and traditions that they come from. The excerpt below shows how one sub-group of students is struggling to get a little of the freedom enjoyed by their friends from the other sub-group:

P: Go five o'clock and come back seven thirty after playing football also get whacking.

S: There was once when exams were over and I kept playing my computer games a few hours extra. My father started scolding me. I was real angry because I just wanted to release tension and my father thought I was wasting time playing computer games.

Q: My parents always say that going out with girls is wrong. I don't think it's wrong because we are not doing anything bad. Just being friends is our intention but it's a big 'NO'

R: My parents don't give me chance to chat or go on-line. Always they will find something for me to do. 12 midnight also must study. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: Two participants were imitating the act of studying a book until one made the action of sleeping on the book; efvr]

The freedom that the above participants want is always curtailed by their parents and that makes them feel demoralised, angry, and frustrated. The initial PAR cycle ended at this point and I encouraged the students to reflect on the two different perspectives that they had discussed so far. What was discussed in the PAR cycle was further expressed in their journals. The journal extract below shows one participant's feelings about wanting more freedom:

I wish my parents understood that I need some time for my own; to do things I like to do and leave me. (*Orkid*)

Interestingly, another student who had more freedom than his friends wrote how he felt about his own freedom and how it should be for teenagers generally. The journal extract below shows another opinion of having controlled freedom:

I am happy with the little freedom I get at home because I can see effects of uncontrolled freedom in my neighbourhood where teenagers become spoilt and smoke and take drugs. (*Orkid*)

The two journal extracts above show two different understandings of what freedom means to participants based on their personal experiences. In the third

PAR cycle, the discussion got deeper and students started giving reasons for holding on to their different perspectives. The capable peer sub-group which had more freedom felt controlled freedom was sufficient. They voted for controlled freedom and had this to say:

> T: My father lets me go out with friends but he gives friendly reminders like "Go out to watch football, don't come back so late" or "Choose your friends".
>
> I: Why are parents watchful over you?
>
> U: They are scared that we might mix with wrong company or even get robbed.
>
> T: Last year there was a report in the newspaper about an adolescent who went out for supper and got murdered.
>
> W: Maybe our parents suffered a lot during their younger days and they want us to appreciate what we have now. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Some participants were nodding while others just watched their friends talk; efvr]

In Malaysian culture, adolescents are always told to choose their friends carefully. My participants felt that they knew what their limits were and anyone or everyone could be their friend. But their parents were always monitoring them for their own reasons. At this stage of the PAR cycle, the sub-group wanting more freedom was starting to agree with the more capable group for the controlled freedom. Evidence from the video showed them slowly nodding their heads or looking doubtful.

The collaborative group for the controlled freedom suggested that gaining parents' trust by showing responsibility as good sons was one way to build the rapport within the family. In this sense, the group for more freedom accepted the suggestion and had this to say:

> P: Some teenagers run away from home to gain freedom but that is the negative way so we won't even consider that.
>
> Q: Best is to wait to grow up. I see that my parents are less strict with my elder brother who is in college now. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: One of the participants took out a key from his pocket and showed the rest. The others just nodded in agreement while a few laughed; efvr]

The key is actually a symbol given to young adults who attain 21 years of age. It is not practised very widely but in the Malaysian Indian and Chinese cultures, parents or grandparents give it to the child in recognition of him or her as a young adult. Even the Federal Constitution defines individuals above 21 as adults who can vote in elections and do things on their own such as apply for an international passport or get married in a civil ceremony with/without parents' consent. This norm is also practiced by parents and families who tend to slowly provide freedom for children above 21 years of age.

### 8.3.4.1  Freedom and culture

The fact that both the groups within the one PAR group had completely different ideas about freedom and what freedom means is interesting. As a researcher I found that the students' cultural backgrounds also influenced their ways of analysing and resolving the above conflict. T who is from a mix-parentage (Chinese-Indian) family seems to have a more open-minded family. During one of my informal talks with him, he mentioned that his parents allow him to go out late at night with his elder brother and they are more open to suggestions from their children. This notion is further reinforced in the student journals. The journal extract below explains how one student saw how the culture of his family and his parents' overseas education had influenced the freedom he received from them:

> Maybe because my parents are from different culture and they had an overseas education, they seem to be more relaxed on us, the children. We get time off to go for movies and be with our friends. We even get a monthly allowance. But if our parents find out matters not too good, like our grades are bad or we are playing truant, then its trouble! (*Orkid*)

Another journal entry written by one participant who was in the "fight for freedom" sub-group wrote how he wished for a bit more freedom. He

understands the situation that his parents grew up in and is mature enough to make a comparison with his present era:

> I know my parents had a tough time during the Japanese occupation and after that during the communist times. They did not even have food to eat. But now we are living in another era and they should be more understanding about our times now. By letting me play football extra time, I won't become a bad guy. (*Orkid*)

The whole process at *Orkid* turned out as in ZCD where initially the PAR cycles took the participants through collaboration and suggestions were provided by their peers as to why parents are controlling and not giving children freedom that they expected. Since there were two sub-groups of capable peers, the analysis deepened in PAR cycle 3 when students argued and discussed reasons for parents controlling their children. The excerpt below shows how each sub-group was trying to make the other see their point:

> W:   They are worried for our safety every time we leave home.
>
> T:   Yes, my mother always says she feels relieved when I reach home safely.
>
> P:   I understand but my father does not even allow me to go out after 6 pm. He says it's not our family tradition to let children go out late.
>
> W:   Then you got to follow his way till you grow up. He is worried for your safety. *(Orkid)*
>
> [Nvc: The same participant who previously took out his key, showed his key to P. At this stage too, the two sub-groups showed body gestures like a thumb up for their friends who they agreed with and a small "Boo" for friends whose ideas they disagreed with; efvd]

At this stage, based on ZCD, reflection was taking place at the collaborative level where students saw the link between culture and the times when their parents grew up. Later at the PAR reflective stages, students understood and internalised the differences in cultures and how the Japanese occupation of Malaysia (see 7.2.4) had influenced their freedom at the present time. They also demonstrated that they understood the state of law for gaining full freedom

at the age of 21 and their need to be patient and responsible towards their parents. The excerpt below shows how each sub-group came to a certain agreement with each other:

> W: Maybe you should get some freedom that some of us get from our parents.
>
> T: Be patient. Parents would learn to let you go when the time comes. They are used to the strict way of bringing up children.
>
> Q: They don't want us to end up with bad company.
>
> P: If it makes them happy then we just wait for our time. *(Orkid)*
>
> [Nvc: Participants were nodding at each others' opinions. W patted P and P gave him a smile; efvr]

At this stage, the participants were compromising with their views and reached a consensus of what kind of freedom they should be getting from their parents. W and P are from the two different sub-groups but they seemed to agree with each other though in the beginning they were on opposite sides. One of the characteristics of ZCD is that students can go well beyond the limits of their own capabilities after collaboration with their peers (see 4.9.1). What one sub-group could do was not acceptable by another sub-group's parents for getting freedom are two different perspectives. But the fact that the students could collectively discuss and later reflect upon their own positions, including internalising what the other sub-group had to say, and later were more capable to face freedom conflicts shows that the ZCD enabled them to propound a new formula. It is important that within the complex Malaysian educational realities students can collaborate and come together to see the different perspectives that exist within the complexities of their daily lives.

According to Nakkula and Toshalis (2006), if the adolescents' desire for freedom is challenged with authority and enforced powerlessness, students will resist and feel frustrated. My participants who yearn for freedom feel their relationship with parents is not reciprocal and find themselves in that demoralised state. However, after collaborating with the more capable peer group, they tend to understand the need for controlled freedom.

Simultaneously, the other capable peer group who had freedom to a certain extent understood the feelings and needs of their friends who were yearning for freedom. They complement each other as capable peers.

Though in initial cycles my participants from *Orkid* were evenly matched, by the reflective cycle, they could see the perspective of the other person and came to a conclusion that they had to face their conflicts according to the situations they were in and reflect on a moral pluralism orientation (see 9.3.2). They were involved in a hermeneutic perspective of decision making (Betan, 1997) where hermeneutics represents a shift in views of the nature of knowledge and the process of how we come to know. Through the use of ZCD, the initial collaboration, later self-reflection, and final group reflection make the decision-making process a relational one where participants interpret what they know based on their experiences, and use this knowledge to inform each other.

### 8.3.4.2  Freedom and Japanese occupation

The Japanese occupation was one of the hardships faced by most Malaysians during the pre-independence times. Food was scare and local people were tortured by Japanese soldiers. The local people were often in hiding and children did not go to school. Those who had the opportunity to go to school went to Japanese regimental schools, learning Japanese language and Japanese school syllabus. Though the Japanese were in Malaysia for a relatively short period (1942 until 1945), the effects and impacts of this time are still felt and repeatedly mentioned to the younger generation (see 7.2.4). The issue of freedom is one of them. Participants in *Seri Pagi* and *Kekwah* also reflected on issues on freedom in relation to the Japanese occupation. Here is a journal writing which voices the effects of the Japanese occupation and its impact on the amount of freedom that the participant gets as a teenager:

> What I want is a bit of time for myself. My parents say during Japanese times they had to work whole day under hot burning sun to bring back home some tapioca. At times they even sleep without food. I understand what they had gone through. But I want some time for myself to do things I like. Is that too much to ask from them? (*Orkid*)

As seen in the excerpt below, during the PAR process in *Orkid*, the participants considered the Japanese occupation as one reason that made their parents curb their freedom:

> P:   When I ask for a little extra pocket money also, Dad would bring the Japanese occupation story.
>
> R:   Parents always compare their times with now. It is difficult to explain to them that times are different and changing. *(Orkid)*
>
> [Nvc: Two participants were nodding their heads to agree with the above conversation; efvr]

The effects of the Japanese occupation is something I myself personally heard much about during my growing years but I never realised that it still leaves such a deep impact on adolescents and their plea for freedom. It must have influenced their parents or grandparents to a very great extent for my participants to make the connection that it still influences their need for some space.

### 8.3.5  ZCD and peers in dilemma analysis concerning tolerance

Tolerance is an important value in the Malaysian setting. However based on recent cultural, political, and economical developments in Malaysia, the value of tolerance needs to be carefully re-examined. It takes two sides to tolerate and give and take. In current times when issues of equality and social justice are becoming more prominent, tolerance is perceived both as negative and as positive - positive if both parties are tolerating each other equally and negative if one party does all the tolerating and the other party takes the tolerating party for granted. In *Bahasa Melayu* tolerance (*toleransi*) means to give and take (*bertolak-ansur*). However, depending on culture and traditions, the tolerance rate differs according to status and authority. My participants perceive tolerance as a two-way system where toleration is equated with care and compassion. The issues they presented are interpersonal in nature and the conflicts involve friends, parents, and siblings.

For this theme, Dilemma 4 *#Seri Pagi* will be analysed. This is the dilemma about the conflict between my participant and her brother who ended up not talking to each other (see 7.3.5.3). In the initial PAR cycle, the students wrote down their conflicts and Dilemma 4 *#Seri Pagi* was one of them. In the second PAR cycle, the students read the dilemma and started discussing. This is an interesting dilemma which not only shows the sibling conflict but also the conflict between cultural norms and the need to be heard. The excerpt below shows how my participants are torn between two perspectives; that is, between having their voices heard and still living within the cultural norms:

> N:    There must be some form of toleration between both the brother and the sister. Or else there is no way the conflict can be solved.
>
> L:    Maybe the sister, being the younger in the family should give in.
>
> M:    But what about the sister's privilege to watch television programmes she likes? We cannot be always giving in to our elder brothers and sisters.
>
> J:    But isn't that what our culture has taught us - that we must respect our elders?
>
> M:    Respect is always there but the younger sister must also be recognised as individual in the family. (*Seri Pagi*)
>
> [Nvc: First participants were nodding to N's opinion then they were also nodding to M's opinion too; efvr]

Based on the excerpt above, two points of view are voiced about this moral dilemma. One voice is raising the need for tolerance based on culture and religion which teaches younger siblings to respect older ones; the other voice is reflecting on the needs for older siblings to care and understand the needs of younger siblings. In the Malaysian culture, elders are always looked up upon with respect by the younger ones. Such a practice has been taken for granted and tolerance in this situation has a negative connotation because the elders will always get their way and the younger ones always need to give in.

In the third PAR cycle of discussion, it was interesting to note that the PAR group in *Seri Pagi* wanted a change; they wanted their voices as younger ones to be heard too:

> M:     But times are changing. The younger sister should also be understood by her older brother. We as younger sister cannot be always giving in.
>
> N:     Older brother too should tolerate and give in to younger sister once in a while. (*Seri Pagi*)
>
> [Nvc: J kept shaking his head left to right; efvr]

Based on the second and third PAR cycles, there were two sub-groups within the PAR group in *Seri Pagi*. One sub-group was knowledgeable about cultural and traditional norms where younger siblings give in to older ones and another sub-group of participants argued that those times are changing and its time that younger ones are heard. These two groups were each committed to their own perspective and there did not seem to be any resolution possible at that time. We stopped at the third PAR cycle and I encouraged the *Seri Pagi* students to reflect on what had been discussed so far and write what they felt about the whole dilemma into their conflict journal. As discussed earlier the journals had two voices. The journal extract below shows the voice that is strong in culture and traditions:

> As younger members of our family we must ask for forgiveness from the older brother because he is older and he knows what is good for us the younger ones. Our religion and culture teaches us to respect elders so why fight with older brother and make things worst at home. Just say sorry and forget about the whole matter. (*Seri Pagi*)

Another voice was focussed on rationality and less on culture. The journal extract below shows one opinion that is based on rationality alone:

> We are all humans and all of us have some sort of dignity. Whoever did some wrong to another one must admit their mistakes and say sorry. It's that simple. If the younger sister was wrong she must say sorry. If the older brother was rude then he should say sorry. If both are at fault then

both should admit their *kebodohan* (stupidity) and be friends again. (*Seri Pagi*)

Since there were two schools of thought, I did not see any capable peers in the first few PAR cycles of discussions, although there was plenty of collaboration and sharing of different ideas. However during the PAR reflective cycle, the students came to a compromise as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

O: There must be a way to solve this conflict.

J: It must be a two way reaction.

N: It is not right always for the younger sister to give in.

L: If older brother had done wrong, he should say sorry and the other way too.

K: In my experience, being the youngest in my family, I always have to say sorry or give in first. But I think its ok because my older brother and sister respect me for that.

O: I don't think that is accepted because within our families, we have certain norms. As older brother or sister, they must also show a good example. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: Participants were nodding to each others opinions; efvr]

In this reflective cycle, I identified J as the more capable peer who could draw out reasoning based on the duality of the tolerance dilemma analysis. Since there were two strong voices, one based on culture and tradition and the other based on rationality, the capable peer here is the one who could merge both and look at the conflict within the context. The excerpt below shows how the capable peer could link both rationality and the cultural needs of tolerance:

O: But if you did not do wrong why do you have to say sorry?

J: Some of us have been brought up to respect the elders from small. So if they do wrong also, we have to *tutup sebelah mata* (close an eye).

O: Then the elders will always win and the younger will lose out.

> J:     The younger can show respect to the elders but at the same time be firm with what she has to say. It's no use being rude or speaking out loudly. If we are respectful, the elders will listen to us. Then we can explain and they would listen to us. (*Seri Pagi*)
>
> [Nvc: When J was speaking all participants eyes were on her and heads were nodding as a sign of agreement; efvr]

In the above PAR process, J has helped the PAR group to see the relation between culture and relationship and how the tolerance dilemma can be resolved. J is the more capable peer who cast light on the situation by seeing and expressing to the others the possibility of being cultural while also putting their rational opinion across.

Based on my own personal observations and dialogue with my participants, I find them very influenced by the way they have been brought up from childhood. For those who had had a strict religious upbringing with traditions and culture as part of their way of life, practically all their decisions go back to what they were inculcated with when they were young. However, several participants had been brought up more liberally without focussing much on religion or traditions and these are the participants who write different point of views.

The situation in the dialogue above is a typical scenario of what most of my participants were trying to voice during the entire research process. They know their rights and where they stand as children of parents, siblings of brothers and sisters, students of teachers, and friends of friends. They have been brought up with religious, cultural and traditional norms, surrounded by law and legislation and community norms. On the other had, when they start going to school, they are also exposed to critical and creative thinking, human rights (MOE, ME Syllabus for Secondary Schools, 2000), and other Western philosophies. The media and internet also influence their behaviour and thoughts. With all this exposure, the ME students are faced with challenges and dilemmas about how to resolve their moral conflicts. They cannot forget their traditional cultural background but they also want to be heard.

In this dilemma analysis process, the *Seri Pagi* participants are engaged in a social constructivism decision-making process (Cottone, 2001). Though there were two schools of thoughts in the beginning, the decision by the creative capable peer was created based on the interactive process between the participants. Peers have been collaborating with themselves in every stage of the research except for personal reflection when they do their own thinking.

In all five ZCD analysis above, the capable peer have been different participants who shared their knowledge and experience which led to actions within and outside the ME discussion.

In the following section of analysis I would like to share how the peers played their roles and responsibilities in my research generally. Pring (1984) argues that adolescents learn more from the behaviour and attitudes of those around them that they actually do from formal instruction. To a great extent, I agree with Pring because my participants observed, participated, and voiced their opinions throughout the research process. They used body language unique to the Malaysian adolescence way of communicating (nods and shakes of head, keeping quiet, looking at friends for support) which was something new for me and that every ME teacher should be aware of.

## 8.4    Peers help to resolve academic challenge

My participants meet their peers most of the time in school. Their lives together involve many academic issues like group studies and tuition. They found that to develop intellectually peers play an important role, though in chapter seven I discussed a conflict where peers also distract them from concentrating on their studies (see 7.3.3.2). The issue of academic challenges was discussed in all three schools that I researched. In the interview excerpt below, my participants relate to friends when faced with academic challenges:

> H:    Either study on her own or discuss with her friends.
>
> F:    Friends are the best solution because different students understand at different level so if we sit together then we can come up with some real good discussion and clear our doubts on the different topics that we do not understand (*Kekwah*).

[Nvc: Participants were nodding to each other and a few were tapping their friends shoulders; efvr]

It is common for secondary school students in Malaysia to form study groups on their own to discuss academic matters. They meet outside school hours or in school between lessons.

The excerpt below is from during one of the initial stages of my PAR where students were still very attached to the traditional method, and values learnt during ME are seen in terms of "facts". Based on my observations, the participants were most concerned about ME grades and examination but towards the end of the research and during the reflective cycle, this perspective completely changed (refer to quotes from the students' journal as we go along this part of the chapter):

> T: If everyone is serious during study group, then if we start with five facts we can end up with ten facts.
>
> I: What facts?
>
> U: End with more knowledge, memorise values. Everyone will give what they know.
>
> Y: In group study we need certain values too.
>
> Q: Yes like share the information with each other. Group members must not be selfish. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Two participants were showing the "thumbs up" sign to the rest of the group; efvr]

Values learnt during ME lessons were perceived as facts because these facts needed to learnt, memorised and applied in the ME examination papers. *Seri Pagi* students expressed similar thoughts about facts too. The excerpt below is also from during the initial cycles of research where my participants kept referring back to values as facts learnt in ME:

> J: When we have knowledge in a subject matter and help our friends to understand a certain concept, we will understand better and we have also helped our friends.

N:     For example we might have two facts in the beginning of the discussion but by the end of the day, we would have understood that two facts better and have more facts in our heads.

I:     What are facts?

