REAL-LIFE DILEMMA RESOLUTION AMONG MALAYSIAN ADOLESCENTS: A CASE STUDY

By

VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a participatory action research. The research is based on a process of resolving real-life moral dilemmas in the Moral Education classroom. It critically analyses the types of real-life moral dilemmas that a selected group of secondary students thought about. It also indicates the moral choices that they make based on their negotiation skills and cultural background. Participants in this study were twenty-two 16-17 year old adolescents from three different types of secondary schools in a Form Four Moral Education classroom in Malaysia. They were from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but within a non-Muslim community of students. Moral Education in Malaysia is designed to cater for this group while Muslim students study Islamic Studies. Findings show that students were concerned about moral issues and values that 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.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research, Real-life Moral Dilemmas, Adolescents, Multicultural.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia being a multicultural, multi religious nation caters for adolescents to grow and develop within an Islamic state structure. However, these adolescents have the freedom to embrace their own historical and natural religion and day to day culture. Since education in Malaysia is understood as a life-long process, national integration through formal and informal education aims to create a harmonious environment between the different ethnic groups living in Malaysia (Mukherjee, 1983). Moral Education (ME) was introduced in the Malaysian education system in 1982 as a formal subject for non-Muslim students to complement Islamic Studies which caters for Muslim students. In the ME subject, students are taught to understand and develop into moral citizens of the nation. All formations in regards to ME were based on the 1979 report of the Cabinet Committee on Education to review the implementation ME in schools. In this report, (Ministry of Education, Malaysia (1979), 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).

Since 1982, ME has been introduced and implemented in preschool, primary and secondary schools. For the past three decades, the syllabus has been revised several times. Yet the subject is always critised as not being effective and a mismatch between what students need and what the subject caters (Vishalache, 2004).

The study focused on the actual real-life dilemmas that a group of selected multicultural, multi religious adolescents are facing. With a very strong neo-Kohlbergian approach still dominating ME pedagogy in Malaysia (Vishalache, 2002) and also other parts of the world, one method of teaching ME in the classroom is to present moral dilemmas. Students will then discuss, debate, reflect, and finally reach a way to resolve the dilemma given. According to Lapsley (1996), there are two ways in which students make moral decisions. In the first way, students decide what is morally right by gauging the consequences

of each decision. In the second way, students decide what is morally right by applying some socially defined template of moral rules for behaviour. If going by Kohlbergian method of using hypothetical moral dilemmas which are construction of situations which might be true or created and contains conflicts or moral differences, students of ME resolve the conflict as an outsider (Vishalache, 2002). They use the third person perspective to use their cognitive reasoning and 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. However, in everyday life the notion of moral development also includes the affective and moral action. In a ME 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 respond to hypothetical dilemmas according to what the ME teacher guides them to report. In real-life, their decision might differ according to the current situation and parties involved in the dilemmas they were facing. In real life, moral decisions made are for real, followed by actions, not what should be done by a certain fictitious character.

Real-life moral dilemmas are conflicts faced by individuals in their everyday lives. Gilligan (1982) found 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 individuals 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. Wilson (1972) stated that one effective way of teaching ME is to put students in a real-life situation. He insisted that students need to feel what is being discussed and be part of the process. So the use of real-life dilemmas was used in this study. The method used in this study also closely linked with the rationale of using real-life moral dilemmas. Students had empowerment

over their own dilemmas through participatory action research.

Method

The study used participatory action research methodology where the students of ME were empowered to use their own real-life moral dilemmas to be used as materials in a ME class. This study applied the participatory action research (PAR) methodology utilising qualitative techniques such as real-life dilemma discussions, observation, and document analysis and journal entry. The PAR is undertaken collaboratively by co-participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998) where intervention, communication and development takes place in-depth. The collaborative social process (Habermas, 1994) which takes place during the real-life dilemma discussion is described by Habermas as an open communicative process realised by individuals who collaborate to change the practices through which they communicate in a shared social world, and where they live with the consequences of another's actions. Torre and Fine (2006) supported that PAR is a successful methodology for engaging the voice of youth in the classroom and service learning projects.

The research was conducted in three different secondary schools which included an all girls school, an all boys school and a co-educational school. They created their own pseudonyms (Orkid, Kekwah and Seri Pagi). The rational of choosing such a diverse setting is to analyse if students in such different setting encounter different moral dilemmas in their day to day living.

The study was 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 the researcher's 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 (Table 1).

Phase One involved bureaucracy and is the most

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

Table 1. A brief overview of the research design.

challenging and innovative phase as it involved the building of the foundation for the whole study. Other than approval for ethics application, Park (1993) talks about the need to create a community base before collective investigation can proceed.

Phase Two was to ensure the establishment of a safe environment for participants to work among themselves and with the researcher. Information sheet, consent letter and ice breaking sessions took place accordingly. The most important of all was the rapport building between participants and the researcher. Other than face-to-face sessions, communications was via email and phone. A working agreement (WA) was developed to ensure the empowered was equally divided between all participants and researcher.

