Psychology for National Development: Interracial Interaction in Educational Context

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Abstract: Multitude of social scientist and psychologist expressed the advantage of interracial interaction. However, it's still received little attention in Malaysia. Indeed, positive racial climate is an important aspect in school advancement that would have significant implications for youth development. In this paper, the author has explained in detail concerning the essence of interracial interaction, explained the challenges in encouraging interracial interaction, and strategies to enhance. Overall, the author demonstrated the essence of promoting harmonious interracial interaction and embracing multiculturalism in schools in order to reach the pinnacle of a student's career.
Index Terms: Interracial Interaction, Multiculturalism, Malaysian Adolescent, National Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Unity in a pluralistic society is a massive evolutionary step since the Independence of Malaysia. One of our fundamental responsibilities as a human being is to alleviate the existence of prejudice and stereotype toward others. Prejudice can have a strong influence on how people behave and interact with others, particularly with those who are different from them. In a modern society, the feeling of prejudice becomes a primary force in human social interaction. Categorization based on race more prevalence and becomes a major driving force towards entire nation policy. Social categorization entirely transforms human interaction across the globe and triggered much devastating calamity. The more mankind decline to apprehend the benefits of diversity, the quicker the humanity will disappear from our community. When we say unity, it is not merely pertaining toward single entity but encompasses more than one, such as unity in multiracial, religion, and the way of expressing our patriotism to build our nation under the tenet of justice and equality. Malaysia is a nation that is comprised of different culture, race and religion. Although this harmonious reality ever crashed in a violent way on 1969, but succeeded remarkably by adapting the notion of pluralism. Productive ideas, innovation and achievement made by our people from diverse racial background proved the transcendent unity possessed by people of Malaysia in a global perspective.

II. INTERRACIAL INTERACTION

There are more than 30 million people in Malaysia and each person is uniquely different from every other. Diversity is a global phenomenon which became significant in Malaysia when increasing number of immigrants reached from India and China during the British colonialization. After decades, they were integrated and melded into a common union under the one national identity. Although there is various effort implemented to nourish the practice of unity in diverse population, racially segregated issues have been deepening in almost every educational setting. Racial and economic isolation in educational setting offers a great threat towards national unity. Indeed, cross-racial friendship is very rare practice among students and racial polarization deeply affected Malaysia adolescence (Ganaprakasam, 2017). In the context of race, this concern can be particularly acute as minority worry that they will be the target of racial bias and majority worry that they will be misunderstood or assumed to be racist. However, if one has the opportunity to communicate with others, they are able to understand and appreciate different points of views involving their way of life and it would gradually diminish the existence of prejudices.

Psychologist have revealed many ways to eradicate the feeling of prejudice through practicing interracial friendship. According to Allport (1954), interracial interaction can be very effective has long as these four elements were applied.

1. Every individual from each group must have equal status - equal status among both groups is effective in promoting positive intergroup.
2. Common goal - effective contact usually involves an active effort toward a goal the groups share.
3. Intergroup cooperation - attainment of common goals should be an interdependent effort based on cooperation rather than competition.

4. Must be backed and recognized by constitution - authority sanction establishes norms of acceptance and guidelines for how members of different groups should interact with each other.

According to Feddes, Noack, & Rutland (2009), friendship can be used as a standard unit to enhance inter-group relations in society with various sub-groups. Friendship between people of different ethnicities can be an indicator of the health of inter-ethnic relations in that particular society or country (Inta, Hashim, Zaharim, Siamak Khodarahimi, 2012). According to Siwei Cheng and Yu Xie's (2013), individuals prefer friends who are similar to themselves. Most of us encountered the self-evident experience of noticing students' tendency to form a clique mostly from their same racial background and incline to mingle up with others. This scenario was surprisingly visible when they go to secondary school. This phenomenon was described and supported by numerous studies and articulate precisely that interracial friendship decreases across age and grades. Scholars agreed that there is a gradual birth of racial segregated friendship among students (Tan Yao Sua & R.Santhiram, 2014) though number of strategies was initiative by government of the day. In line with this, study by Najeemah Mohd Yusof (2006) found secondary school students tend to mingle with the same racial background in every activity conducted by school or individually. Research also revealed that, each ethnic group more likely to seek help among similar ethnic and keep away from other ethnic groups (Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014).