N:     Values to be remembered for Moral exam. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: Participants were nodding to each other when J and N were sharing their thoughts; efvr]

At present, ME is taught in schools in the manner explained by the excerpts above. Values are learnt in the form of facts with contextual meanings and hypothetical situations. Later, whatever was learnt is tested in either school-based or centralised examinations. The above was from one of the initial cycles of discussion; by the end, the students became more self-reflective and here is an extract from one of their personal journals:

These few days, I've learnt to know myself better and learn to resolve my moral problems. I managed to express my moral problem [moral conflict was about learning to cope with academic pressure; Dilemma 2# *Seri Pagi*] and my feelings and find ways to resolve my problems with the help of my friends. It was a chance to discuss the moral problem which has been kept deep inside me for a long time. The process has taught me to be more sensible and to show tolerance in any situation that I am facing. I feel relieved and happy because not only is my problem solved but my friends who face similar problems also seem to have found the solution to their problems. I feel very happy to help friends by giving my opinion. I learn to have self control and self realisation about not making the same mistakes again. This whole experience has given me a new dimension about learning ME. (*Seri Pagi*)

Most of my participants are caught in a dilemma of resolving their own academic conflicts and challenges within the constraints of examinations and competition in school life. When they are provided with alternatives and different ways to resolve such dilemmas, some of them, as indicated by the participant above, learn to deal with such conflicts.

**8.5    Peers provide moral support and motivation in times of crisis**

Peers for my participants provide solace and moral support in times of crisis. They gain confidence in sharing their conflicts and learn how to cope with such conflicts. They are comfortable to be among their peers and share their adolescent lives with them. They care for each others' feelings and are honest with their relationships which showed naturally in the non-verbal communication (refer to Nvc after each excerpt).    Friends can be an emotional refuge for adolescents who have difficult relationships with their parents (Berndt, 1996). Participants share their personal dilemmas with close friends but some keep it to themselves (Dilemma *5# Kekwah*). The excerpt below shows why friends are important to my participants:

> U:    We go to our friends because we spend more time with them and they understand us better than family members.
>
> I:    Why do you say so?
>
> U:    Because we practically share similar problems which family members do not understand and friends can keep secrets. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Two or three participants were patting their friends' shoulders with some caring facial features; efvr]

Similar ideas about peers were also written in the conflict journals. In one journal, a *Kekwah* participant wrote this:

> Peers who have similar problems will be in a better position to help friends solve their problems. Peers provide support and tell us how to face such problems. (*Kekwah*)

However, several other participants did not trust all their peers and were selective with whom they find trust and friendship. They said peers are not necessarily trustworthy people and they choose their friends carefully:

> I will find a good trustworthy friend to share my problems. I have several good friends whom I can share my problems with. (*Seri Pagi*)

Participants in *Seri Pagi* find their peers helpful in enlightening them when faced with moral conflicts. They are able to relate and communicate well with each other. They respect each others' opinions and, as mentioned in the dialogue below, are practical about the pros and cons of having peers:

M:    For me, I have my own opinion and my friends too have their own opinions. When friends have problems and share with us, we might have had the same problem and we can share how we faced that kind of a problem. We can help our friends face their problems.

O:    Between friends, it's easier to learn from each other.

L:    But at times, we also learn not so good things…

I:    Like what?

L:    We may have friends who smoke or play truant and want us to follow them.

O:    But when such matters arise, we can compare what is right and what is not, and then we try not to follow the negative effect or bad characters. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: Participants were nodding and giving each other signs of a clap and thumbs up; efvr]

In the above excerpt, the non-verbal communication showed that participants accepted their peers' views. The clap and thumbs up reflected that they appreciated their friends and the support that they get from them and vice versa.

Participants in *Kekwah* agreed that peers' experiences and sharing mean a lot to them. They are open to suggestions and agree that at times, peers know more than them in certain circumstances:

I:    Do your friends help you in any way?

All:    YES… (Loud voice in chorus)

I:    How?

B:    Give ideas and share experiences.

H:    Give ways to resolve problems based on their own experiences.

> A: Sometimes friends know better because they have already experienced such problems. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: Participants were nodding and smiling and one particular participant hugged the friend who sat beside her; efvr]

In *Kekwah* (all girls school), students showed their affection more outwardly and the nodding, smiling, and hugging are all non-verbal signs of being comfortable with their friends during the PAR process. In the traditional Malaysian culture, physical contact was not very common when showing affection to others, but nowadays the adolescents are becoming more vocal and accept physical contact as part of friendship and appreciation.

Other than the excerpts above, my participants also wrote about how their friends gave a listening ear to them or were a place of comfort for them to turn to when facing dilemmas. Here are some opinions taken from the participants journals on why friends provide support in times of crisis:

> Friends are the ones I would turn to when problems arise because they are in the same age range and would definitely understand the situation from my perspective. They are there to listen when we need someone to listen to. (*Kekwah*)
>
> At this age, we don't get much support from family members. They don't listen to our side of the story and that is why we always turn to our friends for moral support. We need some help to decide. (*Orkid*)

Decision-making when faced with moral conflicts is very difficult and complicated. But my participants found the support of peers helpful and encouraging when they faced such conflicts. Since there is no one solution that is right, the experiences of their peers help in allowing space and time for them to learn how to decide for themselves. This is a new experience for the ME students who are so used to being guided towards the "right" resolution. Here the students had the autonomy to make choices of their own which gave them a sense of moral responsibility too.

Motivation is an important factor for my participants when deciding on a moral issue. Though not openly mentioned, from their discussions and non-verbal

communications, participants feel enlightened when their peers motivate and support them in finding resolutions to their moral conflicts. The excerpt below provides an avenue for participants to be motivated to overcome the dilemma faced (see Dilemma *1# Kekwah)*:

D:      I'm worried that the person with sweaty hands will make her into anti-social person.

E:      She does not have to worry. If she has several friends who keep telling her its okay and it's not her fault to have sweaty hands, she would gain confidence.

H:      Yes, I had a cousin who had the same problem when she was in school but now she is in college and she has got used to it and is less worried about it. Even her boyfriend does not mind. [All laugh]

[Nvc: The participants were looking at each other with compassionate looks and TLC was evident with their patting and touching each others' shoulders; efvr ]

In *Orkid* too, when participants are frustrated with the dilemmas that they think are insoluble, their friends give them support in their own way. The excerpt below explains how the participants managed a crucial part in discussing Dilemma *3# Orkid*:

T:      If the father trusts the son, it is better than the father not trusting.

Y:      Very true, if father doesn't trust, then got to pretend like studying.

W:      We have to learn how to manage such a situation. If father doesn't trust, then we earn the trust but if the other way around, then we got to be more disciplined.

P:      Easier said than done.

R:      But we can always try and get help from friends if facing trouble or difficulty. (*Orkid*)

[Nvc: At this stage E shakes hand with R as a sign of thanking him for his support; efvr]

Participants find meaning in their relationship with their peers and try to connect wherever possible. Here are some of the extracts taken from their personal journals which show what they think of their peers:

> Peers help their friends to solve moral problems by giving their opinions. If a teenager has some problems, the friend can provide suggestions about the problem and make him see the pros and cons in the problem. Peers will also be good motivators and supporters to help resolve the problem. (*Orkid*)

> Help me decide. They could change my mind. They will think in our perspective. (*Kekwah*)

> Peers are always there to share our problems with us. We also feel the burden lessened when we have peers to support us. (*Seri Pagi*)

> Peers give us ideas from different viewpoints that even we might not have thought of. They might advise us based on their own daily experiences. They might *tegur* (reprimand) us too. "Friends may not pull us up but still they will think of ways not to let us down". I think the support that they give us is most important. (*Seri Pagi*)

To be able to motivate and support their friends, the participants in the three different schools had their own way of doing it. For example the *Orkid* participants were always ready for a quick joke or light moment. The *Kekwah* participants were happy with their peers' long and lengthy explanations whereas the *Seri Pagi* participants were more formal and related back to authority and culture and traditions most of the time. They were well informed on rules and dos and don'ts. Some even expressed that they can't change situations much but the dialoguing helps to release their tension and was indirectly good support to their daily dilemmas. The extract below explains it all:

> Not very much, as my mum is rather strict and stubborn. She refuses to listen to anyone once her mind is set. Even her own parents can't convince her to change her mind, so I doubt that suggestions from my peers would do much to change her fixed mentality. Plus, I already know what most of the things they've suggested. But sitting together and dialoguing helps relieve the tension within me. (*Kekwah*)

## 8.6    Peers learn to decide for themselves

ZCD which is extended from ZPD focusses on Vygotsky's claim that what the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1986). In my research, participation is the fundamental issue. Because the participants in all three schools participated and made the whole research process their own, there were lots of relational communications and connections. They cooperated with me as a researcher and with their friends as participants and peers. During the PAR cycles, participants were involved in thinking and reflection processes and it reflected in their discussions and conflict-resolution journals as well. They did not follow their friends' opinions and suggestions blindly. They were open to others' suggestions and criticisms but also maintained their own opinions at a high level:

> F:    Because we don't see the same thing and have our own opinions.
>
> I:    Then what you do?
>
> F:    We share our opinions but let the person involved make the final decision.
>
> C:    Sometimes our friends don't advise or say anything when we do wrong. Maybe they want to care for our feelings but that's not a good friend.
>
> G:    What is your idea of a good friend?
>
> C:    One who supports us when we are right and tells us off when we are wrong. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: Several participants were nodding their heads and others whispered "yes" quietly; efvr]

The fact that my participants come from a range of different cultural and religious background influences how they would resolve the dilemmas discussed. Every participant would have to conform to their own cultural way of expressing an opinion or putting forward a suggestion. But participants in all three schools think that the support that peers provided that made them decide on their own.  Below are some views taken from their journals:

> Friends give us courage to stand up for our own decisions. (*Kekwah*)

Yes, they gave a few solutions. I have to try it out. (*Orkid*)

They help us a lot as some of them face the same problems like mine. So we get to share our problems together and try to solve them. (*Seri Pagi*)

Friends discuss together about certain problems faced by one of them. (*Kekwah*)

Friends provide several rational solutions to the problems in our daily life. (*Orkid*)

As peers, we feel closer to our friends because our thoughts and present situation are nearly the same. However, we still have difference in opinions because we are from different backgrounds. So we can give our own opinions and it is not necessary that we ask our friends to follow our suggestions. The final decision is theirs. (*Seri Pagi*)

The different backgrounds of the students were realised by the participants and they understood that the deciding person is the one who faces the dilemmas. Participants from all three schools agreed that peers help them a great deal in resolving moral conflicts in their daily lives. The academic challenges, the crises they face, and the decisions that they have to make are greatly helped by peers who have experienced such dilemmas or have helped them to think through the process of resolving the dilemmas. They felt that no matter what the discussions were, the final decision is to be taken by the person involved directly in the dilemma. However peers played an essential role in the process of dealing with real-life moral dilemmas.

## 8.7 How peers aid in the process of dealing with real-life moral dilemmas?

Based on the findings above, peers play an important role when my participants need to make decisions based on the real-life moral dilemmas that they face. Since my focus in this thesis is looking into the process of dealing with the real-life dilemmas, it would be useful to analyse what kind of help peers offer their counterparts when faced with a moral conflict. The two main kinds of help that my participants have been offering each other are suggestions and reprimands.

*8.7.1  Suggestions*

The research I conducted in all three schools reveals that one of the forms of help provided by peers is suggestions. Suggestions were in the form of moral choices (see 9.2), what can or should be done, and different ways of looking at the moral dilemma. Suggestions, either directly or indirectly, were a common feature in most of the discussions. Sometimes the participants related what similar conflicts they had encountered and how they managed to resolve it and later suggested alternative choices to the person concerned. At other times, they related experiences that their siblings or relatives or other friends had faced in similar settings and suggested what should be done. The excerpt below shows how they provided choices to each other based on their experience:

> W:  No use talking to parents who can't see our side of the story.
>
> I:  So what you think you can do?
>
> U:  Negotiate and strike a compromise. Make a deal with them or something like that. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Most participants were nodding their heads; efvr]

During the reflective session, several participants agreed that views and opinions from friends are good suggestions and can be tried out. The excerpt below supports that statement:

> P:  Friends help by giving advice and suggestions to help us solve our moral problems.
>
> Q:  They will provide their suggestions and link it with their own experiences. It is very practical.
>
> W:  At times, they give good ideas and if we try out such ideas, our conflicts can be resolved.
>
> R:  They give comments and advice which can influence our decision-making. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: S shook hands with T and said 'thank you'; efvr]

In *Kekwah*, the suggestions provided were welcomed with non-verbal reactions. In the excerpt below are some examples:

> E:     I think the person concerned should confront her mother and explain why playing the piano is so important. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: At this stage, those who agreed with E nodded and those who disagreed kept shaking their heads from side to side; efvr]

Further discussion on suggestions as moral choices is discussed in Chapter Nine. In their journals, my participants stated that suggestions from peers are helpful when they need to decide on a resolution. They have a few choices (see 9.2) from which they are able to make their final pick. They felt that since peers are the same age group as themselves, certain opinions are good to reflect and decide upon. The journal extracts below explains the suggestions that peers provide:

> Peers always help by giving their opinions on the conflicts that we face. It's up to us whether we want to accept their opinions or not. Peers help other adolescent resolve their moral dilemmas by providing opinions. (*Kekwah*)

The suggestions provided by peers in my research are received with different reactions. My participants sometimes elaborate what is suggested initially and at other times disagree or even reprimand their friends whose suggestion is not acceptable.

### 8.7.2  Reprimand

One other form of help that my participants provided each other was to reprimand each other. They did so by scolding, telling firmly, or even by being silent to show disagreement. In the Malaysian culture it is common for elders to reprimand the younger ones in cases of behaviour and language. But to my surprise, my participants were open to extending this method of help to their peers who are of same age. Below is an excerpt taken from *Seri Pagi* which exemplifies how the participants reprimand their peers:

J:      You cannot tell Grandma. It is a shame for the family.

O:      Why not, Grandma is part of the family right.

J:      But it is not proper. Don't embarrass our own parents by telling about our family. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: During this stage body languages like twitching of mouth and fierce piercing looks were exchanged between J and O; efvr]

Later, during the reflective session in the same school, the same participants had this dialogue which suggests that they had internalised some of the values during the earlier discussions:

I:      How do your friends help you?

J:      Give ideas.

O:      At times they even scold us.

J:      Because we did not agree with them.

O:      At times they totally disagree with us too. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: While J and O were arguing, two other participants imitated how a teacher scolds a student with a finger pointing at the friend and the other student looking frightened and timid; efvr]

The participants in *Seri Pagi* were most concerned with this method of help and wrote some in-depth opinion on the matter:

Peers help us to solve moral conflicts. They also teach us how to control ourselves from wrongdoings. When we do something not right, our peers tell us not to do it again. (*Seri Pagi*)

They help to correct my character, which is not good, so that I can become a better person. Sometimes they scold me. (*Seri Pagi*)

The non-verbal communication in the above excerpts also reinforces how my participants corrected each other or were reprimanded by the authorities. For example the imitation of how a teacher scolds a student is seen as concern for one who might have done a wrong thing or displayed negative character traits.

## 8.8    Moral choices and moral orientations in ME classrooms

The experiences of adolescents are diverse and complex (Wyn & White, 1997). It is so for my participants even with the help and collaboration with their peers. Vygotsky (1978) stated that problem solving within a group framework could extend a child's ability to comprehend and acquire knowledge. In my conclusion for this chapter I find my participants discussing, negotiating, arguing, and resolving the moral dilemmas. The ZCD and PAR processes encouraged group collaboration and allowed the participants to find ways to resolve the moral dilemmas and to discover what alternatives are available for this. In the following chapter, I will discuss the moral choices and moral orientation that my participants made based on the PAR process they underwent.

**CHAPTER NINE**

**Moral Choices and Moral Orientations**

## 9.1    Introduction

When my research participants were dialoguing and undergoing the PAR cycles, they were also providing each other with many moral choices based on their experiences, what they had learnt, and what they already knew. The participants experienced and viewed the different moral choices available from their own perspectives in order to resolve a certain real-life moral dilemma. The moral choices that they made also reflected the moral orientation that they were involved in.

## 9.2    Moral choices of my participants

Choice is necessary because, to be a moral person, one must have more than one course of action available, as well as both the authority and the competence to choose which course of action to follow (Boostrom, 1998). When I analysed the data from the PAR cycles that I carried out in the three different schools, I found that the participants were keen to discuss and deliberate the moral choices they have made regarding the moral conflicts (see Chapter Seven). Most of the moral choices that they make in their daily lives are strongly influenced by factors like parents, religion, culture, and relationship with others.

To have an opportunity to make moral choices, one must have more than one course of action available. This was a great challenge in my thesis as there were instances where my participants' thoughts were restricted by top-down government interventions and cultural norms and traditions which they had to accommodate. Since the first six years of their ME in primary school is based mainly on values inculcation, my participants are familiar with what is expected out of them as individuals and adolescents in Malaysia.

However, because the purpose of this thesis is to allow the voices of ME students to be heard, students were provided full autonomy to voice their opinions and deal with their own conflicts in deliberative discussions with their peers. Students' moral conflicts and the process of how they deal with such conflicts has been the main focus. Their moral choices are influenced by several factors that have influenced their lives until now.
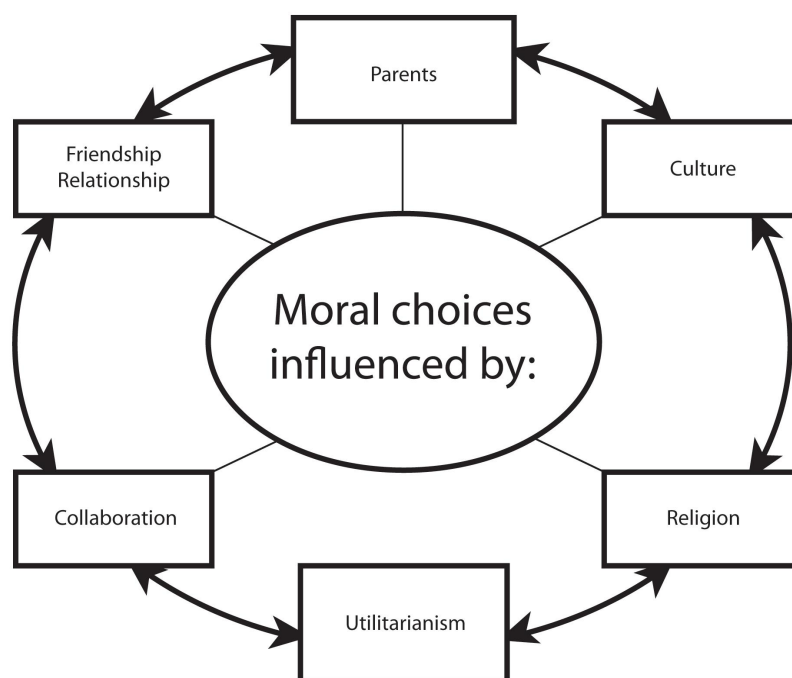


Figure 9.1: Factors influencing moral choices of PAR participants.

### 9.2.1 Moral choices based on parental influence, culture, and religion

I will begin with this excerpt from my focus group discussion which explains the difficulty of making moral choices based on the constraints within their circle of life. The influence of parents, culture, and religion is greatly felt by them here:

> J: When making a choice, we've got to understand how our parents will feel. We cannot hurt their feelings as they are our providers from the time we were born.

O:     If we are younger too, we have to be the first one to ask for forgiveness. Isn't that what our tradition and religion teaches us? (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: Two participants nodded and two others shook their head from side to side; efvr]

The example for the above reasoning between J and O is seen in this excerpt. The above Nvc reflects the different opinions that students shared or disagreed with. The moral choices available for the issue of brother and sister living under the same roof but not communicating with each other for months were discussed (Dilemma *4# Seri Pagi*):

M:     When we are tolerating, it involves more than two parties, we have to see who is free and can give in. Maybe today the younger sibling can give in and tomorrow our older brother will pity us.

O:     Maybe we can invite our older brother to watch his favourite program and he can see how matured we the younger ones are.

K:     That is quite practical.