The third phase involved students' problem formation. Students were provided time and space to think of a real-life dilemma which they were currently experiencing. To ensure dilemmas involved moral conflicts, researcher shared her own and made time for reflection and analysis of moral dilemmas. To enable the group to identify and understand individual perceptions of the real-life that the researcher was facing, problem-posing techniques and dialogue were introduced. Empowerment also prevailed when participants were given the option of presenting a dilemma which was not from their private lives, but which they had encountered through discussions with friends or the media. Participants' confidentiality is protected by ensuring that real names are not mentioned. Instead pseudonyms are encouraged.

The fourth phase comprises the real-life moral dilemmas discussion and resolution based on participants' perspective. Participants discuss the dilemmas and researcher asks investigative questions from time to time if necessary to probe the participants.

Examples of investigative questions:

The fifth phase is the reflective phase. After a few cycles of dilemma analysis and self-reflection as well as journal entries based on all the moral dilemmas presented, participants met for the final cycle to reflect upon what the PAR process meant to them and how it had influenced their perspective about real-life moral dilemmas. Towards the end of the research in each school, students viewed the selected video recordings 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 (Table 2).

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 the 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). The PAR students think that those around them do not understand their needs and this causes moral conflicts, particularly with those in authority.

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 2. Examples of investigative questions for the PAR cycles.

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 the observational notes, the researcher 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.

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.

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.

Respect

Although respect is included in the curriculum, 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.

Conflict of mutual respect

The 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 the 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.

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 the 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 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. 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)

The 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 the students brought up this conflict in relation to their beliefs; this differs from the way it is implemented in the ME syllabus.

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.

Respect versus authority

In another dilemma, a 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, Cahill & Elkin, 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)

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, 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, is still being practised in some families in Malaysia. The 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 checkup. 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 participant 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. The participant is 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.

Trust

In all three schools where the research was conducted, this theme kept recurring either in the focus group discussions or in students' dilemma analysis journals. 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.

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)

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.

Trust versus mistrust

In a conflict of trust versus mistrust, one 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, Cahill and Elkin (2007), learning to keep secrets is an important social skill, expecting an understanding of social expectations and a capacity for self-regulation. The 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. 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.

Freedom

The conflicts concerning freedom as presented by the 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. 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.

Freedom versus responsibility

In the first conflict below, the 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 the 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 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.

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.

Freedom versus parental expectations

The notion of freedom presents conflicts when parental pressure increases and, in this case the 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 the 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.

Tolerance

Tolerance is not a new value in the Malaysian scenario where people from different ethnic groups have lived together; respecting and tolerating each other's 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 the participants. The participants indicated a preference for the idea of mutual tolerance. 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 the 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.

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.

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.

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.

Moral choices of the 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. 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 for the PAR participants 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, the participants are familiar with what is expected out of them as individuals and adolescents in Malaysia (Figure 1).

However, because the purpose of this study is to allow the voices of adolescents to be heard, participants were provided full autonomy to voice their opinions and deal with their own conflicts in deliberative discussions with their peers. Participants' 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.

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)

The example for the above reasoning between J and O is seen in this excerpt. 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)

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)

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.
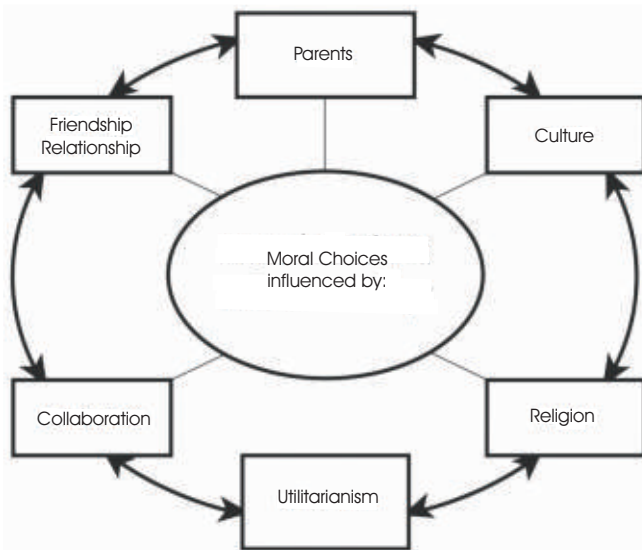
Figure 1. Factors influencing moral choices of PAR participants.

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 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 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 lookout 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)

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)

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 other's 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.

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)

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. 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).

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)

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). The participants 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.

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)

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.

Moral choices based on relationship/friendship

According to Handel, Cahill and Elkin (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)

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)

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 the 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)

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 and other communicative experiences.

In a multicultural environment, listening to adolescents' voices contributes to intercultural tolerance and understanding which today's world is yearning for. In Islamic states like Malaysia where multiculturalism is becoming popular, more studies can be conducted to analyse future trends and understanding between nations of different culture.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the moral dilemmas presented by the 22

participants, 19 dilemmas involved relational relationships with others whom they knew, 1 involved the environment and 2 were not included as moral dilemma. Based on the research findings, the moral conflicts presented by the 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 the research in the three different schools are autonomy, respect, trust, freedom and 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 (MOE, Moral Education Syllabus 2011). However, these values have been embedded within the content area which students study as "facts". The 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.