This gloomy experience was termed as "Homophily" by the sociologist Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and James Cook (2001) in their time-honored paper on the subject "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks". As stated by McPherson (2001), homophily defines as people prone to find companion or friends who are similar like themselves. Rising phenomenon of homophily in school setting has superlative probability towards vanishing the element of appreciate diversity and developing students holistically (Aroff, 2015). According to Berten & Rossem, (2015), there are two driven factors namely selection and influence result into the behavior of homophily. Selection is obviously the leading component behind status homophily, as individuals incline to form friendship with other people who share striking status attributes such as gender and ethnicity (Berten & Rossem, 2015). However, influence refers to the process of socialization which involves choosing friends based on shared similar attitude (McPherson et al., 2001).

The most prominent factor affects this polarization is inequality. Inequality in every aspect of their life provides insight on how to label others as "out-group". The earlier exposure that reflects the notion of inequality in school context such as racial discrimination and bias makes them grip harder to their self-automated racial segregation attitude. Students tend to form a group of people who shared collective similar experience and shared ideology of life and almost from similar socioeconomic status. This experience may override the concept of unity mentioned in our education philosophy. The mindset of classism (like racism and sexism), believing that those individual from that group are *"hidup senang"* than ours, creating gap and reduce the possibility to mingle up with others.

The early emergence of the racial disparity proved to have larger consequence in their later career life and diminish the art of unity. Combating this terrifying ill-intense stereotype should have begun earlier by a positive racial socialization from their parents and undeniably, the role of teacher in rendering support and not devaluing students based on social and academic hierarchy. The role of education in developing unity and enhancing the notion of harmony between the rich pluralistic societies is the prime aspiration of Malaysian educational philosophy. The most powerful social context where an individual learns to comprehend the existence of another kind with total difference in color, race, religion, cultural and ideology is school. School supposed to be the prime arena for our younger generation to generate an absolute perception regarding the essence of sustaining unity in multiracial society. From this standpoint, we may well conclude that, school always inherit the profound capability to influence the concept of unity in younger generation. According to the Philip Zimbardo's (2007) most influential Stanford prison experiment, the power of a given situation can easily override individual difference in personality. This concept ultimately shed a harsh light on the nature of human tendency towards the influence of social context. For an instance, an individual through inherited upright personality may easily turn his back if he/she was stimulated continuously by an ineffective situation. They might absolutely turn in an opposite way than we have predicted. This is what exactly discovered by psychologist and termed it as "Lucifer Effect".

III.   FACILITATING CONSTRUCTIVE INTERRACIAL INTERACTION IN SCHOOL

School is the prominent context for nurturing the philosophy of unity in multicultural society. Enrollment of students from various racial backgrounds certainly hastened tremendously. As a part of it, any effort to deal with the person from other racial background presumes to very challenging task if one failed to acquire adequate understanding concerning racial sensitivity of another. Fundamentally, nurturing the notion of unity must always be the educator's paramount consideration. Educators are necessary to embrace and acknowledge the uniqueness in diversity. Every effort must be implemented in order to bring diversity from theory into their daily life.