P:     That's the norm in our culture. The older brother wants to take care of his *air muka* (dignity) but having the younger sister telling sorry will encourage the older brother to be more loving and compassionate. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: When P mentioned *air muka* several participants pointed to their own faces; efvr]

Culture is so strongly embedded in my participants that they refer to it recurrently for consolidation and confirmation. *Air muka* for the adolescents is perceived as a norm for taking care of their own dignity and respecting others too. It is interesting to note that even though my participants belong to different ethnic groups, the norms and values discussed above run across all cultures in Malaysia. The excerpt below where participants discuss forgiveness and respect is a follow up of the above:

N:     When we tell sorry, the other party will respect us more.

> M:     By asking forgiveness first, older brother will think, small child also can say sorry and they will realise their mistake and this can enhance the family ties. (*Seri Pagi*)

> [Nvc: Most of the participants who were observing nodded; efvr]

In their journals, the choice for the above dilemma reflected the influence of traditions and religion:

> It is in our religion that we must respect our elders. At times our siblings make mistakes, but we have to forgive them. After all, they are our own siblings. Our culture too encourages us to respect and tolerate the elders. But we can always explain politely our feelings and I am sure those who are elders to us will listen to us. (*Seri Pagi*)

Similar voices of respect for parents and family is seen here in *Kekwah* where parents are put right in the front:

> C:     Usually I make my moral choices in daily life by trying to discuss with my parents. The factors that influence my choice depend on the attitude of parents and the consequences of my action on others. If my choice does not hurt anyone but is okay for me, I will do it.

> E:     At times when I go beyond my parents' words, that's when problems start.

> D:     Our family background too influences our moral choices. Sometimes we are forced into making choices by parents because we are still living under our parents' roof. (*Kekwah*)

My participants felt that by going against parents' wishes or advice, they are inviting trouble. This is based on culture and religion (see 7.2.2 and 7.2.3) where students are struggling within the domain of culture, ethnicity and religion when making moral choices. The concept of "filial piety" in the Chinese culture and the respect for parents' "words" as being next to the word of God in the Indian culture is strongly bounded within the experiences of the adolescents. They share most of their conflicts with peers (see Chapter Eight) but when it comes to moral choices, parents' influence plays an important role.

The issue of choice based on parents' influence was discussed in relation to their own choices. The excerpt below is an attempt to rationalise their thinking about why they accept parents' advice:

> B:    Parents are actually worried for our safety. They don't want us to have *pergaulan bebas* [mixing around freely without boundary/restrictions].
>
> C:    They don't want us to fall in love so young in life.
>
> I:    Why?
>
> C:    They want us to concentrate on our studies first. (*Kekwah*)

"*Pergaulan bebas*" is a culturally bound conflict unique to the Malaysian setting. It may mean nothing to Western society but within Malaysia where regulations are based on the Islamic code of conduct, mixing freely with the opposite sex is forbidden and many adults/parents, though not Muslim, are very particular about it. On the other hand, students are also on the look out for choices which deal with their own needs and again are caught up in a circle of constraints.

The excerpt below shows how the *Orkid* participants had a wider outlook when discussing factors related to the moral choices. These students brought up issues of elders, religion, and parents in relation to making their moral choices:

> T:    I will make a choice based on my own needs and those around me like my parents.
>
> Y:    Sometimes our decision is based on fear. But at the same time we respect our elders and remember their advice.
>
> W:    I always hold on to the religious upbringing I have had and this part of me helps to decide and make a good moral choice. For instance, if I had a choice whether to use drugs or not, it all depends on the religion I was brought up in. I would do drugs if my parents did it and my religion encouraged it. I wouldn't if they didn't. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Almost all participants nodded their heads in agreement; efvr]

In Dilemma *5# Orkid*, the participants yearn for autonomous choices compared to the authoritative ways of their parents. The excerpt here shows how students are yearning for their voices to be heard on issues such as clothing and image:

> P:    Yes, I agree, but if parents are not happy with their children's dressing, they have the right to voice this and children too must respect their parents' wishes.
>
> Y:    I think we as young boys too have certain rights how to dress and carry ourselves. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: One participant took his comb out and combed his hair and the rest laughed; efvr]

The excerpt above is the only one where the participants raised the issue of rights but later during reflective cycles, they went back to the notion of care and how they and their parents would feel if both parties did not understand each others feelings and needs. The relationship between my participants and their elders had been uneasy, as the generations increasingly viewed each other across a hostile divide of taste and behaviour. According to Fass (2007), issues of identity such as taste in music and clothes had become commonplace forms of separation.

Parents play a very important role in the choices children make in the early stages of their lives. But as they become adolescents moral autonomy is greater. For most parents, their children's development during adolescence and emerging adulthood overlaps with their own development during midlife (Arnett, 2007). This is shown below in one of the students' journals:

> I think my dad too might have wanted to do things his way when he was young but he could not. So the same tradition is passed down to me. (*Orkid*)

The moral choices of my participants, influenced by parents, religion, and culture, continue to consider the choices based on utilitarianism. Being in an Eastern culture, my participants have been brought up to always understand what the other party would feel and to always care for the others' welfare.

### 9.2.2  Moral choices based on utilitarianism

When academics in ME talk about what students choose morally, they are looking at the quality of their participation, not at a body of content they are to memorise. Their ability to exercise moral choices depends upon their freedom and competence to say what they think. The excerpt below shows one participant's dilemma; whether to follow the choice of parents or to exercise their own choice:

> Q:    Parents should give children freedom but they also have to monitor them or else children might abuse the freedom and parents will have more headache. (*Orkid*)

The discussion from here took a twist; there were two opinions among the participants and they reached a point of deciding that they need freedom but that freedom needs to have limits. The responsibility that parents take upon themselves to protect the adolescents seems to conflict with the need for freedom by the adolescents. However, the participants themselves disputed and argued that freedom given by parents can be controlled freedom. It is interesting to note here that my participants agreed to some steps of precaution taken by parents to scrutinise their freedom. They accepted the idea that if everyone is happy with the controlled freedom then that is the best moral choice.

The excerpt below shows how the participants in *Kekwah* saw utilitarianism as a base for making the ultimate moral choice:

> A:    When I want to make a choice I have to think of so many factors like what my parents would think of me, how our relatives will take my decision and all.

> G:    I think the moral choice is to make others and also ourselves happy. There was a time when I did something which my family did not approve and I felt so bad. It took me months to come back to be my normal self. (*Kekwah*)

> [Nvc: One participant was shaking her head and mentioning "Always others come first"; efvr]

Utilitarianism is quite strong in Eastern culture, including the Malaysian culture. Decisions made always consider whether it will harm others, make others sad, and what the one who decides feel or wants is the last consideration. This has been a social norm which is at times taken for granted. And consistency is seen as a way to gain parents' trust as shown in one journal writing below:

> If we are consistent in our character, we can gain our parents' trust but a little mistrust, all that was gained gone down the drains. (*Orkid*)

At times, students' choices are influenced by the environment they are in and which they have no control over. The following excerpt concerns the student who cannot trust himself to study:

> M: If your friends distract you, keep away from them.
>
> O: I can still hear them enjoying themselves.
>
> J: Best is to think of the good and bad of a certain action. Sometimes the activity is interesting but not beneficial. Think of your future in life. (*Seri Pagi*)

It is a kind of utilitarian decision-making: the participants are reviewing the greatest happiness (by being with friends) compared to himself who is struggling with studies that he does not enjoy (see 8.3.3). However, the suggestion about futuristic thinking reflects the consequents' decision-making where participants discuss issues that would help them make a better moral choice if they thought of the consequences of their actions now.

Class discussions that involve students in critical assessment of ethical issues are valuable for guiding students to identify and evaluate the contextual variables underlying their moral choices (Basourakos, 1999). In the situation above, by being futuristic students helped each other to create a sense of awareness of the consequences of choices, and the deliberate discussion led on to reflection by the student within him/herself. This excerpt, based on the discussion above, was taken from the student's journal:

No doubt how much parents and teachers teach us to be moral, the final choice is still ours. If we have strong foundation in religion and good parents who we can role model, we have no problem. Religion teaches us good values and parents always ensure that we practice those good values. But we have to be intelligent and sensible to make good moral choices and don't get into trouble. (*Seri Pagi*)

The notion of making a self-decision in a pluralist society is important for my students. They are aware that with all the constraints, the final moral choice is theirs. However much as they like to decide on their own, factors like religion and good parents are always their guide to a good moral choice. Based on their discussion, they were able to provide multiple choices for the dilemmas analysed but had several constraints to remember (see 7.2).

### 9.2.3  Moral choices based on collaboration

According to Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi (2000), one of the tasks of schools is to promote the development of discourse among students. This requires shared activity in which students are able to interface between schooled concepts and those of everyday experience. It also relates to Cottone's social-constructionist approach. The bridging between the two can be developed through solution of practical problems which are within the experiences of the students. My research agrees with the opinion above.

The excerpt below details the discussion for Dilemma *4# Kekwah,* in which students described conflict with the Science teacher who taught them without listening to the problems they faced in the Science class. This situation led them to conflicts of mutual respect. They respected their Science teacher but felt she did not respect them. So they collaborated as a class to resolve the dilemma:

> G:    We can decide as a group or as individuals.
>
> B:    Talking to her personally might help.
>
> F:    Why not set a day for us to tell her how we feel?
>
> D:    Maybe we should decide as a class. (*Kekwah*)

[Nvc: When D spoke, every other participant was nodding their heads; efvr]

When the participants came up with alternative moral choices, they were also thinking about their relationship with the Science teacher. They were hoping for some positive reaction from their Science teacher. "Teachers who model ways of being in relationship for students reach more than content knowledge"; they teach "respect, care, collaboration, and a host of life skills necessary to ensure success and personal happiness" (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 97-98). My students suggested having a talk with the teacher concerned and listed a few choices which might help them resolve the conflict. They could take a multi-perspective and analyse the situation from different angles. At this point, they were no longer attacking the teacher but also looking at the situation from the teacher's perspective. The ZCD approach encouraged them to look at different perspectives as they collaborated with their peers.

In another PAR process, participants in *Seri Pagi* were constantly collaborating with each other to reach a final decision which was decided upon after everyone had their say:

O:      Sometimes Grandma will tell about us to other relatives.

M:      But we can still talk to Grandma. She would understand us better.

J:      Isn't it better to talk to our parents. They are the ones directly involved with us and they can sort out our problems.

K:      It all depends on how close we are to Grandma. Or else better to speak to parents directly. (*Seri Pagi*)

[Nvc: Most participants were nodding their heads; efvr]

Collaboration among peers encourages them to co-operate and decide on matters that means a lot to them. They are able to view different opinions and decide which one moral choice might work in the given dilemma. They nod and use simple body language to show agreement or unity among themselves. The extract below explains the power of collaboration in making moral choices:

> I get the solution for my problem from all my friends who come up with many different solutions. We talk a lot and argue but most of the time the suggestions our friends give us make us think. Then we are able to find one way out of the many ways to resolve the conflict. When we decide as a group, it's easier to reason out why because we have some many ideas. (*Orkid*)

Collaboration encourages participants to reflect and merge ideas or construct new ideas. They build upon previous knowledge and experiences within the group when discussing moral choices for their real-life dilemmas.

### 9.2.4   Moral choices based on relationship/friendship

According to Handel et al., (2007), friendship and relationships provide the opportunity for adolescents to gain self-awareness and self-control. Among influences on adolescent development, the friendship network has often been mentioned as one of the most important (Youniss & Haynie, 1992). In my research, I observed that my participants were sensitive to the others in their group. They supported each other as they were exploring the moral dilemmas and were engaged in serious discussions without criticising anyone in the group. As discussed in the excerpt below, when making their choices, relationship and friendship are seen as important factors to help decide on the final choice:

> I:      If your friend gossips, what do you do?
>
> B:      Try to change the topic.
>
> I:      How do you change the topic?
>
> B:      Tell her that it is not right to talk about others because people can always talk about us.
>
> G:      If they are good friends, quite difficult to tell them off… (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: One participant was showing her hand, literally to the friend sitting next to her by saying "Gossiping is bad"; efvr]

In Malaysian culture, it is considered rude if someone is told off abruptly. If someone needs to be told off, it has to be done discreetly so as not to hurt the

others' feelings. This is what the participants were alluding to in the excerpt above though they never mentioned anything about culture or tradition. At times such a norm can be misleading because those who are making mistakes would not know their weaknesses if they are not told about it, such as in the instance above. However in the above dilemma, my participants thought of alternatives as shown in the excerpt below:

> H:      If we continue gossiping, we are also doing a wrong thing.
>
> B:      Provide the friend with alternatives. Tell her if she wants to gossip, we don't want to listen to it.
>
> G:      Then we might lose a friend.
>
> F:      But if we are true friends, we will care and tell our friends in a nice way. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc: One participant was patting her friend on the shoulder; efvr]

The importance of being a true friend and how caring relationships can help make moral choices is described above and in the video recording. My participants are being careful and bridging two different ways (their upbringing in their own culture and at the same time the notion of caring for a friend) and making a wise moral choice. It is not an easy decision but they managed to put choices about relationships and friendships in the forefront.

Relationship/friendship-based moral choices were also discussed in *Seri Pagi*. It is a common scenario where the boy is attracted to a girl and vice versa but sharing such a relationship in the school is becoming a conflict (Dilemma 5# *Seri Pagi*). The excerpt below shows the high level of maturity in my participants and how they reflected and saw the pros and cons of such a conflict:

> J:      Love is a part of life; so think first before doing anything. Because every action has its reaction and every reaction that we gain has its own action. Whatever it is, think and do.

> L:     He should not fall in love at this age. If he likes the girl, he can tell her that he likes her. But he shouldn't get too influenced by the whole matter as his studies might be affected. If the girl wants to get further in their relationship, then he should tell her that now is the time to study and they can be good friends.

> K:     In my opinion, an individual who plans his life well can have a firm love life because he is well disciplined. If one falls in love and is able to divide his time well between studies and other activities, it shows that he knows what he wants in life. That is good. *(Seri Pagi)*

> [Nvc: One participant made the sign of love with his hands and "cut it" and said, "Not in school"; efvr]

Thorne (1993) once stated that adolescents and children's interactions are not preparation for life but "life itself". In the interaction above, my participants are actually voicing their opinions about life and living life. Romantic relationship and intimacy is indeed an important part of their lives but because of the constraints within the Malaysian culture, they are able to look at the multi-perspective of such an issue. The non-verbal communication showed that the participant who did the love sign disapproved of such a relationship in school.

The moral choice that my participants discussed are within several constraints but what is important is to still have the freedom to choose in spite of all the constraints. They might not have as many choices as in the Western system of education but there are at least several choices for them to consider and decide morally.

Moral choices provide students with opportunity and authority to choose an action which, based on their own reasoning and reflection, they feel is best. The choices that their peers make available give them opportunities to self-reflect and internalise values based on the collaboration during the focus group discussions. For example in the dilemma of the Science teacher, the final decision to meet and discuss with the teacher would not have been made if the capable peers kept silent and did not provide the suggestions (see 8.3.2).

During reflective session in *Kekwah*, *Orkid* and *Seri Pagi*, the students were aware of the constraints on their moral choices as the collaborative and co-

operative cycles created that awareness in them. They were able to self-help and internalise moral choices which seemed workable based on the real-life dilemmas discussed. Moral choices that my participants make reflect the type of moral orientation that the choices reflect.

## 9.3 Moral orientation and process of dealing with real-life moral dilemmas

Based on earlier discussions above, it is becoming clear that my participants are struggling to find balance between themselves, their moral choices, and creating a system of moral thinking, feeling, and action. It is the intention of the ME syllabus in Malaysia to enable students of ME to develop within the three domains of morality based on the nation's agenda (see 1.4 and 3.1.3). So far in my findings I have found that participants have their own notion of what they want or how they want to resolve moral conflicts, but on the other hand they are also reflecting upon the structure and fundamentals of being part of a nation that is so diversified. The other aspect that they need to consider is the rules and constitution set by the authority (see 2.5.1).

The moral orientations in my research findings are derived from the types of choices made by my participants and how they reason the resolution suggested in the PAR cycles of discussions and reflections. The types of moral orientations that I found in my research findings are as follows.
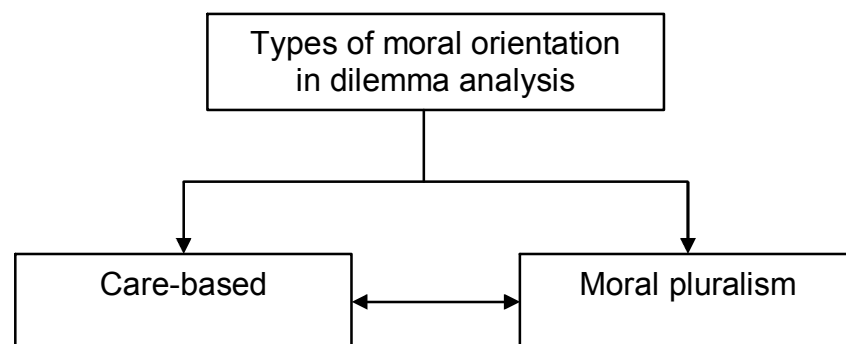


Figure 9.2: Types of moral orientation discovered.

In almost all their discussions and in their journals and also based on my personal observations, students are very attached to the ethics of care (see 5.3.2) compared to the ethics of justice. The responses were also compared with Lyon's (1983) coding system. Lyon defined care-based moral orientation as concern with maintaining or retaining relationships and the promotion of the welfare of others or prevention of pain and hurt. Justice-based moral orientation is concern with the maintenance of impartial rules, principles, and standards and concern with fairness and equality; this characterises the ME syllabus.

However, instead of using a scoring scale I based the responses on scores as recommended by Lyon, a two-dimensional construct using continuous rather than categorical. It is a real struggle and challenge because some or most of the dilemmas mentioned are relational but in Malaysia there are many aspects of the ME curriculum which focus on what is prescribed as right and the rule of law (see 2.4.3). It is the aim of this thesis to voice what the students feel though they are caught in an irony of care, justice, and other factors.

### 9.3.1 Care-based resolutions

According to Noddings (1992), care is important for relationships, has a situated self, and is context sensitive. Noddings argues that:

> An ethic of care involves a rejection of universalizability, the notion that anything that is morally justifiable is necessarily something that anyone else in similar situation is obligated to do. Universalizability suggests that who we are, to whom we belong, to whom we are related, and how we are situated should have nothing to do with our moral decision making. (p. 21)

In all their PAR cycles, the voices of my students were attempting to demonstrate their own uniqueness and showing moral sensitivity. Rest (1983) claims that before it is possible to behave morally, moral sensitivity is necessary in order to appreciate that there is a moral dimension to the situation. Thus the participants in my groups demonstrated an important component which they did not learn by the book but through their experience in

their daily lives. Moral sensitivity is linked with moral feelings where empathy is shown for the dilemma and people involved in the dilemmas.

According to Shapiro (2008):

> When you have empathy it means that you know how another person feels. When you are sensitive to the feelings of other people, you will develop more fulfilling relationships. Caring about others is one of the most important of all human emotions. Empathy is the reason that people try and help each other. Being empathetic is the opposite of being selfish or self-centred. (p. 107)

The issue of caring and being sensitive to others needs is seen as one way to relate and keep the family relationship strong. It has a link with feelings of empathy within the local culture. The excerpt below reveals how students care for their parents when dealing with a conflict of autonomy:

> U:     We need to inform our parents in a nice way.
>
> W:     What if parents don't listen?
>
> U:     Try different ways. Make them see our point of view. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Participants were looking at each other and nodding their heads; efvr]

The need to compromise and make parents see their perspective is always a challenge for the participants whose parents' orientation is based on authority and the effects of growing up in a different era (see 7.2.4). My students were consistent in caring for their parents' feelings though they also wanted their voices to be heard by their parents. Suggestions were to negotiate and get parents to listen to their side of the story too.