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

Theme/School	Kekwah	Orkid	Seri Pagi	Total
Autonomy	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 1	5
		Dilemma 7	Dilemma 5	
Respect	Dilemma 4	Dilemma 4	Dilemma 6	5
	Dilemma 6	Dilemma 6		
Trust	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 2	4
	Dilemma 7			
Freedom	Dilemma 5	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 3	3
Tolerance	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 5	Dilemma 4	3
Total	7	7	6	20

Table 3. Analysis of moral conflicts faced by the PAR participants.

Malaysian setting given the different constraints and factors that cause such conflicts. Table 3 shows the brief analysis of the different conflicts that the PAR participants faced:

References

[1]. Arnett, J. J. (2007). *Adolescence and emerging adulthood: a cultural approach*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

[2]. Basourakos, J. (1999). Moral voices and moral choices: Canadian drama and moral pedagogy. *Journal of Moral Education, 28*(4), 473-489.

[3]. Boostrom, R. (1998). The student as moral agent. *Journal of Moral Education, 27*(2), 179-190.

[4]. Downey, D. B., & Condrin, D. J. (2004). Playing well with others in kindergarten: The benefits of siblings at home. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*(May), 333-350.

[5]. Dworkin, G. (1988). *The theory and practice of autonomy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[6]. Fass, P. S. (2007). *Children of a new world: Society, culture and globalization*. New York: New York University Press.

[7]. Fine, G. A. (1981). Friends, impression management, and preadolescent behaviour. In S. R. Asher & J. M. Gottman (Eds.), *The development of children's friendship* (pp. 29-52). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[8]. Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[9]. Habermas, J. (1994). *The Past as Future. Interviews by M. Haller* (M. Pensky, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity.

[10]. Handel, G., Cahill, S. E., & Elkin, F. (2007). *Children and society: The sociology of children and childhood socialization*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company.

[11].Hibino, K., Yukawa, S., Kodama, M., & Yoshida, F. (2007). Anger expressive behaviours and their inhibitory factors in Japanese junior high school students: From the aspect to narcissism and norms. In T. C. Rhodes (Ed.), *Focus on adolescent behaviour research* (pp. 119-132). New York: Nova Science.

[12]. Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1998). *The action research planner* (3rd ed.). Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.

[13]. Kleinig, J. (1982). *Philosophical issues in education*. London: Croom Helm.

[14]. Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: Essays on moral development: Vol II.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

[15]. Lapsley, D. K. (1996). *Moral psychology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

[16]. Ministry of Education, Malaysia (1979). *Laporan Jawatan Kuasa Kabinet mengkaji pelaksanaan dasar pelajaran 1979* [Cabinet Committee Report on the implementation of the education policy 1979]. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

[17]. Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2000). *Moral Education Syllabus for Secondary School Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Curriculum Development Centre.

[18]. Mukherjee, H. (1983). Moral education in a plural society: Malaysia. *Journal of Moral Education, 12*(2), 125-130.

[19]. Nakkula, M. J., & Toshalis, E. (2006). *Understanding youth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[20]. Park, P. (1993). What is participatory research? A theoretical and methodological perspective. In P. Park, M. Brydon-Miller, B. Hall & T. Jackson (Eds.), *Voices of change: Participatory research in the United States and Canada.* (pp. 1-20). Westport: Bergin & Garvey.

[21]. Shapiro, L. E. (2008). *Learning to listen, learning to care*. Oakland, CA: Instant Help Book.

[22]. Smyth, J. C. (1996). Environmental values and education. In J. M. Halstead & M. J. Taylor (Eds.), *Values in education and education in values* (pp. 54-67). London: The Falmer Press.

[23]. Swanson, D. P., Spencer, M. B., & Petersen, A. (1998). Identity formation in adolescence. In K. Borman & B. Schneider (Eds.), *The adolescent years: Social influences and educational challenges* (pp. 18-41). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

[24]. Taylor, M. J. (1996). Voicing their values: Pupils' moral

and cultural experience. In J. M. Halstead & M. J. Taylors (Eds.), *Values in education and education in values* (pp. 121-142). London: The Falmer Press.

[25]. Tharp, R., Estrada, P., Dalton, S., & Yamauchi, L. A. (2000). *Teaching transformed: Achieving Excellence, Fairness, Inclusion and Harmony*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

[26]. Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

[27]. Torre, M. E., & Fine, M. (2006). Participatory action research (PAR) by youth. In L. Sherrod (Ed.), *Youth activism: An International Encyclopaedia* (pp. 456 – 462). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.

[28]. Vishalache, B. (2002). Real-life dilemmas in moral

education. Unpublished Masters Thesis. University of Malaya.

[29]. Vishalache, B. (2004). *Project Work in Teaching Moral Education: A Malaysian review*. Paper presented at the Association for Moral Education International Conference.

[30]. White, J. (1994). The dishwasher's child: Education and the end of egalitarianism. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 28*(2), 173-181.

[31]. Wilson, J. (1972). *Introduction to Moral Education*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[32]. Youniss, J., & Haynie, D. L. (1992). Friendship in adolescence. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 13*(1), 59-66.