From the perspective of Evolutionary Psychology, the notion of difference tends to provoke intimidation. At the earlier time, human used to identify and distinguish between in groups and out groups members based on their physical appearance. Encounter person from other group seems as threatening due to the poor appropriation of gathered resources. They inherited ultimate feeling of fear arises due to the unlimited resources and began to view out group as a threat of

invasion. According to the Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Levin & Hogg, 2010), rivalry for gained to the poor resources provokes conflict between groups. Correspondingly, the perception of threat seems to have larger influence towards their ultimate rejection response. The differentiation between in group and out group phenomenon laid foundation towards the existence of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism described as an individual superior perception concerning particular race and culture (Konitzer et al.,2018)

In Malaysia, the concept of race was historically structured and benefitted during the era of British colonization. In the course of the British era, a large migration was occurred from China and South India to Malaysia in order to strengthen labour force. Chinese from China was assigned to work in the mines and Indian from South India assigned to work in British funded tea industry and later the rubber estates. Consequently, the divide and rule policy were introduced in order to have direct and indirect control over the entire Nation development. Regardless of the profound development in various sector, it has invented successfully racial polarization. Waller Stein (1990) in his World System Theory articulated that the notion of race happened to be important criteria to divide labors into two categories namely, developed capitalist and underdeveloped peripheries. Scholars added that race was developed solely to smoothen the process of ruling and to enhance advantage economically and politically.

On the positive perspective, as a direct consequence of the larger migration finally emerge the reality of multiculturalism. Today, almost in every school student from multiple races are present together and plays very important role in developing the idea of togetherness by integrates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from various racial circumstances. As a part of it, government has initiated implausible action plans, such as the implementation of 'Rancangan Integrasi Murid Untuk Perpaduan' (RIMUP) programs. It involves various activities such as traditional activities, sport activities, and language related activities. The effort was taken to strengthen the concept of unity through school co-curriculum activities and encourage integration among students from different racial background.

Apart from the government policy, nurturing unity in multicultural classroom has definite advantage. Everyday practice in classroom should encourage student's interracial interaction as a part of necessary element.

IV.   THEORY INTO PRACTICE

There are several research-based strategies to create egalitarian society by encouraging interracial interaction in classroom:
1)   Encourage inclusive environment
According to Heidi and Melanie (2010), children learning in rich racial diversity context tend to hold constructive and healthy perception concerning individual from other races. These series of interaction help to reduce intergroup anxiety and lesser the possibility of being discriminated.
Scholars added that racially unbiased interaction would enhance the possibility of declining the feeling of prejudice among children. However, educator's role in establishing a sense of appreciating the difference among children is a vital importance in bringing the theory into reality.

2)   Exercise Collective Task
Study has found that children of diverse race involvement in any cooperative learning task would generate the feeling of togetherness and develop interracial interaction. In other word, children from in group more likely to gain cross race friendship with another student from out group if they are grouping together rather than self-select to complete assigned task. Therefore, children able to acknowledge and nurture the art of perspective taking and empathy. Perspective taking and empathy is a very critical ability to reduce the ill-feeling of stereotypes and encourage pro-social behavior towards others regardless of the differences. Besides that, according to Lease & Blake (2005) children who have positive interracial interaction tend to have better intergroup attitude and good leadership capability (Kawabata & Crick, 2008).

3)   Role model of Healthy Interracial Interaction
Provide a positive role model of interracial interaction leverage the possibility of maximizing intergroup interaction. There are few possible outcomes through this practicing such as boosting motivational mindset to engage in interracial interaction and lesser the feeling of unreasonable dislike. Children are very good at imitating others behavior. Social learning theory (1977) suggested that children tend to view parents and teachers as a prime source to imitate the feeling of prejudice towards out group members. Allport (1954) stated that children mimic and then begin to internalize and reflect it what they have encounter. Behavior experts explained that children begin to model the behavior of particular individual whose action seems to be rewarded. Thus, educator must practice to praise and rewards students who gained positive cross race friendship. The rewarding process should follow the pattern of consistency and focusing particularly on their specific behavior.

V.   PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF INTERRACIAL INTERACTION IN EDUCATION SETTINGS

The "us" versus "them" mindset is very common among people in a diverse community. Historically, this mindset has leads to unimaginable global destruction. What has been viewed as common happened to be a prime force towards rising of hatred and discrimination. This mindset, proven to very dangerous and regrettably very hard to eliminate this from human mind unless with proper planned scientific based strategies.