In another situation, one participant wrote in her journal how it is important to have compassion and caring attention from parents:

> Solve the problem before it becomes more complicated. Mother + father = us. So tell them first, they can understand us very well compared to others. Because parents live with us, they will understand us better and

listen to us. When a child cries, the parents know why, so even now they will surely understand our problems. (*Seri Pagi*)

In Malaysian culture, adolescents stay with their parents until they leave for work or further studies. Parents become their moral support and, in the example above, my participant has equated how when a child cries it is tended to by parents with the moral conflict faced now as an adolescent. In another journal reflection, a participant from *Seri Pagi* emphasised the importance of communication and caring from parents:

> I feel we need to communicate with our parents. This is not to fight for our rights as children but an opportunity for parents to understand our needs. This way will also make parents understand that their responsibility towards the family is not just work and earn money for the family. We need their love and attention too. (*Seri Pagi*)

In the excerpt above, though the issue of rights was brought up and, at first, seems to veer towards a justice-based orientation, the explanation that follows, which focusses on the needs of the children and wanting love and attention, relates back to the care-based moral orientation.

Though the notion of a generation gap was mentioned earlier, when it came to dealing with the older generation, the participants still cared for them in the form of respect and moral sensitivity as indicated below:

> U: When we have a conflict with our siblings, within a few minutes can be settled but with parents longer and with grandparents even worse.
>
> P: We have to sit and discuss matters in a very polite way. Especially being the younger generation, we have to be sensitive to the older generation needs and wants. We cannot simply say anything which might hurt their feelings. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: Several participants were looking down as if in reflection mode; efvr]

The participants reflected upon the discussion and wrote in their conflict journals. In my own field notes too I have indicated that my participants demonstrated care for others and also themselves when making a choice. This is an indicator that cultural background influences their moral resolution and they are quite happy to resolve conflicts based on such an understanding.

The two journal writings below are typical of the practise of filial piety in the Chinese community where it is a long lived tradition that younger siblings respect older siblings:

> I feel the younger sibling can ask for forgiveness from the older brother because he is older and according to our culture we must respect the elders. *(Seri Pagi)*

> As younger children in the family, we respect and listen to the older ones. We get new knowledge from their experience and it also keeps our relationship strong. For example, when I go out with my older brother, I am careful with how I address him or refute what he says. (*Orkid*)

The journal writing below describes the cultural practice in Malaysian Indian families where family is deemed more important than self and the happiness of family is the happiness of self:

> Tolerating, forgiving, and asking for forgiveness to create a harmonious family is part of every family member's responsibility. Even though the conflict only involves the siblings, it can leave a serious impact on other family members and on own self. *(Seri Pagi)*

Caring for family members and others is also part of Indian culture. The journal extract below explains how one participant perceived the source of her own happiness as the happiness from those around her:

> I always think of my parents and those around me when I make a final decision. If they are not happy then I will also end up being sad. We have been brought up to always remember to make others happy and comfortable. *(Kekwah)*

The notion of care and empathy was demonstrated when students discuss outside the family sphere and reach out to friends. They thought of how the other person would feel and how best they could tell the other party without hurting their feelings:

> F:      Maybe if we can't tell her directly, we could give her a letter where we express that her friendship is important to us but her habit of gossiping is annoying and disturbing our friendship. Maybe she will understand and change her habits. We too might have a better friend.
>
> G:      She might consider changing her habits.
>
> A:      Tell her nicely that we don't like gossiping about others.
>
> C:      Write a nice long note to her, expressing our liking for her as a friend but also caring and not liking her gossiping habits. (*Kekwah*)
>
> [Nvc:  Two participants were changing looks at each other and whispered, "Even writing a note needs to be done tactfully"; efvr]

These participants clearly cared about their friends and the friendship they have.  They valued friendship and the feelings of the other party when wanting to resolve the conflict between the two friends (Dilemma *2 # Kekwah*). From the excerpt above, it is clear that the students wanted to tell their friend about the habit they did not approve but were caring enough to tell it through letters or "nicely" in order not to hurt the friend's feelings. This cultural aspect is also present in other moral conflicts either with parents or teachers where students decide to do something but very caringly according to their own culture.

In resolving the moral conflict dealing with nature too, the notion of care is taken into consideration. The participants see the need to care for nature and take action now rather than to wait for matters to get worse. They also discussed the importance of collaboration among nations to ensure that the issue does not become a threatening conflict later on in life. Here is a voice from one of their journals:

> If we don't care for Mother Earth, we are going to be in trouble later on. Food is going to be scare and we might not even have fresh air to breathe. As a Malaysian, I need to do my part in being tactful to issues of environment that helps to keep Mother Earth strong and healthy. (*Orkid*)

In the Indian culture, earth has always been given several names like "*Bhuma Devi*" meaning "Mother Earth" and "*Swarnabhumi*", meaning "Land of Gold". Though the present ME syllabus is stated in a very non-relational, factual way (see 2.4.3), my participants have identified the above conflict. The expression of how they felt about it shows that the respect they have for earth is as special as that which they have for people and that the pollution of earth disturbs them in a personal way. They went on to discuss what could be done and the excerpt below shows some moral action that they spoke about:

> Q: In Malaysia, we have taken several measures like no open burning and not too many joss sticks to be burned during offering to Gods.
>
> Y: So if every country takes some precaution we can stop the global warming from happening drastically. (*Orkid*)
>
> [Nvc: One participant imitated how joss sticks are put between both hands and used to pray in front of deities in Taoist and Buddhist temples; efvr]

It is the practise to burn joss sticks in temples and shrines during prayer time as a religious ritual. However, during critical weather conditions such as haze and high levels of air pollution in Malaysia, activities such as open burning or burning of joss sticks are forbidden or lessened. It is accepted by the religious authorities as respect for nature and minimal burning is carried out. The respect shown for nature is a kind of care that Eastern culture abides to. The participants were concerned about this issue of respecting nature. Through the PAR cycles, they showed they could think at the level of country leaders and suggested resolutions based on their experience in Malaysia. According to Weston (1986), "…it is we, as a society, who shape our environment by deciding which social and economic priorities should prevail; we choose our environment rather than have it imposed upon us by nature" (p.14).

The religious beliefs of my participants as expressed in Buddhism, Taoism and Hinduism also strengthen their appreciation and care for nature (see 2.8.2, 2.8.3 and 2.8.4).

Participants also showed care in the way they wanted to resolve moral conflicts with people of authority such as teachers:

> Maybe we could write a nice letter explaining what we are going through and sign as a whole class. In that case she won't be angry but maybe angry with the whole class. She would have to know the truth one day, at least before we sit for our *SPM* next year. I wish we respected and trusted her as a teacher. (*Kekwah*)

Care here is shown in the form of respect for the teacher. The participants cared for the teacher who they felt was not responding to their needs but thought of ways to resolve the conflict by taking into considerations her emotions too. Based on my discussion so far, ethics of care seems to prevail in most of the moral orientations and resolutions that my participants decided upon. However, another type of moral orientation also seems to appear regularly in all three schools that I researched and the type of reasoning given does not qualify as either ethics of care or ethics of justice. Rather, I liken it to moral pluralism.

### 9.3.2  Moral pluralism

According to Strike (1999):

> There is more to the moral life than justice and caring. There is craft and civility and charity and commitment and awe and devotion and refinement and obedience and humility and honour and (especially, I think) kindness - and much else. We cannot deal with this array of moral conceptions by means of theories that reduce the moral life to a contest between justice and caring. Moral pluralism provides a more adequate view of moral complexity and moral conflict. (p. 35)

It is important to be sensitive to contextual complexities of Malaysian educational realities and how my participants try to balance between the complexities and educational realities to become moral citizens of the nation.

Contained within the context of moral pluralism are the values of wisdom and judgment and the capacity to strike a balance; these are especially necessary in a context like Malaysia.

The notion of moral pluralism is more appropriate than care or justice orientation here where moral orientations vary according to situations. The moral pluralism that I suggest has to fit within the constraints in Malaysia as described in 7.2. However, despite the constraints, my participants were able to analyse their moral conflicts and with the help of their focus group advance to resolving them. Vygotsky (1978) has advocated that what students resolve collaboratively today can be applied in other situations. Moral orientation is strongly determined by the type of real-life dilemmas by which people make judgements (Wark & Krebs, 1997).

Based on the few examples I have presented so far in 9.3.1, care and the importance of relationship was consistent in my students' moral orientation. In the Malaysian scenario, caring aim and justice aim at different moral goods may conflict. For example in *Seri Pagi*, the participants spoke about their rights as children but ended with the orientation of being caring towards parents who were working hard for the children (Dilemma *6# Seri Pagi).* Thus, the content has issues of rights but during the PAR cycles, participants were focussing on relating to parents, having open communication with them and the discussions narrowed towards the ethics of care.

The notion of moral pluralism that I as adopt is that advocated by Strike (1999) which requires the viewing of moral dilemmas in a more complex and challenging manner than care and justice orientation. It takes into consideration the wisdom of the students within their own cultural and religious background, with the knowledge of collaborative living within the Malaysian context. Moral pluralism here is the notion of commitment towards society and a determination to resolve moral conflicts based on the current culture and situation in Malaysia. Moral pluralism has nothing to do with justice or care but more of what I would term "moral pluralism based on Malaysian morality". It refers to students' ability to "switch" orientations, depending on context. One example of this is contained in an extract from a *Kekwah* participant:

> When I find my siblings good to me I treat them caringly but if they are being unfair to me then I have to be firm. I cannot let them bully me forever. (*Kekwah*)

To be able to decide according to situations and to switch orientations, one needs wisdom, a clear view of what is happening, and strategies for how to go about resolving such a moral conflict. In ways of resolving the dilemma, the participant is operating within the acceptable norms of the Malaysian culture. This type of orientation is quite dominant in my research findings.

As seen in several moral dilemmas about academic pressure (e.g. Dilemma *2 # Seri Pagi*), students resolve the dilemmas based on their own standards of self discipline and persistence:

> K:      We must have a strong self and be persistent.
>
> J:      When we have an inspiration to do something, make ourselves stronger and be persistent until we finish that chore before going on to the next one.
>
> I*:*      Meaning?
>
> J:      Complete one task before doing other things. (*Seri Pagi*)
>
> [Nvc: Participants nodded their head to show agreement; efvr]

A real commitment to becoming moral does not only refer to moral orientations such as ethics of care and ethics of justice but should also be analysed based on forms of different settings. The journal writing below describes the persistence that the student felt is needed in times of academic stress and pressure:

> Study well. Control yourself. Think of your future. It will change your thoughts from play to concentrating on your studies*. (Seri Pagi)*

The participant cares about his future but is also persistent in wanting to control his activities and concentrate on his studies. It is a contextual moral dilemma which the participant is trying to deal with within his limited choices. The next

journal reflection is different from the above in the sense that it reaches out for aid from others whereas the extract above was reflecting on self persistence:

> When we can't manage our own self, help is needed from others. Family members can help us out. (*Seri Pagi*)

Interestingly, both the above extracts are written by the same participant who seems to be concerned with justice in the first reflection but turns to care when he mentions family members and help from the family members. This is another example of how participants switch orientations based on the moral dilemmas. It is not a wrong thing to do; indeed it shows maturity to be able to approach different conflicts with different orientations within the context of the dilemmas.

In another discussion, participants spoke about resolving the autonomy conflict concerning love (Dilemma *5# Seri Pagi*) which, while it showed a great level of moral maturity, there was no regard to care or justice (Strike, 1999). Instead the excerpt shows the students' maturity in dealing with the matter in the given context (see 9.2.4). In dealing with the love dilemma, participants considered the situation in the school and discussed the alternatives of how the individual can be good friends with his lover or divide his time well between studies and other activities which shows that he knows what he wants in life. In one of their journals, students reflected on true love versus *cinta monyet* (monkey love):

> Think carefully whether the love is real love or *cinta monyet* which might not be permanent. (*Seri Pagi*)

In another journal, a student thought about the love issue rationally and came with this writing:

> He should think of his future. If he feels that he can balance between his future and his love, he can continue being in love without disturbing or causing trouble for the school discipline teacher or the prefects. (*Seri Pagi)*

The above extract falls under the notion of utilitarianism though at the same time the participant is also thinking of his own needs to be able to love (see Dilemma *5# Seri Pagi*). Since some of the moral orientations used by my participants do not fall under either of the two categories (care or justice), I would like to advocate that instead of concluding whether or not the moral orientation constitutes care or justice, it would be more meaningful to analyse the living processes of how these secondary school students experience and resolve their real-life moral dilemmas and to identify the challenges they face in coming to certain resolutions.

### 9.3.3 Other observations based on moral orientation

According to Gilligan (1988), as a result of differences in their early life experiences and socialisation, men and women have different moral orientations; men tend to view moral conflicts in terms of justice, while women tend to view them in terms of care. This does not seem to be the case where my participants were concerned. Students from all three schools that I researched showed a strong stance for care-based orientation including those from an all boys and a co-educational school. For example, the moral dilemmas from *Orkid* (an all boys school) were all relationship based (see Table 7.1) and resolutions were care-based. But more obvious was the moral pluralism which fits into the ethics of plurality and complexities within the Malaysian context.

Having said this, there were some differences in the ways in which the boys and girls from the different schools responded. *Kekwah* (all girls school) participants presented lengthy moral dilemmas with lengthy journal entries compared to *Orkid* (all boys school) who provided brief moral conflicts with brief reflections in their journals. *Seri Pagi* (co-educational school) had a mixture of both. The length of discussion was almost the same for all three schools and depended a great deal on their interest on the dilemma discussed.

Another significant observation that I made in my research is the on-going struggle that the students have in voicing their opinions, suggestions, and resolutions based on their self, their friends, and their knowledge of the nation they live in. Thus this thesis is not concerned so much with moral stages or

moral orientation but the final result of a moral dilemma analysis process that results in moral outcomes – which is what the ME syllabus in Malaysia aims to achieve as stated in its objectives (see 1.4). In collaboration with their peers in the focus groups, my participants showed they were well able to discuss and relate themselves to the complexity of moral conflicts that they dealt with throughout the research.

## 9.4    Implications of using real-life moral dilemmas in ME classrooms

According to Vygotsky (1978), a child who works in collaboration with others can perform at a level that is beyond his or her present level. In extension to that, the ZCD that I suggest (see 4.8) further enhances the notion of collaborative action in a multicultural society like Malaysia. This will be further discussed in the next chapters. Cottone's social-constructionist model seems a necessary component of pluralism in Malaysia. It relates to the importance of collaboration in negotiating the diverse choices offered in a pluralist perspective. The collaborative process might be useful in itself as a way of developing a Malaysian moral language.

The fact that participants managed a process of discussions based on their own real-life moral dilemmas is a good avenue to venture into the next chapter where I discuss the implications of using real-life moral dilemmas in ME classrooms in secondary schools in Malaysia. To sum up the complete process of ZPD, I will also discuss how the PAR process in Chapter Eight encouraged my participants to take action on their own. This moral action is further collaboratively reflected upon by my participants.

**CHAPTER TEN**

**A voice to be Heard**

## 10.1   Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the implications of using real-life moral dilemma discussion (Re-LiMDD) in teaching ME in secondary schools. Initial discussions are based on my participants' voices in their own reflections and several excerpts are taken from the PAR reflective cycles. The chapter focusses on the students' voices and reflections based on the PAR cycles.

During the reflective cycle, students reflected and commented upon the PAR process that they had experienced. They spoke about the mood of their discussions, their feelings, and their experiences, how the studying of ME in other ways was viewed, as well as the meaning of the whole process. They explained how the discussions had led them to react morally. They were most concerned about the process that they undergone and how they felt about the whole research. Most of the time they were positive about the process but they also retained a practical and realistic view which I mention in Chapter Eleven in discussion about the nature and limitations of Re-LiMDD (see 11.6).

## 10.2   Students' voices in their own reflections

After learning ME for nine years through the traditional methods of memorising values and focussing on ME examinations as their final milestone, my participants came with various perceptions of what a ME research would be. In fact in one of their personal journal, a *Kekwah* participant wrote this extract:

> When I agreed to be part of the ME research team, I was pretty sure that it was going to be something rather boring. After all how interesting can a moral discussion be? (*Kekwah*)

When I read through my participants' initial journal extracts, most of them were voicing the pains of studying ME the traditional way (exam oriented, memorising facts and adding more pressure to their already heavy burden of preparing for

the centralised examination). It was quite exciting for me because I could hear their voices which re-confirmed for me that this was indeed their reality – this was the starting point which I had hoped for. After several cycles of PAR discussions and the reflective session, the same participant who wrote the extract above had this in her last reflective journal:

> After taking part in the research, my whole impression and opinion of ME has changed. I am so happy that I took part in the research even though I was reluctant in the beginning. The sharing with my group was great and I never knew ME can reach out so deep into our hearts and our feelings. All this while I always tell myself if ever I got an opportunity I want to speak up to tell whoever is in charge to abolish ME which is so exam-oriented. Now I get to understand the real importance of ME. (*Kekwah*)

The transformation of perception of this participant gave me great motivation and gave validity to my research thesis. Furthermore, since I wanted my thesis to make audible the unheard voices of ME students, the above looked like a good start where MEM is concerned. I will proceed to illustrate how the rest of the participants from the three different schools voiced their thoughts and feelings in the diagram and the explanation below:
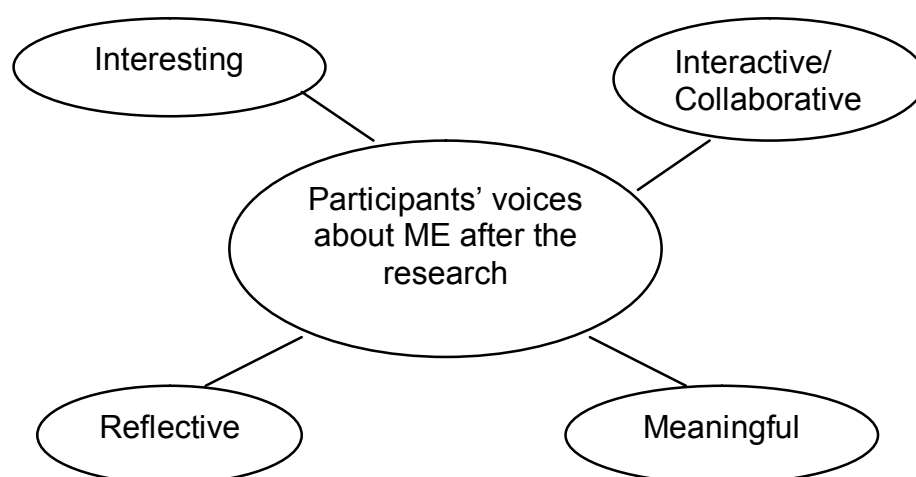


Figure 10.1: Expressions of PAR participants about the research.

*10.2.1 Interesting*

My participants found using the Re-LiMDD interesting in that they could express themselves based on their own experiences and moral conflicts. Interesting here refers to arousing curiosity, attracting or holding attention, or provoking thought; enjoyable because of activities being varied, challenging, stimulating, and exciting. The excerpt below shows that my participants found the research stimulating as the concern was on them themselves:

> C:    It is interesting to be part of the research group. We learnt a lot.
>
> H:    We spoke about ourselves. We learnt to look at our problems from different perspectives. (*Kekwah*)

Participants' responses indicated that their interest was high because matters discussed concerned themselves. They made claims such as: "Matters discussed are close to our hearts" (*Kekwah*), "We are talking about ourselves" (*Seri Pagi*) and "Learning Moral this way is not boring" (*Orkid*). In their journal entries many other students also mentioned "interesting" with their own reasons as shown below:

> I found the research very interesting and effective too. In fact, I'd love to learn moral this way rather than cramming my brains with definitions. (*Orkid*)
>
> The research is very interesting because I get the solution for my problem from my friends who provided many different solutions. Furthermore, I get to solve my friends' problem. We shared our problems and cooperated among ourselves. (*Seri Pagi*)

My participant found the research interesting because it was effective and not as taxing as memorising the values.They made favourable comparisons with the traditional way of studying and emphasised how ineffective that had been for them. One *Seri Pagi* participant stated that she found the research interesting because of alternative ways she received from friends on how to resolve her moral dilemma and vice versa. The excerpt below which took place

during a reflective cycle in *Seri Pagi* shows the comparison made between the research process and the classroom process in learning ME:

> J: We hardly discuss this kind of matters in our Moral classes.
>
> L: If we had discussed similar issues like this, we might have solved many other moral conflicts we face daily in school and at home. (*Seri Pagi*)

My participants made a comparison of how they were studying ME in class where real-life dilemmas are not included and felt that it was something new that they were experiencing. Most important here is the notion that if they had been exposed to such a method of learning ME, they might have resolved other moral conflicts that they face and had faced. They were experiencing something different and of interest to them.

According to Vygotsky (1978), an effective teacher would always try to bridge between what is in theory with what takes place within the classroom. It was the bridge between theory and practice that my participants found interesting and they had an avenue to resolve their own moral conflicts. They could take ownership and be morally responsible for whatever action they plan to take later on. These claims are supported in the next few extracts and reflective excerpts.

The fact that the Re-LiMDD created opportunities for my participants to bring out their own moral conflicts and discuss them within the ME classroom framework gave them a different picture of what ME could be. The interest in the research is also expressed in the journal extract below:

> I feel personalised when discussing problems regarding me. I feel interested when discussing problems linking to ourselves. We as a discussion group help each other in making good decisions. (*Orkid*)

Being personalised in ME helps my participants make the connection between values within the syllabus and their own selves within that value conflict situation. It also completes ZCD which is my extension of Vygotskian ZPD, which takes on another level of proximity where, in times of conflict, students

are able to decide for themselves collaboratively after going through the Re-LiMDD with their friends. This aspect held their attention during the cycles of discussion because they found it different and varied even though the process was similar in every cycle.

Since the PAR research was carried out in cycles, the participants were familiar with asking, suggesting, reflecting, and responding and as the days went by my participants became engaged in more in-depth discussions. They reflected upon their discussions continuously. One participant from *Seri Pagi* wrote this extract, explaining how working in group made their discussion interesting:

> I get to discuss my problem with my friends. We as a group feel happy and excited because we get to discuss our conflicts voluntarily. We get to help each other in solving our conflicts and it is a nice feeling. We also learn to control ourselves, take turns in voicing opinions and all this strengthens our relationship with our friends. (*Seri Pagi*)

Excitement generated by the PAR process kept the participants going. According to Hirst and Renshaw (2004) when "different students take up appropriate voices in discussion, they are learning to take up social identities, to become particular kinds of people" (p. 91). They learnt to accept each other as part of their collaborative group and learnt to give and gain experience based on the PAR cycles. The excerpt below shows how the participants in *Seri Pagi* made a comparison with their current way of studying ME and what the teacher focusses on:

> L:    When we study Moral in class, the main focus is on the values, spelling of values and all. Like the value "*bertanggungjawab*" [being responsible], even write "*tanggungjawab*" [responsibility] is wrong. The focus is so much on correctness of technical matters that we lose interest in the subject.
>
> I:    What about in Form One, Two and Three? Did you study ME?
>
> J:    Yes we did but the focus was on memorising the values and doing exercises from the text book and work books. (*Seri Pagi*)

Students of ME in secondary schools have undergone similar practices of memorising values, doing written exercises based on what is taught, and regurgitating this in their examinations. It is no different than studying any other academic subject. This repetition from Year One in primary school until they reach adolescent age has made them feel negative about the subject even though they understand it is an important subject. According to Bosacki (2005), schools play an important role in how adolescents choose to voice their thoughts and cope with academic challenges. In the case of ME, students have been forced to produce work in the same manner as in other academic subjects and this has left them feeling negative about the whole matter.

Students become attracted to ME when real-life moral dilemmas are discussed and they also become more analytical. The students' responses show that they tend to understand and appreciate values better. Phrases like "The dilemmas are complex and we have to think hard to resolve them" (*Kekwah*), and "We find learning ME this way easier to understand values" (*Seri Pagi*), and "I can use what values and ways my friends use in the discussion when dealing when my own conflicts" (*Orkid*) indicate that moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action are all occurring.  This is what has always been emphasised in ME, but students are still caught up with the dilemma of memorising values and doing well in exams instead of applying values in their daily lives. They are given a framework to follow which prescribes their thoughts about values and their application and so it becomes very mechanical and artificial. The excerpt below gives some insight into the reasons why students are attracted to the process of the research carried out:

> N:     We are attracted to learning ME this way which has nothing to do with memorising values and that's nice. (*Orkid*)

MEM is looked upon by my PAR participants as a "memorising" subject that is not based in actual reality (see 1.4). However, no part of the syllabus or the objectives of ME refers to the memorisation of values but more towards application of values in daily live. The students' voices are loud here, explaining what they are undergoing and how the method used to teach ME traditionally is

making them feel disengaged, especially when it seems that values are learnt primarily for correctness of spelling and grammar in order to answer exam questions correctly.

My participants do not want to learn ME that way but this pedagogy is forced upon them and that is the basis of the problem. One of my initial findings was students will take responsibility in addressing moral dilemmas when given a chance. This is important because the current "remember and write" pedagogy leaves the students dry and burnt-out (Vishalache, 2004). It is also a burden for students who are not good at remembering. ME is intended to be about how to live morally and not how to memorise values.

The notion of interest was also due to the fact that my participants had friends with whom to discuss issues and make decisions. The excerpt below shows how the participants value their friends who help them in resolving moral conflicts and makes the process interesting:

> F: The lesson will be more interesting and a better way to understand what ME is all about.
>
> E: Brings us closer together as friends, creates a friendly and open minded environment and emphasis is more on moral values rather than memory. In our present ME system we have to memorise a whole lot of moral values and definitions to excel.
>
> H: Moral lessons become more interesting when actual dilemma are used in the lessons
>
> D: I think this would be the best way of ME compared to memorising all the definitions of values. (*Kekwah*)

Once again the notion of interest arises from comparing the process with that of memorising values and doing well in examinations. This is a serious challenge in the current development of ME in Malaysia which needs serious restructure. My participants showed they were well able to make comparisons between the effectiveness of learning ME through the research process and the current classroom way.

The interest in all my groups was also shown by the nature of the discussions which were personal and close to them. The moral conflicts were either theirs or their peers and it gave them a sense of practicality and reality. When ME became interesting during the research process, my students saw an alternative way of learning the subject and I too heard their voices in the Re-LiMDD. One reason given for why ME is boring is that the method used did not attract the students (S.Yin, 2007).

In the research, the Re-LiMDD kept the students attracted to the research process. Each dilemma presented was unique. This kept the students curious and wanting to go on discussing and analysing the dilemmas, finding alternatives for resolving the dilemmas, and using their own previous experience and knowledge to look at the dilemmas from different perspectives. They were attracted to the discussion and took the initiative to resolve some of the conflicts discussed (see 8.3.2).  The collaboration extended to ideas for taking moral action too.

### 10.2.2  Interactive/Collaborative

When I started my research, I expected my PAR groups to interact and collaborate as described in my methodology (see Chapter Five). But during the analysis stage, I found that students used body language in every PAR cycle with their peers. At first I found it surprising but as the discussions passed through the different cycles, I realised that this is an important way of interacting among the adolescents in my research. Consideration of body language and non-verbal communication was not originally part of my research agenda, therefore it came as a surprise; I have analysed this and discuss it further in my own reflections (see Chapter Eleven).

The students also displayed both commonality and diversity within their interaction and collaboration.  Participants saw the relevance of resolving the moral conflicts by sharing experiences and collaborating with their peers. They found the discussions to be interactive and collaborative. Collaboration is the first level of the ZCD principle (see 4.9.1) where, in initial stages, students collaborate with their peers.

Interaction and collaboration, either through interpersonal or intrapersonal channels, were the main processes throughout my research. I started each group by interacting with the participants and developing the WA (see 6.4.1) which helped to establish the notion of a two-way interaction. It was a good initial PAR cycle where the students and I participated in a discussion, resulting in the WA and my participants started to feel at ease with the power sharing between us. The fact that the WA was not final and we could revisit it at any time to change or make adjustments, gave students the notion of equality and flexibility. For example, after completing the second PAR cycle, *Seri Pagi* participants renegotiated one of their earlier agreements (see 6.4.1).

Because the whole PAR was conducted in groups within each school setting there was sufficient time and space for the participants to discuss in groups and resolve their real-life moral dilemmas. Accordingly, the "group discussion is a central site within which learning takes place" (Hanauer, 2007; p. 373). The excerpt below explains how my participants found the focus group discussions:

> W: This way of studying ME is more helpful and effective.
>
> Q: We find solving the moral dilemmas easier when it is discussed in a group.
>
> R: We get to discuss real issues more seriously than talking about something in the Moral textbook which we are not even familiar with at times.
>
> S: There might be times where some students will feel shy to share their problems with others.
>
> T: But because we don't mention names I think no one should feel threatened.
>
> U: I think students will be able to find solutions to their problems if they have the ability to think and find resolutions.
>
> P: This way is effective to learn ME and based on my experience here I am able to get various ways and suggestions on how to solve the moral problems we face daily. (*Orkid*)

However, students were also given time between sessions to reflect on their own and to write in their conflict-resolution journals. Later at home, they also

had the opportunity to write their comments about the discussion that had taken place or to act upon some resolutions discussed in the focus group.

My participants also spoke about the collaboration that brought them closer together and the extract below shows how the participants found the process of the research as important as the interactive relationship with their peers and how peers provide alternative solutions to resolve the conflicts:

> Other than friends' opinions on our dilemmas, we also understand the dilemmas that our friends face. Our relationship becomes closer. Even though I haven't tried out the alternative for my dilemma, my thoughts are more mature and I am able to see from different perspectives. The whole process has taught me that when we are at a dead end facing a dilemma, discussing with friends will help us see other alternatives. For example, when I get different opinions, I can try out such alternatives which never came to my thoughts before this. (*Seri Pagi*)

According to Erkens (2004), "Collaboration on a task means negotiation of knowledge and task strategies" (p. 200). In a multicultural group with different capabilities, the students were able to cooperate and help each other with the task of resolving the moral conflicts which were theirs. Not only were tasks and strategies carried out, but the participants also developed a positive relationship.

The interaction and collaboration with peers provided opportunities for them to learn from each other. The crucial realisation to them is discovering that there is no one right way to resolve a moral dilemma. This is an important finding because in the present system of treating dilemmas in the old fashioned way of coming to one final resolution this is not possible. As students in my research come from different cultural backgrounds, this affects the alternative choices they have and the PAR process allows for that.

Students took different roles in presenting their ideas; the ZCD, with its notion of capable peers, accepts that during the collaborative cycles different students will take on the role of capable peer. For example in *Kekwah*, the eight real-life dilemmas had different capable peers who spoke and shared their experience and knowledge. At times it was an individual, a pair, or a small group within the

larger group who was the capable peer. It was the same in *Seri Pagi* and *Orkid*. Different students had different experiences and knowledge relevant to the dilemmas presented. Different individuals emerged as capable peers for different moral dilemma discussions; the understanding of the power sharing element generated the cooperation and acceptance necessary to work with each other in the various and changing roles throughout the research process. The extract below from a journal explains how my participants relate to their friends:

> When we are in a studying environment, we will follow our friends and our intention to study would be fulfilled. We also get to learn more from what our friends know. They also learn from what we have to share. *(Seri Pagi)*

In Dilemma 1# *Seri Pagi*, the capable peer was a student who had parents who were flexible and allowed him to choose for himself whether or not he wanted to go for tuition. The second capable peer was a different student who talked about how to keep away from friends who distracted them during studies (Dilemma 2# *Seri Pagi*). The third capable peer was another student who spoke about the advantage and disadvantage of taking extra papers for the *SPM* examination (Dilemma 3# *Seri Pagi*). Thus in different dilemmas, different students took the role of capable peer and brought the discussions to a deeper analysis.

My participants found that resolving moral conflicts collaboratively in a group was a helpful alternative method. The extract below shows why working as a group was helpful to one participant:

> I think it's quite interesting as we can share our problems and try to solve the problems as a group. It's easier to solve moral conflicts when we get opinions from our friends. Some of my friends' problems were similar to mine, so I got an idea of how to solve my problem too. (*Kekwah*)

The ZCD is underpinned by the notion that what is done in collaboration today can be resolved in multiple ways and the learning can be transferred to other conflict situations of conflict (see 4.9). This is supported by the above extract

where the participant is positive about the skills and experiences acquired in focus group discussion for resolving her own problems later on. The group discussion context also encouraged my participants to analyse their conflicts from different perspectives. They supported each other and suggested several alternative resolutions (see 8.4) to resolve conflicts discussed. The journal extract below shows how cooperation and collaboration helped another participant to realise that she and her friends face similar moral conflicts:

> Conflicts brought up were thoroughly discussed and ways to solve such conflicts were analysed from different angles. Some students may encounter problems in choosing the most sensible solution but with the help of other friends, our burdens may be enlightened. It is relieving to know that we're not the only one facing moral dilemmas and other friends are also in the same boat. (*Kekwah*)

In spite of all the arguments, debates, laughter, giggles, and jokes, my participants thought the research process constituted an interactive, learning environment. They found it easier to concentrate and were relieved that they were able to express themselves in a supportive environment. The students in *Seri Pagi* had lots of arguments and debates during their PAR cycles (see 8.3.5). But what they did here compared to their own traditional ME class was to engage in serious discussion and focus upon what was going on during the discussions:

K: I feel relieved.

I: Why?

K: Because we can express ourselves.

M: The situation here is peaceful and we can discuss seriously.

O: If in class, it is difficult to concentrate.

I: Why?

O: Students are not interested and are with their own stories. They don't bother what the teacher is teaching. (*Seri Pagi*)

Most ME classes in Malaysian secondary schools consists of about 35-45 students. In such large classes, if the teaching is of no interest to the learners then the environment in the class can turn chaotic. In another phase of their reflection the *Seri Pagi* participants indicated that they felt they had more autonomy to study ME during the research; that they understood the values and moral conflicts clearer because they were actually helping each other (see 8.3.3). They expressed dissatisfaction with the present way of teaching ME where much emphasis is given to the technical aspects of values. They found the research method interactive and they could link themselves with what was going on in the research process. The fact that they could resolve their own moral conflicts with the help from their peers acknowledges the effectiveness of the theoretical framework I developed in Chapter Four.

ZCD also suggests that teachers may not always provide resolution and peers too can be their "teachers" at times. The excerpt below explains the help of peers in conflict resolution for the *Orkid* group:

> M:   Even though you did not provide us with any answers, we had the opportunity to discuss, to argue, and to support each other to come to finding resolutions for the conflicts together.
>
> L:   I feel when we study this way, we are able to relate to friends better. (*Orkid*)

Friends seem to play an important role in their discussion process. Friends provide my participants with "shoulders to lean on" and ideas to listen to when they are in conflict. Friends help to ease the heaviness of the conflict and make life more comfortable. The journal extract below explains how one participant saw the role of his friend. It explains how friends enable them to feel less stressed and how they manage to help each other:

> Friends help us see problems as less burdening, easier to manage and help us deal with our dilemmas discussed. We get to solve our own problems and to help our friends if we had encountered such dilemmas before. (*Orkid*)

According to Banks (2006), when students are able to participate in processes where they formulate and construct various knowledge forms, they are able to understand how different groups within a society formulate, shape, and disseminate knowledge. In almost all dilemmas presented (see 7.3), the students were trying to analyse why such conflicts exist and how different people would react in the given dilemmas. Students themselves challenged the perspectives in the Re-LiMDD and with the help of different capable peers they came to certain resolutions which took them to deeper levels of analysing and resolving the conflicts.

The connections made here show that the students learnt to analyse conflicts from multiple angles even though they had their own ideas and opinions about the moral conflicts discussed. The students were in a caring environment where they were free to speak for themselves and their peers. As Noddings (2002) relates, "We are called upon to listen, to respond to others according to their needs, not according to their membership in a symbolic community or according to universal rules that they themselves may reject" (p. 67). It was indeed a challenge for my participants to take turns, provide responses, and even to argue when they disagreed. But because they all shared the knowledge and empowerment, they were engaged in healthy discussion cycles which improved their moral thinking and moral feelings and led to moral action in certain instances (see 8.3.2).

The non-verbal communication made the interactive and collaborative links between the students richer, and were themselves worth analysing. According to Garcia (1991), non-verbal communication often conveys unconscious cultural bias. As explained in Chapters Seven and Eight, at different times during the PAR cycles, the students were signalling each other non-verbally and it is important to be able to respond to such gestures. For example in Dilemma 4# *Kekwah*, if I had not been sensitive to the non-verbal interactive gestures that the interested quiet duo were exchanging, I might have assumed that they were not keen on the dilemma analysed. But because I saw them being silent and exchanging "eye talk" and "head shakes" with each other when others were complaining and because I invited them to provide their view point, they

emerged as the capable peers (see 8.3.2). Participants' body language provided me with great insights that supported the verbal discussions that were taking place.

### 10.2.3 Meaningful

Overall, the students found the research process meaningful compared to what they had previously been doing in ME. They related to the real-life dilemmas presented, provided alternatives for resolving the conflicts, and even applied some of the choices suggested during the PAR cycles. In this section, it is worthwhile to differentiate between "interesting" (see 9.2.1) and "meaningful". Meaningful here means adding significance, meaning, or purpose to somebody's life and in this case the lives of my participants. Interest (see 10.2.1) starts the students discussing in Re-LiMDD but meaningful provides the purpose for the discussion.

The research provided an avenue for my participants to voice their views and to practice the three main components of the ME syllabus (see 8.3.2) which are moral thinking, moral feelings, and moral actions. When I conducted the reflective PAR cycles, several students shared their experiences of enacting choices discussed during the earlier PAR cycles. For me, this was seeing moral thinking, moral feelings, and moral action in transformation. In *Orkid*, for example after the issue about freedom was discussed (Dilemma 1# *Orkid*), one student tried communicating with his parents and wrote this extract in his conflict journal:

> Dad isn't that bad after all. He listened to what I had to say and gave his opinion after that. It was a good start. (*Orkid*)

The impression that the student had of his father who curbed his freedom changed after he went through he PAR process and spoke to his father. During the initial PAR cycles, students were putting the moral thinking and moral feelings into play. That's when they shared ideas and analysed the dilemmas. When they went home and reflected, they were in the second ZCD stage of self-help and trying to internalise what was learnt during the initial PAR cycles.

Later when they took action in facing their own real-life dilemmas, they were taking themselves to the ZCD stage of helping themselves and the moral action domain as Lickona calls it. All in all, the moral philosophy in MEM and ZCD process complemented each other in the PAR cycles.

The use of group discussion in my research enabled my participants not only to analyse their own action but also to be able to learn from previous mistakes based on their own actions or their friends' experiences and sharing (see 9.2.4). Thus the important element that made this research process meaningful to them was being able to relate to what is in the ME syllabus. They collaborated with friends, learnt from each other and individually practised skills learnt. The journal extract below explains how the process was meaningful to one participant in terms of what she learnt and how she hopes to react in the future:

> We learnt to deal with our conflicts more effectively and discussions like this bring us closer together as we understand each other's conflicts. We learn to think how to resolve our conflicts. So in future we'll know how to deal with our conflicts. (*Kekwah*)

The process that my participants found meaningful not only helped them during the process but also provided guidance for facing similar conflicts in the future. It therefore complements the ZCD stage of recursiveness (see 4.9.4) where students know that they will be facing future moral dilemmas. This is important because one of the objectives of ME in Malaysia is for students to develop initiative to act morally based on care, justice and utilitarianism in line with the noble values of the Malaysian community as stated in the ME syllabus (see 2.4.3) in order to bring up morally responsible citizens. When students of ME are able to voice themselves in class, then their confusions about the different conflicts that they face can be viewed from different perspectives. These experiences guide them to identify and make good moral choices. The excerpt below explains how the process allows the participants to knit a closer relationship and what it meant to their lives as adolescents:

P:      We had friends to help us out.