Shallow level of oral proficiency in mastering language among minority students have been one of the main factors contributing to the current level of disintegration in forming friendship. Language is a medium to play very crucial role in developing interaction and gain mastery of this language seemingly endless obstacle among student from minority ethnic background. At secondary school education setting this occurrence were verily evident. Despite of, introducing Ethnic Relation Modules as a compulsory course in Universities thus the phenomenon of poor interracial interaction difficult to eradicate.

In this article, ethnic minorities refer to Chinese and Indian community who has been settling down in Malaysia in the mid-nineteenth century. Both parties possessed very firm intention to preserve their ethno-cultural uniqueness by instill the notion of mother-tongue education. They have their own particular schooling system under different types of management. Mother tongue is their prime language and used as medium of instruction. Despite of challenges and obstacle from every part of the Nation, the Chinese community successfully progress forwards and well established Chinese Secondary school and many private colleges. However, for Indian situation were seems very awkward. They have met various pitfall and led to gradual decline numbers of Tamil primary school from 657 in 1970 to 523 in 2007. Due to the various pitfalls such as poor socioeconomic and lack of trained teachers, ethnic Indians have failed to improvise their education policy until to the secondary level.

Take a moment and think. Generally, how anxious someone feel when encounter very different situation? Previously for the past six years, they were adapted in mono-cultural environment and Tamil language has been prime medium for communication with other. This immediate transition from primary school to secondary is very challenging and not everyone possesed the capability to adapt instantly. Out-group members began to meet difficulty when interact with in-group members due to the poorer language proficiency. Intergroup anxiety arises when they anticipate or interact with a member of another group. Some people began to safeguard their dignity and avoid the feel of anxious by avoiding intentionally joining with people from other race and prefer to circulate with same group members. Consequently, they might view others as competitor and untrustworthy. These biases breed the feeling of prejudice and stereotype and over the years, it would build up strong hatred towards people from another race.

Apart from this, much of the psychological research has examined the role of media in various domains. In this modern age, media holds a large amount of responsibilities in exerting their effort towards developing notion of unity in multicultural nation. Even though, in intense intergroup ethnic conflict in Rwanda on 1994, radio has been play-sophisticated role in initiating the wonderful notion of integration between both members and enhances the possibility of intergroup interaction. Certain media in Malaysia make it a practice to create racial lines for the sole purpose of increasing their profit. The form of news coverage of statement made by politician sometimes widens the gap of interracial interaction. Failure of mass media in creating awareness and instill the very notion of unity in pluralistic society generates a stereotypes mental picture regarding others.

VI.   PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE: WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERGROUP INTERACTION

Nurturing the value of humbleness and openness to accept the greater diversity in humanity is necessary element of human existence. Diversity has facilitated various benefits such as foster human capital, developing adaptability and creativity. Sometimes the existence of diversity creates uneven form of distress for whom does not cognize the benefit of it. These types of people being directly hold negative perception about others and tend to be prejudice. In social psychology perspective, prejudice encompassed three main elements namely affective (feeling), cognition (belief) and behavior (avoidance). Prejudice person has greater tendency to display the feeling of uneasiness when encounter person from out-group and reflect it into their behavior. However, the effort to eradicate a destructive feeling difficult to come in reality by simply bringing members from various groups together without any proper intervention plan. Social Psychologist explained almost everything concerning intergroup interaction and proposed various intervention strategies to advance.