Y:      I realise that friends also face serious conflicts like me.

> T:   We are all facing similar conflicts and the discussion helped us realise that.

> U:   Its all part of our present life conflicts but discussions like this help us feel less tension. (*Orkid*)

Based on the excerpt above, in collaboration the students found meaning to what was discussed in the PAR cycles. They had their friends to help them out and felt the burden of facing such dilemmas less stressful because they knew other friends had similar dilemmas and the discussion gave them such realisations. The meaning here also relates to a transformation taking place within the students - as a group and individuals. As a group, the different groups were making meaning out of the dilemma analysis, thinking and feeling in the moral domains, and later transforming such perspectives into moral action. Moral actions were taken as a group or as an individual depending on the moral conflict. In the dilemma of the Science teacher (see Dilemma 4# *Kekwah*), the whole *Kekwah* group enacted their moral action by meeting the Science teacher and dialoguing with her as a collaborative group. In *Orkid,* a student took action by speaking to his father and discussing the dilemma faced (see Dilemma *7# Orkid*); an action he never thought he would take until after the Re-LiMDD he went through.

This in ZCD terms is at the internalisation of values and skills stage (see 4.9.3). The students collaborated with their friends but were also undergoing the same process internally. They had to consider challenges where their cultural and religious differences were being reflected upon. However, once they were clear with the different choices, students were able to react morally based on the constraints and local setting.

The journal extract below explains how one participant found meaning at the intrapersonal plane. She reflected upon the different ways the PAR research influenced her way of thinking and making decisions. She reflected upon rational thinking and how friends played a role in such a thinking process:

> The individual who has conflicts learns how to talk about their conflicts to others, so that they feel better sharing with their friends. And these

friends discuss ways to solve the problems and conflicts in our daily life. I feel that it has been a very interesting experience as I got to know my friends better, discussed my conflicts with them and realised that everyone faces conflicts in their lives and they too have problems in overcoming the conflicts, just like me. This process has affected me in various ways. I got to share my thoughts and problems among open minded friends. I have also learnt to think rationally about the consequences of the decisions I make. Besides, I learn how to converse with my friends personally and get to know them better. Furthermore, my friends have given me various solutions to my conflicts. I am now in control of my sweaty hands and I have overcome this problem by building up my confidence. I don't feel shy when I shake hands with my friends. Before this I didn't shake hands with anybody and tried to find excuse. (*Kekwah*)

The reflection above shows how ZCD is working at an intrapersonal level and at the same time, how moral thinking, moral feelings, and moral action have helped the student to prepare herself for future conflicts. The student has raised certain issues that should be useful in group discussions. The realisation that everyone has conflicts gives some relief to the students. The process in the PAR research has helped the student to collaborate and think rationally about the conflicts addressed as recommended in ZCD.

The essence of the PAR and ZCD processes was for the participants to create knowledge within a PAR process. They did this successfully - based on their moral dilemmas and the Re-LiMDD process they underwent. They participated authentically and responded to their needs and to the needs of their friends. They understood the notion of collaboration in a complex context such as pluralistic Malaysia but are also able to see themselves as unique individuals who have to learn to decide for themselves when facing their daily moral dilemmas in life.

My participants also found the dilemma analysis meaningful because the power sharing was two-way and they helped each other to resolve conflicts discussed. The excerpt below shows how two participants suggested alternatives for Dilemma 5# *Orkid* without feeling threatened or inferior:

W: If parent's think you are a bad boy, prove them wrong by being responsible.

> U:     Why always the need to prove to them? Be yourself and they must learn to tolerate you.
>
> W:     You listen first, if you can't tolerate your parents why would they want to tolerate you? [Looks fiercely at U: efvr]
>
> U:     Well, it has to be two-way and we have to give and take. (*Orkid*)

In the above excerpt though words were flying at each other, the students were all having an active discussion with some piercing eyes and hand movements. But the students were not threatened by the others because by the end of this particular PAR cycle, W and U were tapping each others shoulders and shaking hands. Their body language showed that they were not offended.  They had to discuss and bring out matters even if it risked making others angry or frustrated.

Habermas (1987) stressed the notion of open communication and how it enables the different parties involved to reach rational resolutions. At the moment, most MEM have one-way communication where teachers present the hypothetical conflict and get students to provide answers which fit into their frameworks of answers. Students at times rebel and question the teacher for not accepting their response which is moral but not within the framework of teacher's answers. Here, teacher will argue that it's according to the syllabus and if students want to do well in the ME examination, they must follow the given answers (Vishalache, 2002). The above situation was raised by several participants from *Seri Pagi* in the initial PAR cycle. Below is the excerpt:

> J:     Sometimes our answers are also correct but teachers do not accept them.
>
> N:     Teachers only want answers according to the ME syllabus. (*Seri Pagi*)

Through the research I found that students want to be involved in whatever that is taking place in the classroom. They were involved in the collaborative and interactive stages (see 10.2.2). Later they reflected upon the PAR process and found that they learnt to analyse and resolve their conflicts. They felt the attachment that they developed towards their friends made the PAR process

meaningful to them. The journal extract below explains the reflection of one participant from *Kekwah*:

> I am more prepared to face conflicts in my house with my brothers and sisters now. I will speak up if I'm not happy with their attitude and get my parents to interfere if I have to. The moral discussions with my friends have taught me how to handle my family conflicts better. (*Kekwah*)

According to Vygotsky (1977), development from collaboration and development from learning are a basic fact in the life of a child and I extend it to adolescents. My participants found meaning in what it means to discuss together with friends and how they are able to collaborate and learn from each other and develop as individual moral beings. The excerpt below explains the importance of being involved and the process that they undergo in learning to be moral from their own perspective:

> Q:    Because we ourselves are involved.
>
> R:    If we do not discuss, our problems will be prolonged.
>
> S:    And when we discuss, we can analyse and resolve our problems.
>
> T:    We get to understand that ME is not just memorising values; it is more <u>meaningful</u> studying this way.
>
> Y:    I feel comfortable because there is no stress studying this way.
>
> T:    Moral is part of life and when we get to discuss together with our friends, we learn from our friends and our friends too learn from us. (*Orkid*)

In the excerpt above the point at which T says, "We get to understand that Moral is not just memorising values; it is more <u>meaningful</u> studying this way" reflects on the notion of learning moral education using the thinking, feeling, and action domain. This is in contrast with their present way of studying where the focus is on learning the values for the sake of learning and answering well in the ME examinations. Student T is also able to link the research and what was learnt with the philosophy of life which moral is part of and how she or he learns from friends and vice versa.

This extract is in contrast with an earlier cycle of discussion by the same *Orkid* group who brought up the issue of how technical ME is with learning spelling and memorising values (see 10.2.1). They find ME more meaningful now because of process as well as product. The process was Re-LiMDD in collaboration with their friends. The product was being able to self-help, help their friends, internalise values, and resolve the moral conflicts based on the different choices that they received and suggested during the dilemma analysis process. Phrases like "Studying ME this way makes sense" (*Kekwah*), "We can try out what we discussed" (*Seri Pagi*) and "I don't mind learning moral this way" (*Orkid*) indicate that the PAR process is more meaningful to them.

Discussing matters close to their hearts helps students to stay focussed and value what is taught in ME. Open discussion, mutual exchange, and active participation (ten Dam, Volman & Wardekker, 2004) made ME holistic during the Re-LiMDD process. Though my participants go back to the cognitive aspect of understanding values better ("Now I understand meaning of values better" *Seri Pagi*), they also talk about the affective moral domain of being able to share emotions and resolve problems. They find this method practical and impact-leaving. According to Van der Linden, Erkens, Schmidt and Renshaw (2000), more educational theories of the current era emphasise that learning is a social process and not individual. Social dimensions like group work to foster learning are also encouraged. This is a social constructivist (see 4.3) approach that is encouraged in the current ME syllabus but not being fully established in reality.

One participant in *Seri Pagi* brought up the notion of ME being meaningful as shown in the excerpt below:

> O: We are not sleepy as we used to feel in the normal Moral classes, find it more meaningful and we become more *peka* [tactful]. We understand the values better too. (*Seri Pagi*)

*Kepekaan* or tactfulness is connected to moral sensitivity as mentioned by Rest (1983). It is an important factor to be considered when dealing with real-life moral dilemmas in a multicultural classroom. During the initial PAR cycles in

each school, I discussed the importance of being sensitive and they were tactful to each other's cultures and family differences (see 6.4.1) According to Tsolidis (2006):

> Students negotiate and compromise between the cultures they bring with them to school, those available to them, and those to which they aspire. Life is about deciding between available options and school is an important part of learning this. (p.189)

The notion of caring and being cared for in an open, honest discussion was one important aspect in my research. Though my participants come from various cultural backgrounds, they were comfortable with each other during the PAR cycles and the non-verbal language showed that they spoke up if they had to but at the same time were caring to those who spoke.

*10.2.4 Reflective*

Through the PAR process, these participants have learnt to become more reflective. In fact, before the research started, these students were voicing their opinions about ME and how they felt about the subject in largely negative terms. They spoke about the exam-oriented focus, memorising values, and the lack of time for reflecting on the process of acquiring the values and applying them in their daily lives. They saw no obvious link between the theory, the objectives of ME, and what was taking place within the ME classroom. However, after undergoing the cycles of PAR, my participants started to reflect upon the process that they had experienced and what it meant to them. The excerpt below reflects what they felt about the PAR process during the reflective cycle:

> L:     By studying this way, I get to express my feelings and analyse and reflect upon my actions which I have never done before.
>
> K:     I find studying this way useful.
>
> I:     Why?
>
> K:     Because we get to learn from previous mistakes. (*Seri Pagi*)

Since all the moral conflicts involved more than one person, my participants were trying to make sense of themselves and their friends. They learnt an important process which is reflecting on their actions and consequences which they have not been taught to do before in their traditional ME classes. This is not surprising because in class the conflicts discussed were usually hypothetical and there was little reason to reflect upon what should have been done. In contrast, the journal extract below shows how during the PAR process they reflected upon themselves and the dilemma analysis process:

> We get to understand ourselves and our friends better. We will also avoid ourselves from being trapped in the same problem if any situation we discussed is repeated. (*Seri Pagi*)

The same student gave an example of how the PAR process made him a more capable peer based on the conflicts discussed. Here is his excerpt about the autonomy dilemma for love and relationship (Dilemma 5# *Seri Pagi*) in which he was the more capable peer:

> Today [the day the discussion took place] I was walking home with my friend. He wanted to give a love letter to the girl working at the copier shop. I told him that it might be too early to get into such a relationship and maybe he should finish his secondary schooling first. He was shocked to hear that from me and told me that he would think about it. I was happy that I could make my friend think. (*Seri Pagi*)

The extract above shows that the process in ZCD can also be passed from students within the PAR process to others they are in contact with. It demonstrates a ripple effect that gives validity to my research in a small way.

The one finding that came up again and again in most of the reflective cycles was participants learning to understand friends better and learning from friends so as to deal with similar conflicts more skilfully and not to repeat mistakes. These learnings reflect the ZCD stages of self help and internalisation of values and problem solving skills. Another matter that was reflected upon by participants was how certain conflicts which they would normally have kept to themselves were brought out to be discussed and shared with their peers. They

found some emotional relief from this and the journal extract below explains how one participant plans to use the experience to relate to family members at home:

> We share similar problems with our friends and we get to discuss our problems as a group. That is great! We tend to find the solutions for the problems faster and I feel so happy because we get to release our emotions towards the problems that have been bugging us for such a long time. I think I will learn to communicate better with my parents and siblings at home after this. (*Orkid*)

Another participant reflected upon the PAR process as personal and able to be applied in his own life. This is significant because the participant began to collaborate with his peers, self-reflect, and later internalise and extend what was learnt to his own life. This is in line with the ZCD and ME in Malaysia which expects students to both take responsibility for their own moral actions and to be able to act morally according to local social and cultural norms. These two journal extracts below explain:

> Problems of my friends are similar to my own moral dilemmas. I can apply solutions discussed to solve my own problems. (*Orkid*)

> My friends gave a lot of ideas on what I shall do. When I am in situations as discussed with my friends, I will know how to handle it as the final decision maker will be me. (*Kekwah*)

The fact that these participants express hope to resolve moral conflicts of their own if they face such dilemmas later on validates the final principle in ZCD (see 4.9.4). The recursions when values conflict is natural in a pluralistic setting. However, what students did during the Re-LiMDD in the PAR cycles equipped them with skills and experience to face challenges on their own.

Students in my project seem to be more positive about facing future moral conflicts, using the skills they have practiced. However, students also showed that they understood that, although their peers provided useful alternatives, they still ultimately face conflicts alone because the final choice of what action to take is their own (see 8.6). This shows that several participants have developed

autonomy, a new value brought up in this research (see 7.3.1) which is not in the current ME syllabus and which I will elaborate on further in the next chapter.

What is equally valuable is that the students are able to voice these feelings through their reflections. The process of the PAR using Re-LiMDD was as least as important as the product (resolution for the moral conflicts). The participants voiced their own moral choices based on the reasons given and it was very enlightening to see them involved in the research.

## 10.3  Coming to an end…

Though my participants were honest and open in their views, I would still consider the restraints placed on students' freedom to express their views were inevitable due to unequal power distribution between researcher and participants. I am aware of the possibility that they might not want to say anything too negative or to hurt my feelings. However, the verbal and non-verbal data that I analysed provided in-depth data for my research. In the final chapter, I begin with my own reflections of the whole research and revisit my thesis questions for further clarification and discussion. The research findings and the new values identified by the participants are discussed. New findings that I did not expect such as the use of body language in the students' discussion are also discussed. The nature and limitations of the research will be included.  I discuss the transformation which may result from implementing an alternative method of teaching ME and suggest the research method as an alternative for ME pedagogy. Finally, I include suggestions for further research in this area.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**Beginning of an end…**

## 11.1 Introduction

My research was focussed on the engaging of secondary school students to resolve their real-life moral dilemmas and how open discussion with their peer group influenced the process. To listen to their voices from such pedagogy allows the space for those at the "grass roots" level to be heard. This chapter begins with my own reflections and includes surprises that I encountered in using such an alternative pedagogy. I also argue for the inclusion in ME of new values that were identified by my participants during the research, and which are unique to the Malaysian multicultural society, the classroom, and the curriculum. Based on my research, I proceed to suggest a process of using Re-LiMDD based on Vygotsky's ZPD - which I extended into ZCD - and consider how this could function in local and global contexts. I end this chapter with a discussion of the nature and limitations of Re-LiMDD based on my research, and consider the prospect of moral journeys ahead.

## 11.2 My reflections

Several new issues have been raised by my research. First is the new values and new content matter in the already learnt values. Based on the fact that participants in all three schools that I researched identified conflicts involving autonomy, autonomy is a new value that needs serious consideration in future ME syllabus revisions.  Living in multicultural Malaysia, adolescents like my participants find themselves caught between autonomy and authority. They want their own space to develop but at the same time they are committed to the authorities such as parents, school, and rule of law, religion, societal norms, culture and traditions. They are respectful but have conflicts regarding mutual respect and self respect as well as respecting the planet earth in a spiritual way. In the ME syllabus values like respect, trust, freedom and tolerance are spelt

out in non-relational way (see 2.4.3). However, my research shows that students prefer to take a more relational view. Students have demonstrated that they want to take responsibility for their own decision-making and this is interesting because they are still "working out" within the boundaries of the Malaysian culture (see 7.2.2).

The degree of use of body gestures by my research participants totally surprised me. My original focus was on the verbal discussions that were going to take place in the PAR cycles and how the students were going to demonstrate moral thinking, feeling, and acting based on their Re-LiMDD and journal records. However, after a few PAR cycles, I found my participants using a language unique to them but filled with meaning. These observations were useful in my data analysis. In the PAR cycles, most of my participants related important messages with their eyes, their heads, their hands, and with facial expressions; these I picked up and used for the dilemma analysis.

When someone speaks, it is just words that come out of the mouth but non-verbal communication, body language, also says a lot. According to Shapiro (2008), non-verbal language actually speaks louder than words. Body language which consists of facial expression, posture, gestures, and other actions is important in relating to others. Being able to read the body language of students in a ME classroom will aid teachers to understand their feelings better. This is another factor to consider because students from different cultures use different gestures and to understand, respect, and respond to such gestures is important in a multicultural society (see 8.3).

Words and verbal communication comes from moral thinking but I suggest that body gesture comes from the heart and moral feelings and action. The way people communicate non-verbally is an important part of culture. How people "look at each other and what the particular looks mean often vary within and across different microcultural groups within a society" (Banks, 2006, p. 75). I think more research is needed here to further discuss this area especially in the Malaysian context.

Moral pluralism is another issue that came up in my research. In a pluralistic society like Malaysia, the ethics of care and justice can be seen but what is more evident are moral orientations based on moral pluralism. Adolescents in my research are concerned about many changes taking place within and outside them. They have experienced many dilemmas requiring moral decisions but because of their cultural and religious upbringing, they are in a morally pluralistic environment. This means that moral orientations are based on current situations but are greatly affected by the constraints within the local setting (see 9.3.2)

I recommend acknowledgment of moral pluralism as one alternative way of approaching moral dilemmas in the Malaysian setting. It is natural to encourage the promotion of values that support moral pluralism in secondary schools. Students at this stage are mature enough to reflect upon what is essential where daily values and virtues are concerned. Moral pluralism is common in a country like Malaysia where students have so many differences and unity in diversity should be promoted in the ME curriculum.

In moral pluralism approach the focus should be on the process of moral decision-making. The ME curriculum should focus on moral decision-making processes. In MEM classes, resolving problems and decision-making is part of the syllabus content (Vishalache, 2008a).

Students in my research were grappling with the challenge of how to react morally because they know what is morally right and wrong but how to act on that resolution is the challenge. As one participant from *Seri Pagi* wrote, "If you want to change something about yourself, it is easier if you can set a goal and work towards it". Here the notion is about being authentic in facing challenges and resolving them according to the specific situation. It is no use spelling out values and content area if students are not equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to reach that destiny.

The current ME syllabus is comprehensive in nature (see 2.4.3) with a whole set of values and content area to be completed within the secondary school time frame. However, the students do not find it meaningful to their moral

development (Vishalache, 2004). The values are isolated from the relational language of care and response. My participants might have the same values as stated in the syllabus but <u>reciprocity</u> is not included anywhere in the syllabus and it is worth discussing. This is interesting because such views come from the students themselves who see the world from their perspective, and express it in their voice. Students see the curriculum values as prescribed from the government or MOE's perspective but these values do not touch their hearts as did dilemmas provided by them (see Chapter Seven). My desire to research what the ME students really want, and what their moral woes are, was based on this. It would be ideal to have a syllabus that could cater for both the aspirations of the country and the moral needs of the ME students.

I found that the capable peer, as suggested by Vygotsky (1978) in ZPD and extended to ZCD, can be anyone or any sub-group. For example in 8.3.1, the more capable peer was an individual with real-life experience which he could share and help resolve the autonomy conflict. But in 8.3.2, the pair of participants who comprised the capable peer was the silent duo who showed by body gestures that they disagreed with the comments made and who, with a little encouragement from me, flourished as the capable peer who gave a different perspective of the whole conflict which was then amicably resolved as a group. In 8.3.3, the capable peer was a sub-group who had relevant experience and knowledge to share.

However, one of the capable peers experienced regression within ZCD (see 8.3.3), a natural state to endure in the process of moral development. In 8.3.4, there were two sub-groups who took the role of capable peers based on their experience, background and knowledge. Each sub-group provided the other with experience and examples which finally helped the group as a whole to analyse the moral conflict and resolve it. Finally in 8.3.5, the capable peer was the participant who could think laterally and merge two schools of thoughts that arose in the discussion. The creative capable peer is essential here because there were two sub-groups within the group, one with religious and cultural reasoning and the other with rational reasoning.  Overall, I find the capable peers existing in various situations in different ways and Re-LiMDD allows for

such diversity in process. The ripple effect of the ZCD is also seen in my research where students who gained knowledge and experience through the PAR cycles became capable peers in other real-life conflicts (see 10.2.4).

I was extremely surprised to find the Japanese occupation mentioned in situations where my participants spoke about the generation gap they found with their parents when discussing issues of freedom (see 7.2.4 and 8.3.4.2). It has been more than 60 years since Malaysia was invaded by the Japanese but the effect of the occupation still impacts on the current adolescents through their family members who survived the occupation. It is an issue which clearly needs consideration within the ME syllabus as it was frequently associated with the clashes of values that my participants faced with their parents or older family members.

Based on my research, I find that using Re-LiMDD can be a valid alternative pedagogy in the ME subject in secondary schools. It is indeed possible to use such as alternative as students at the secondary level of education in Malaysia have undergone six years of ME in primary school where they are inculcated with the different values and norms of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The focus of the first six years of the syllabus, mainly at the lower primary level is on "habit forming and building up of a relevant vocabulary" (Mukherjee, 1988, p. 157). Students have also been exposed to the rules and regulations of the state and what is conformed to as fundamentals and absolutes within the Malaysian educational realities. What I see now is the need for a transformative ME curriculum and ME classroom able to incorporate the Re-LiMDD approach. It would be worthwhile to analyse these factors which have direct influence on the implementation of Re-LiMDD in Malaysia ME subject in secondary schools.

## 11.3   Revisiting the thesis questions

When I began this research, I constantly reminded myself of the importance of ensuring that the students' voice is listened to. The main findings in my research provide evidence that there are several issues and new values identified by my students which are not in the ME syllabus (see Chapter Seven).

There are other new issues that arise which surprised me as the researcher which I would summarise below.

## Research Question 1: What are the moral conflicts faced by a representative sample of 16-17 year old adolescents in a Moral Education class in Malaysia?

When students in my research were asked to reflect upon their moral conflicts and to identify one moral conflict, each and every student was able to provide their own conflict or one that was disturbing and bothering them. Every conflict was different and unique in its own way but with the help of two authorities in the field of developmental psychology and counselling, I categorised the 20 conflicts into five conflicting themes. These are autonomy, respect, trust, freedom, and tolerance. Autonomy is a new value introduced by the students through the moral dilemmas presented. The other four conflicting themes are included in the current Moral Education syllabus though not spelt out in the way my PAR students have presented them (see 7.3). When students discussed their moral conflicts they mentioned – directly or indirectly – a complexity of factors like government policies, culture, ethnicity and religion, and the Japanese occupation which makes the conflict that they present difficult to resolve. Students understanding of several of the values differed from the more common interpretations and students appeared to value reciprocity (see 7.3.2.1).

Based on my research, I found that students experience a dilemma when they have to decide between issues like authority, mutual respect, self trust, cultural sensitivity and tradition, parental expectations, and their own need for the conflicting values mentioned earlier. All in all they are in a constrained situation to make choices on the moral dilemmas that they face.

## Research Question 2: To what extent do peers help these adolescents solve their moral conflicts?

In my research process, peers are perceived as a supportive group (see 8.7). The participants helped each other to resolve academic challenges, and in times of conflict provided each other support in the form of suggestions,

reprimand, and motivation. But most importantly, participants found that their peers helped them to learn to decide for themselves. This finding links back to my notion of a ZCD which suggests that what the students learn in collaboration they can later utilise. Students who are by this adolescents stage influenced and affected by factors like parents, religion, culture, and state have to resolve their moral conflicts within all the existing constraints. Peers help them by giving alternative choices but the final decision is solely theirs (see 8.6). Students' collaborative discussions brought them through the interpersonal stage to the intrapersonal stage where they were able to reflect and make good moral choices.

Based on the research, I found the students taking the role of capable peer in ZCD terms; able to provide knowledge and insights based on their experience and knowledge during the Re-LiMDD. The role of capable peers is varied and shifting. At times it is just one person and at other times, it is a duo or a small group within the PAR group.

**Research Question 3: How do these adolescents describe moral choices they make in their daily lives?**

The moral choices made by my participants were heavily influenced by parents, culture, religion, utilitarianism, collaboration, and friendship (see 9.2). These conflicts presented surprising ironies; for example four out of five moral conflicts concerning autonomy involved conflict with parents but when the same participants considered their moral choices, they were tactful about what their parents would think when they decided what to do. In Chapter Five, I differentiated between problems, dilemmas, and moral dilemmas and explained how resolving a dilemma is a matter of determining whether your favoured choice has enough of the positive such that you can live with the negative (Murrell, 2007). Based on my research, I found that the PAR students' moral choices are greatly influenced by the need to make others happy as in a utilitarianism concept (see 9.2.2) and this is one of the deciding factors for their moral choices.

Culture and religion were also influencing their moral decisions because from a young age, my participants have been inculcated to respect and obey their elders (see 9.2.1). As times, the students made choices based on rationality but, as always, traditions and culture were there to influence their choices and they had to make choices within such constraints. For example in Dilemma *4# Seri Pagi*, participants were caught between making a choice to go against a brother who wronged them or keep to tradition and be respectful to the elder brother (see 7.3.5.3). It is an ongoing challenge for my participants to constantly struggle with the dilemma of making moral choices in their daily moral conflicts based on these factors.

**Research Question 4: What are the moral orientations used by these adolescents to resolve such moral conflicts?**

My research indicates that the moral orientations showed by participants in dilemma resolutions were mostly care-based (see 9.3.1). Students were concerned about their relationship with the people or nature that they conflicted with. They had concerns about how the other party would feel and what they would say and how they could resolve the conflict without hurting the other party (see 9.3). They were sensitive and empathetic to the other's needs.

However, in most other situations, moral pluralism seemed to prevail. Here, there was no conformity to ethics of care or justice but situations showed students "switch" orientations based on the context of the conflict (see 9.3.2). This is an important new finding of my research. My participants are concerned about resolving conflicts based on current context and choices influenced by factors explained above. For example, the need for freedom compared to having to discipline oneself in order to excel academically (see 7.3.4.2) looks like an ethics of justice issue, but what the participant was wanting was to be heard within an ethics of care environment in a situation based on his/her conflict at that moment and at that time. Most of them are under great pressure for achieving academic excellence and their moral orientation is neither on care or justice but on dealing with the conflict in specific contexts.

**Research Question 5: What are the implications of using real-life dilemmas in the Moral Education classroom?**

Through the voices of my students, I found that the students were positive and proactive about using Re-LiMDD as a method of studying ME in the classroom (see 10.2). They found the research process to be interesting (see 10.2.1), interactive and collaborative (see 10.2.2), meaningful (see 10.2.3), and reflective (see 10.2.4). The students were comparing their traditional method of learning ME through memorisation, use of hypothetical moral dilemmas, and the focus on one right answer with the method of using real-life dilemmas which they themselves presented. Having alternative choices to resolve the dilemmas and having equal power in undergoing the Re-LiMDD gave them a different view of ME.

The research enabled the students to flow through the process of PAR and take moral action as individuals or as a group. They were living the notion of moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action through their PAR cycles and actions taken based on the discussions and sharing. The PAR process resulted in effective and appropriate actions which completed the notion of moral thinking, moral feeling, and moral action. Actions were carried out collaboratively and individually, depending on the dilemma faced. Actions also impacted on others who were not within the PAR group (see 10.2.4).

**11.4   Using real-life moral dilemmas in ME**

Based on my research, I find using Re-LiMDD in the teaching of ME in secondary schools feasible with some transformation based on the current syllabus. I emphasise secondary schools because the students are now at a certain level of maturity where they are able to understand what Malaysian society aims for in the moral domain, and the other influencing factors like the federal constitution, culture, and traditions and the students' role in all of them.

*11.4.1 My suggestions for ME curriculum for the use of Re-LiMDD*

Based on my research and the research findings, I now propose a ME curriculum which is transformative in nature. It is almost inevitable when dealing

with social systems and social processes such as education that there will be "inherent tensions between the centre and the periphery of the system" (Ling, Burman & Cooper, 1998, p. 38). In order to implement Re-LiMDD in classrooms, the ME curriculum has to be transformative and be able to facilitate the voices of students. There are several factors which need to be considered in order to enable the practicability of Re-LiMDD in ME classrooms. The diagram below which I have designed based on my findings and analysis explains what the requirements are for a transformative ME Curriculum based on my Re-LiMDD.

Respect ethnic and cultural diversity

Foster multicultural interactions

Reflect cultural diversity

Provide opportunities to develop collaborative and self reflection

Bridge students' experience with syllabus

Identify conflict ideals and realities in Malaysian educational realities

Explore morality at current times based on current issues

Promote values that support moral pluralism

Develop discussion and decision-making skills

Develop student culture for interpersonal group discussions

Prepare reflective students

Figure 11.1: Transformative ME Curriculum in relation to Re-LiMDD.

## 11.4.1.1 Characteristics of a transformative ME curriculum

These suggestions are all based on my research findings and the voices of the students. The most important characteristic is to reflect students' voices and experiences. Without having the students involved, no ME curriculum can adequately reach out to the students. The first person and third person in morality in the Malaysian setting are to be taken seriously (see 1.5.7). Students of ME need to understand realities and ideals in Malaysia both from the individual and from the third person perspective.

Based on my research, the notion of multicultural interactions is inevitable in the Malaysian setting. Without a notion of moral pluralism and allowing differences to be practised within the nation, ME curriculum for Re-LiMDD might not work. This is because students need to understand differences and to live successfully within such differences. Notions of tolerance, reciprocity, and mutual respect are important in creating a multicultural relationship. According to Burbules (1993), the ideal of dialogue opens the avenue to the possibility of open, respectful, and critical engagements where individuals can learn about others, the world, and themselves. A ME curriculum which considers the above would be ideal for the Re-LiMDD to take place.

Students in this project demonstrated that cultural diversity is becoming globally recognised and accepted. The effective incorporation of Re-LiMDD into the ME curriculum requires cultural diversity to be acknowledged and reflected every time real-life moral dilemmas are discussed. The reality in conflicts enables students to discover and appreciate a cultural diversity unique to the Malaysian setting. In 1988, Mukherjee noted that the initial planning and writing team of curricular materials and textbook materials for ME are mainly Malay writers but the curriculum was meant for non-Malay students. This observation still requires attention. In my opinion, there are plenty of Malay writers who are sensitive to the other ethnic cultures and implementing a system which includes one or two non-Malay writers should help in the check and balance process of dealing with curriculum and policy matters.

As demonstrated in my research, collaboration and self/group reflections are two important elements in ZCD. These need to go hand in hand to allow students space for group and self development. Johnson and Johnson (1989) explained that cooperative learning, as compared to competitive learning, results in greater productivity across the group. Not only does this encourage students to work together but they also acquire skills and knowledge to guide them in other conflicts. It is important that the ME curriculum include these elements (see Figure 11.1) for Re-LiMDD to be truly effective.

In my research, students presented their real-life dilemmas which were of current times. The rapidly changing global and environmental context and how students will have to deal with new and very challenging moral discussions are beyond anything that have been experienced so far. As described in Figure 11.1, morality in ME curriculum should always explore the current times. Re-LiMDD allows space for looking into current moral conflicts that students face and a more in-depth reflection on how students' discursive construction of these issues might be changing would be useful. It is not practical to have a syllabus that focusses on issues of yesteryear if students of ME talk about latest and current conflicts and challenges.

The use of Re-LiMDD fosters a culture of understanding which has been successful in encouraging students to understand and appreciate differences within and between themselves. This culture enables them to see themselves and others within a cultural kaleidoscope. In order for Re-LiMDD to work, the ME curriculum would need to allow space for students to be reflective. Reflective students tend to resolve moral conflicts in a more holistic way, following through the process and thinking through the consequences of an action. They reflect upon their actions and moral choices that they make. The ME curriculum can provide the opportunity to allow such processes to take place.

In Malaysia, ME and other subjects have a comprehensive curriculum which becomes the guide for teaching and assessing the respective subjects. However, for ME to be able to use Re-LiMDD as an alternative pedagogy, requires some flexibility in the curriculum that would enable real-life dilemmas to

be brought into the ME classroom and also the characteristics mentioned above.

Other than changes required in the ME curriculum to enable the Re-LiMDD to work, the ME classroom is also equally important. Having a good ME curriculum does not guarantee quality in the ME classroom. Teacher preparation, awareness, and practical training are necessary to ensure that Re-LiMDD works in the classroom. Most important of all, the notion of change must be accepted by all parties involved to make Re-LiMDD work within the ME classroom.

### 11.4.2   ME classroom

Logically, the ME classroom should reflect the ME curriculum as elaborated earlier (see Figure 11.1). In order for the needs of different social groups to be met, negotiation and co-operation are necessary factors in everyday classroom relationships.  In order for the students' voices to be heard, the ME classroom has also to be transformative in nature. For Re-LiMDD to become a reality in the ME classroom depends on four important factors as illustrated below:
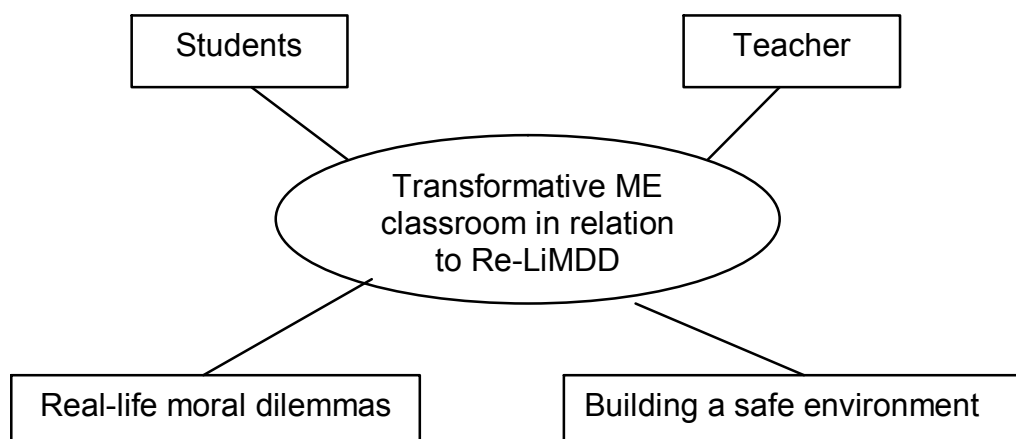


Figure 11.2: ME classroom factors supporting Re-LiMDD.

### 11.4.2.1   Students

Any secondary school student can be a student of Re-LiMDD as long as they are able to collaborate and cooperate with their peers in class and later self-

help themselves. They would be able to increase their funds of knowledge trough their collaboration with their more capable peers. The Re-LiMDD and PAR process would encourage students to self-help and later internalise the skills and knowledge learnt. Later they are able to use skills and knowledge acquired in their own moral conflicts. The size of the class is also important in ensuring the feasibility of Re-LiMDD (see 11.6).

## 11.4.2.2  Teacher

Most teachers of ME are not specially trained to deal with ME (Rosnani, 2007) let alone Re-LiMDD. The rapport between teacher and students is important in building a relationship of mutual trust and care (see 5.5.2). To create rapport in a classroom, teachers need an honest personal relationship with students (Vishalache, 2008a). It makes it easier for students to relate and share their moral conflicts with others in the class.

An effective transformative and empowerment curriculum must be implemented by "teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to help students understand the ways in which knowledge is constructed and used to support power group relationships in society" (Banks, 2006, p. 217). It has always been the policy of the MOE in Malaysia to encourage teachers to engage in dialogue, discourse, and activities that deepen their level of academic and intellectual maturity. Pring (1984) emphasises the need for in-service training of teachers in the skills and strategies which shift the approach from instruction to the facilitating of active and experiential learning. Ideally, teachers and would-be ME teachers would undergo such a course involving Re-LiMDD as a module to allow them to have the experiential exposure and knowledge.

Teachers bring cultural perspectives, values, hopes, and dreams to the classroom. They also bring their prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions to the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Thus in a Re-LiMDD, teachers should be aware of their position and their role. Teacher education programmes should recognise and reflect the complex moral, ethnic, and cultural identities and characteristics of the individual students in the classroom. "Professionalism includes being sensitive to individual pupils' needs and abilities" (Taylor, 1996,

p. 136). If Re-LiMDD is to function effectively in ME classrooms, teachers must be sensitive to students' needs where cultural and social aspects are concerned.

### 11.4.2.3   Real-life moral dilemmas

Real-life moral dilemmas are the most important factor in Re-LiMDD. Ideally the real-life moral dilemmas are sourced from the students themselves to provide them with a sense of responsibility to their own conflicts. However, the students can relate their own dilemmas or source them from media, friends, or anywhere (see 5.5.3). This also provides some protection for the students who can present an issue concerning them, without identifying actual people concerned. The fact that students bring the dilemma to the classroom allows for open-speech situations free from constraints and power relations (Habermas, 1984). Students are not in the situation where they have to adhere to issues presented by the teacher but those based on their own real-life scenarios.

The primary goal of any formal institution like schools should be to socialise individuals into the common culture and enable them to function successfully within it (Banks, 2006). By using Re-LiMDD, the avenue to reach such a goal becomes practical and meaningful to the students.

### 11.4.2.4   Building a safe environment

Building a safe environment for the students in Re-LiMDD is indeed important. Students at the adolescent stage are vulnerable to criticisms and it is imperative that during initial stages of the Re-LiMDD process, the ME teacher is able to build a safe environment for learning and development to take place and to ensure that as far as possible, students and their families' privacy/confidentiality are protected (see 5.3.4). The notion of trust and honesty combined with the ethics of care (see 5.3.2) and compassion should help a long way with this aspect. Students are unlikely to relate to or discuss issues with ME teachers who are authoritarian or who focus only on examination and syllabus content.

The idea of a WA worked well in my research and I suggest such strategies be used to build a safe environment for the students and the teacher (see 6.4.1).

Confidentiality or privacy and gaining informed consent is essential; for example students must know what the process will be before engaging in it. Guidelines for the Re-LiMDD process should be in place and agreed upon in the event of a difficult closure. For example in Malaysia, any issues dealing with drug abuse or child abuse are required by law to be instantly reported to the authority concerned. Students and ME teachers need to build a rapport long before Re-LiMDD can proceed.

From here, I go on to describe the dimensions and process of Re-LiMDD based on my research and findings.

## 11.5   The dimensions of Re-LiMDD

Based on my research and my analysis, I suggest that the dimensions of Re-LiMDD are made up of four important components. All these four parts are interrelated and provide strength to the foundation of Re-LiMDD. They are content, pedagogy, empowerment, and participation. The diagram below illustrates the interrelationship between the four components.
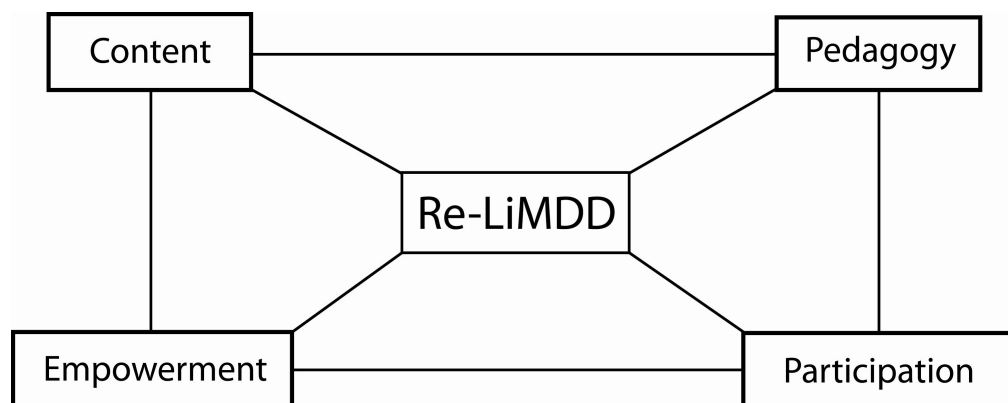


Figure 11.3: The Four Dimensions of Re-LiMDD.