Firstly, parent's practice of ethnic socialization plays an important part in developing children to behave in non-prejudice way (Ganaprakasam, 2017). Ethnic socialization defines as parents' roles in delivering valuable information concerning their ethnic and promotes the art of living pluralistically. Role of parents to instill the art of living in pluralistic society is very critical. Parents are a prime source for children to receive valuable information concerning others. The notion of ethnic socialization develops a major area of research which has been contributed towards the improvement and well-

being of minorities youth (Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013). According to UmanaTaylor, Alfaro, Ba´maca & Guimond (2009), parent's practice of ethnic socialization encompassed a few elements namely ethnic pride, way to overcome racism, silence about ethnic issues, promotes pluralism and ethnic inequality. The main focused of this practice is to prepare someone (from minority group) to meet any obstacle and threats from out-group members. Research has shown that a person who receives adequate ethnic socialization practice by their parents able to overcome any racial related issues, improve communication with out-group members and achieved good grades academically (Grindal, & Nieri, 2015). This great works of literature sought to understand the profound effect of parents ethnic-racial socialization message for their children well-being and development. Ethnic socialization proven critical phase in developing positive ethnic identity, which contributed to the quality of appreciating diversity of multi-ethnic society in Malaysia. Therefore, the frequent practice of ethnic socialization has result in an optimistic outcome. Increased state of acceptance and resiliency in fighting back unpleasant feeling from any ethnic related issues, lower the chances to have binary vision and close the gap of "we" and "us". As mentioned previously, for some individual intergroup contact would lead to the feeling of uneasiness. Bringing them and required to mingle immediately with members from other groups does not always bringing fruitful outcome. The feeling of uneasiness arises from past emotional stored in the central part of Amygdala. Amygdala is a prime driving force for an individual to alert and execute the person fight or flight response when encounter with individual from out-group member. Amygdala is most crucial element in human brain, which regulates emotion. A person with intergroup anxiety, might automatically trigger amygdala activation because of perceive threat from out-group member. The response sometimes can be very intense. For some individual, they able to rationalize the differences and their socially matured brain response could have avoid the feeling of perceived threat. Their high order thinking mechanism guide them to detect conflicting elements and thus assist to solve in a creative and constructive way rather than nurturing pro prejudice and violence behavior. Considering brain is the most vital part in influence human intergroup interaction, psychologist has generated the most wonderful and important scientific brain-based intervention to eradicate the feeling of uneasiness or intergroup anxiety.

In 1954, Gordon Allport great work regarding crucial factor to be considered in order to improve intergroup contact largely plays critical role in developing solidarity Nation in a diverse world. He stated that interaction with out-group member would only be beneficial under the right condition. However, a recent study has revealed that simply imagining a specific social framework can have the identical consequence as truly undergoing that context. Various social psychological has well documented the greater benefit of this intervention in literature (Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2011; West, Holmes, & Hewstone, 2011). Mentally stimulating positive experience result in activation of positive feeling towards the existence of out-group members and lessen the feeling of uneasiness. Human brain has remarkable capability to think imaginatively. These imaginative approaches widely utilize by visual and performing arts. For an instance, Wayne Rooney, Jonny Wilkinson, and Andy Murray uses visualization before engaged in their particular sports to gain what they desired. Many athletes have utilized mental imagery technique in order to overcome competitive related stress and equipped them way to success. Psychologist explained that mental imagery technique triggers neural firing in brain and create mental picture that can ultimately facilitate future performance.

Similarly, imagined contact encourages individual to imagine positively the scenario of intergroup interaction. For an instance, a person instructed to take a couple of minutes to imagine themselves at any place with out-group members, instructed to begin a positive interaction and identified the differences and takes as a reference to guide future interaction. From this method, out-group members held more appropriate approaches towards in-group members and vice versa. This intervention safeguards humanity against falling towards the trap of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. Imagination can bring person to step beyond their current emotional capacity. Fear of rejection is critical element to eradicate through implementing this strategy. From this strategy, an individual able to boost their confidence to have productive exchanges.

In conclusion, the effort to enhance and encourage interracial interaction among students can transform the way of life in multicultural society. The disintegration of relation between in-group and out-group members will result in great calamity if continuous without intervention. This early emergence of the racial disparity proved to have larger consequences in their later career life and diminish the art of unity. Combating this terrifying ill-intense stereotype should have begun earlier by a positive racial socialization from their parents and undeniably the role of teacher in rendering support and not devaluing students based on social and academic hierarchy.

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