### 11.5.1 Content

In my research, the content was provided by my students which made it relevant to them. Content for Re-LiMDD is simply the real-life moral dilemmas provided by the students. In order to allow some system within the lessons, thematic forms of discussions can be arranged to ensure the bridge between the syllabus and the content. Currently, the values to be learnt and content areas are all spelt out comprehensively in the syllabus (see 2.4.3) which gives little or no space at all for students of ME to express themselves or link the values and content taught to their real lives.

### 11.5.2 Pedagogy

The pedagogy for Re-LiMDD is dialoguing, discussion, and engaging in critical thinking processes. The pedagogy must be transformative in nature and develop in students the knowledge, skills, and values needed to make good moral choices and resolve moral conflicts amicably. Decisions made need to be reflected upon. In other words the pedagogy for Re-LiMDD must allow reflective decision-making with collaborative and personal moral action. This is essential, especially now in the Malaysia scenario where students are required to understand their social and moral responsibility as citizens in a multicultural nation.

### 11.5.3 Empowerment

Power sharing is essential in implementing Re-LiMDD. It must be between students and students, and teacher and students. Each party should feel comfortable and confident that they have equal power and privilege to voice their opinions, suggestions, and arguments.

One important finding of my research is that students from different ethnic and cultural groups come with different ideologies about their moral conflicts and need to engage in dialogue. To enable the voices of students to be fully heard, I did not include teachers at any point of my PAR research. In the Malaysian classrooms, teachers are always seen as the authority and students on the other hand are individuals who abide by the authority (the teacher). Students

have multiple resources for knowledge and teachers no longer just teach but educate students. In my Re-LiMDD especially, teachers must share power with students though they have the maturity to suggest and guide with leading questions (see 8.3.2). However, equal power is impossible in MEM. Maybe all ME teachers can do is work towards giving students opportunities to exercise their own agency.

### 11.5.4 Participation

In Re-LiMDD, students take on an active participation role. There are times when they become the capable peer who leads the group discussion. It all depends on their experience and their funds of knowledge (see 4.9.1). The role of the capable peer is taken up in various forms and the teacher too can take this role if students lack the expertise. However, the notion of power sharing is important and students tend to listen and dialogue better when there are fewer constraints from the teacher exercising an authoritative role.

Finally, as the four components above are interrelated, they all share equal weight in Re-LiMDD.

## 11.6  Re-LiMDD - Nature and Limitations

There is not a single or best pedagogical answer that would suit all contexts and any initiative is still just one of the many possibilities with their own strength and limitations (Chen, 2008). I agree with Chen, but being a social science researcher I feel compelled to research, analyse, and construct integrative and alternative approaches to teaching ME in Malaysian secondary schools. It is important that weaknesses of a certain approach are seen with a proactive perspective and distinct alternative approaches are articulated.

Based on my research, Re-LiMDD made some participants see the potential for a future impact for the nation as a whole. The excerpt below shows a participant linking the experience he had with the effects on the nation:

N:    If we train ourselves to resolve our own dilemmas this way, I'm sure our
       country will have citizens who have missions and are moral. Other than

that we would have leaders who are dynamic and great moral problem solvers. (*Seri Pagi*)

Nation-building is one of the component in the present ME syllabus (see 1.4) and with creative implementation, Re-LiMDD might help to achieve that objective. Not only would ME students be able to link theory and practice but they would also become responsible moral citizens of the nation - which is the aim of ME in Malaysia.

Students in my research are very analytical about the pros and cons of using real-life moral dilemmas as issues for classroom discussion. They could reflect upon the positive as well as the negative aspects of using such a method. The excerpt below reveals weakness in Re-LiMDD from the student's perspective if group members are not serious with the process involved:

> J:     Friends in the Moral class who like to play in class would avoid other students' problems.
>
> L:     At times a moral conflict which is sensitive or personal can become others' topic of discussion outside the Moral class if they do not know how to respect other people. (*Seri Pagi*)

Based on the excerpt above, there are two issues that my participants expressed which need to be addressed. First is the issue of not being serious with the Re-LiMDD process. If students are not serious then Re-LiMDD will only take place on the surface. To ensure full participation, pre Re-LiMDD activities like constructing a WA (see 6.4.1) and building trust and rapport between students can be conducted (see 11.4.2.4).

The second issue is about sensitivity. The ethics of care (see 5.3.2) can be used to resolve this issue. The concern for care, compassion, and relationships should be the main focus and students can be responsible for themselves and their friends. The collaboration phase in Re-LiMDD (see 11.4.1) can help to create awareness of differences, and the WA should help to initiate tactfulness and reciprocity of respecting differences among students. Another alternative would be to include a discussion about how participants would deal with the

eventualities. This agreement can be part of the WA where teachers of ME will have to find a way of addressing the issue. For example, each dilemma can be scrutinised to remove identifying material or teachers can stress in the beginning that students will never know if the dilemmas are real or constructed. However, the key is to stress that the dilemmas need not be the students own problems, but should be problems that have "touched" them in some way.

In one reflective session, participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Re-LiMDD as shared below:

> O:     I see two sides to this way of studying ME. I personally find ME interesting when studied this way. The positive aspect of studying ME using real-life moral dilemmas is we are able to resolve the conflicts from multiple perspectives. The negative aspect is our problems might be told to others by our friends here and we might be teased by them. (*Kekwah*)

In the situation above, the participant is able to see two sides of studying ME using Re-LiMDD. Trust is an issue which can be settled through establishing a WA within the ME classroom and the ME teacher and students. Confidentiality is another matter that needs to be addressed during the WA and rapport building sessions. The sharing or real-life moral dilemmas expect mutual respect and tactfulness from both the dilemma owner and those in collaboration.

Another weakness of Re-LiMDD as brought up by my PAR participant is the size of ME classes in Malaysia. Here is the excerpt:

> R:     By learning this way, teachers won't need to force students to learn ME. But I'm wondering how can a teacher with so many students in a Moral class handle this way of an in-depth discussion?
>
> U:     The teacher can break the class to smaller groups or discuss as a class. It all depends on the creativity of the teacher. (*Orkid*)

This refers to the commitment of the ME teacher and how creative the teacher is in restructuring a big class into meaningful group discussions as mentioned

above. ME classes in Malaysia are big but through their creativity, teachers of ME can overcome such problems. The ME class population is a serious issue which needs consideration. Teachers must be creative in this situation where groups within the ME class can be formed. According to Jensen (2008), teachers can create their own "microclimates in the classroom" (p. 97). Lessons can be carried out not necessarily within the four walls of the classroom but in other suitable locations within the school compound.

The alternative pedagogy that I suggest will be workable if the weaknesses are overcome creatively. The dangers of using Re-LiMDD without taking the precautions discussed above are likely to cause uneasiness among students. This indicates a need for further research on the role of the teacher in using Re-LiMDD. Furthermore, the process of Re-LiMDD within the ZCD which I suggested in 4.8 (collaboration, self-reflection, resolve dilemmas, reflection) can be further researched too.

## 11.7 Beginning of an end…

When I started this journey of mine, I had a mission to listen to the unheard voices in ME which are the voices of the students, the end receivers of the ME subject and ME curriculum. Now that I have completed my research journey, I realise that it is just the beginning of an end. Why do I say so? The research experience that I gained in this project makes my journey begin. My journey to explore the usability of Re-LiMDD and explain to ME curriculum developers of the voices of the ME students is about to begin. My journey to continue working on the Re-LiMDD about which I feel so passionate is also about to begin. This work will entail a whole new process of writing, discussing, and reflecting on the usability of Re-LiMDD in the Malaysian ME scenario.

I feel a great sense of achievement in my work of investigating the Re-LiMDD process and the writing up of this thesis. I found that discussion in my PAR cycles mediate and shape moral experience in fundamental ways, but ultimately it is the participants themselves who construct their own understanding of such dilemmas, as values in the discussed cycles are internalised as a result of the guided participation and social interaction that occur within the ZCD. Based on

my findings I saw the relationship between collaboration and moral development which is important for a multicultural nation like Malaysia.

My participants' lived moral experience is expressed through real-life moral dilemmas which gave me the inspiration and motivation to construct the Re-LiMDD model. I did not have any idea of what my final chapter of this thesis was going to be and kept an open mind to listen to the voices of the ME students in my research. The research has enabled me to understand that there is hope to facelift MEM from the students' perspective. Their need for power sharing and autonomy puts me as an academic and ME curriculum consultant in a challenging position; to balance the aspiration of the nation and the voices of the ME students.

The one aspect in my research that took me completely by surprise is the significance of non-verbal communications. The relationship between group collaborations and moral development where discussions functions as a central component should be further explored. Interaction through signs, words, language, and other cultural discourses to enable action and interaction constitutes a gap that I hope future ME researchers in Malaysia and other parts of the world will investigate. Being in a multicultural environment, verbal and especially non-verbal communication plays an important role in the formation of ideas and motives which are later translated into choices and actions. The non-verbal communication in Malaysian ME classrooms has great potential for future researchers.

Participants in Re-LiMDD enter and traverse a ZCD where educational and developmental processes help internalise gradually, and make their own, an understanding of caring activities that begin as joint ventures with others. Here too, there is opportunity for further researchers to look into collaborative resolution in ME and how such processes affect the moral decision-making of students either within the classroom or later in life.

Another gap that I managed to identify is that MEM is not simply to be memorised, also to be understood and appropriated in a new way, as to guide students' moral actions in the world. The ongoing interactions through Re-

LiMDD and ZCD might bridge the gap between theory and practice and bring a new understanding of all that ME can be in the Malaysian educational realities.

ME not only involves the head but also the heart and action. A practical way of nurturing a sense of belonging is through involving adolescents in the decision-making processes that shape the institutions and environments in which they spend their time (Thomson, 2007). The cultures of students in my PAR as well as the Malaysian ME class are diversified. From a cultural studies perspective, culture is defined as everyday social practice (Kehily, 2007). Based on my discussion of my findings in the earlier chapters, the cultures of my participants are interwoven with the family upbringing, their religion, and their local community as well as their understanding of the national constitution and how they perceive the morality of youth culture in their own demographic setting. Through Re-LiMDD, such differences can be brought out to be discussed and understood with clear notions of unity within diversity.

Re-LiMDD encourages such a process to take place within the ME classroom and promises a pedagogic space for such a vision in Malaysian secondary schools.

Schools in Malaysia are being urged by the government, non-governmental organisations, religious bodies, and society on the whole to address notions of integration and Malaysian morality, diversity, globalisation, computerisation, and others in order to fulfil their obligations as educational institutions. Re-LiMDD could be a starting point for students of ME to see the subject differently and, after collaborative discussions, make decisions about moral dilemmas they face. Furthermore, it has the potential to provide an alternative pedagogy and be a powerful tool for ethical engagement with difference in MEM classrooms.

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# APPENDICES

| Appendix | Description |
|:---:|:---|
| A | Ethics Approval (New Zealand) |
| B | Education Planning Unit Approval (Malaysia) |
| C | Information sheet |
| D | Consent letter |
| E | Sample working agreement |
| F | Working agreement (*Seri pagi*) |
| G | Working agreement (*Kekwah*) |
| H | Working agreement (*Orkid*) |

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

# VICTORIA
## UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

15 AUG 2007

Visha Balakrishnan
Victoria University of Wellington College of Education
C/- School of Education
Karori
Wellington

Dear Visha

## RE:  Ethics application AARP SEDS/2007/42

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application **'Teaching Moral Education in Secondary Schools using Real-life Dilemmas',** with the requested amendments, has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington College of Education Ethics Committee.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Judith Loveridge
Convenor
Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

**Appendix B**

EPU

*Telefon : 603-8888 3333*
*Telefax : 603-888*

*Ruj. Tuan:*
*Your Ref.:*

*Ruj. Kami:* UPE: 40/200/19/2115
*Our Ref.:*

*Tarikh:*
*Date:* 26 September 2007

Vishalache Balakrishnan
No. 5 Jalan PJS 10/5
46000 Petaling Jaya
**Selangor**

**APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA**

With reference to your application dated 27 July 2007, I am pleased to inform you that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been approved by the **Research Promotion and Co-Ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department.** The details of the approval are as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Researcher's name | : | **VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN** |
| Passport No. / I. C No: | | **670601-08-6456** |
| Nationality | : | **MALAYSIA** |
| Title of Research | : | **"TEACHING MORAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS USING REAL-LIFE DILEMMA"** |

Period of Research Approved: **THREE MONTHS**

2.      Please collect your Research Pass in person from the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Parcel B, Level 4 Block B5, Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62502 Putrajaya and bring along two (2) passport size photographs. You are also required to comply with the rules and regulations stipulated from time to time by the agencies with which you have dealings in the conduct of your research.

3.      I would like to draw your attention to the undertaking signed by you that you will submit without cost to the Economic Planning Unit the following documents:

a)      A brief summary of your research findings on completion of your research and before you leave Malaysia; and

*Visit*
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*2007*
Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood

b) Three (3) copies of your final dissertation/publication.

4. Lastly, please submit a copy of your preliminary and final report directly to the State Government where you carried out your research. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

(MUNIRAH ABD. MANAN)
For Director General,
Macro Economic Section,
Economic Planning Unit.
E-mail: munirah@epu.jpm.my
Tel: 88882809/2818/2958
Fax: 88883798

ATTENTION

This letter is only to inform you the status of your application and **cannot be used as a research pass**.

C.c:

Pengarah
Bahagian Perancangan Penyelidikan & Dasar Pendidikan
Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia
Aras 1-4, Blok E8
Kompleks Kerajaan Parcel E
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan
**62604 Putrajaya**
(u.p: Dr. Zahri bin Aziz)         (Ruj. Tuan: KP(BPPDP)603/011 (24)

Pengarah
Institut Pengurusan Penyelidikan dan Perundingan
Universiti Malaya,
C 313, Bangunan IPS,
**50603 Kuala Lumpur.**

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

# VICTORIA
## UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Participant and Parent/Care-taker Information Sheet for a project entitled '**Teaching Moral Education in Secondary Schools using Real-life Dilemmas'**.

Researcher: Vishalache Balakrishnan: School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

I am a PhD student in Education at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of my degree, I am carrying out this research project for the write up of my thesis. The project I am pursuing is examining the process of solving real-life moral dilemmas in a Moral Education class. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

Students in Form Four Moral Education classes are invited to participate in this study. It involves a one and a half days Moral Discourse Project during school hours. Students who participate will be discussing the moral conflicts they face in their daily lives and examining how they solve those problems with the help of peers involved in the project. To safe guard students' privacy, students will present the moral conflicts they would like to discuss by typing into the computer and use a pseudonym. At the end of each session, students would be required to complete a conflict-resolution journal and participate in reflective activities. Towards the end of the five-day period when the study ends, students will be interviewed to gain feedback on their experience of the project. Students' permission will be sought to be audio and video taped throughout the sessions.

It is very important for students to fill out their conflict-resolution journal after each session. The research will provide participating students to voice out their opinions to resolve the real-life dilemmas presented in type-written form.

At any time of the research, students involved in the study are free to withdraw from the project. They may do so without question at any time before the end of the Moral Discourse Project. Students will not be penalized for withdrawing from the project.

Responses collected from the project will be analyzed and written as part of my thesis. Confidentiality of all participating in the project will be safe guarded at all times. All material collected will be kept confidential. All identifying material will be removed from the written material before sharing with my supervisors. Only I and my supervisors, Dr Lise Claiborne and Dr. Sue Cornforth, have access to the journals and recordings. The results of the project will form part of my thesis and will be submitted for marking to the School of Education and deposited in the University Library. One or more articles might be submitted for publications and presentations at conferences. Conflict-resolution journals, video and audiotapes and documents will be destroyed three years after the end of the project.

If you have any queries or would like further clarification about the project, please contact me at +6012-2238134 (phone), visha@um.edu.my (email) or my supervisors, Dr. Sue Cornforth at (+644-463 5177) ( sue.cornforth@vuw.ac.nz) and Dr. Lise Claiborne at (+644-463 5164) (lise.claiborne@vuw.ac.nz)


Thank you.

Vishalache Balakrishnan                                    Signed

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

**VICTORIA**
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

**Consent Form**

Researcher: Vishalache Balakrishnan: School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Project: **Teaching Moral Education in Secondary Schools using Real-life Dilemmas.**

Please tick (/) the relevant box.

I have been provided with sufficient information regarding the nature and objectives of this research project.  ☐

I have understood the information and have been given the chance to obtain further clarification.  ☐

I am clear that I may withdraw from this study at any time before the end of the Moral Discourse Project.  ☐

I understand that if I withdraw from the project, I will not be penalized.  ☐

I understand that any information or opinion I provide will be kept confidential and reported in a non-attributable form.  ☐

I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research project and any other further use will require my written consent.  ☐

I understand that when this research is completed the information obtained will be destroyed.  ☐

I agree to take part in this research.  ☐

Name:

Signed:

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

# VICTORIA
## UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

We, the Participatory Action Research Group for the research titled "Teaching Moral Education in secondary schools using real-life dilemmas" which is being carried out by Ms. Vishalache Balakrishnan  in ***  have talked over and agreed upon the below as our regulations for the discussion process.

o	Participate honestly and openly in the discussions.
o	Give ourselves time to reflect upon the moral dilemmas we are analyzing.
o	Encourage our friends and ourselves to participate in the discussions.
o	Provide our friends with moral support during times of distress and tension.
o	Listen to others and get others to listen to us.
o	Revisit working agreement with the intention to add, delete or renegotiate current discussion regulations.

Name:
Signature:

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

**VICTORIA**
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

We, the action research for the research titled "Teaching Moral Education in secondary schools using real-life dilemmas" conducted by Ms Vishalache Balakrishnan at *** in *** have discussed and agree with the guidance below as principles for our entire research and discussion process.

o      Raise our hands or give cue when wanting to express an opinion.

o      Understand the moral conflict that would be discussed carefully. If we don't understand, then we shall ask Ms Visha to explain further.

o      Go back to class from time to time to find out if subject teachers are discussing important aspects for the coming examinations.

o      Always be punctual for sessions.

o      If the situation during discussion becomes stressed up, take a break and relax our mind first.

o      Voice out and interact with every member of the group.

o      Revisit and change this agreement if necessary.


Name:

Signature:

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

**VICTORIA**
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

We, the Participatory Action Research Group for the research titled "Teaching Moral Education in secondary schools using real-life dilemmas" which is being carried out by Ms. Vishalache Balakrishnan in *** have discussed and agree with the below as our principles for the whole process.

o        Be able to interact with everyone in the group

o        Feel free to voice anything that concerns the issue being discussed

o        Everyone needs to feel comfortable throughout the process

o        Participants would have the freedom to refrain from expressing opinions which are too personal/sensitive to themselves

o        Need to care about others feelings during discussions

o        Must always protect others secret and confidentiality

o        Take others opinion and suggestions with an open mind

o        Consider every ones opinion equally important as our own

o        Be co-operative when discussing and resolving dilemmas put forward

o        Take 5 if discussions get too heated up or sensitive and resume when every one is cool.

o        Revisit working agreement with the intention to add, delete or renegotiate current discussion principles.


Name:

Signature:

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

# VICTORIA
### UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

We, the Participatory Action Research Group for the research titled "Teaching Moral Education in secondary schools using real-life dilemmas" which is being carried out by Ms. Vishalache Balakrishnan in *** have talked over and agreed upon the below as our regulations for the discussion process.

o        Listen and be listened to during discussions.

o        Always help each other in solving the issues discussed.

o        Be serious during discussion session though can joke once in a while.

o        Trust friends and be trusted as we are discussing matters of confidentiality.

o        Be normal and treat the discussion as informal and friendly.

o        Be friendly to everyone in the group.

o        Be able to revisit working agreement with the intention to add, delete or renegotiate current discussion regulations.

Name:

Signature: