

SMU's character development programme laudable

I APPLAUD the Singapore Management University's initiative in introducing a values-based programme to advance character development among its students ("Values 'should be taught, not left to be caught'; Nov 1).

It shows that the university places emphasis on the learning journey as much as the end result itself and is dedicated to moulding desirable traits in their students beyond just academics.

Singapore has a rigorous curriculum in place that teaches primary and secondary students good values through the Character and Citizenship Education programme – which is implemented nationwide.

However, beyond these levels, students have less opportunities to think about these values or put them into action as there is comparably less emphasis beyond the pre-tertiary levels.

This creates a gap in learning that may hamper their ability and desire to carry these values with them into adulthood.

SMU's innovative proposal is

an interesting and ground-breaking way of engaging students to reflect upon their actions and purposes, and to re-examine the assumptions and beliefs they adhere to.

Prior to such an initiative, universities traditionally have conveyed their institutional values through stated honour codes. But students are generally left to their own devices to determine the activities they participate in and hence, many seldom get the opportunity or platform to reflect on and discuss the importance of having good social values.

As students entering tertiary institutions are usually on the cusp of full-fledged adulthood – where their life values and directions are more concretely established – cultivating good values at this juncture is very important.

Reflective learning with the help of facilitators will allow them to explore issues related to their personal experience more thoroughly, and hence enhance

the learning outcomes of their extra-curricular activities.

A habit of introspection will also enable more students to reflect on their relationships with others and, to a broader extent, develop greater social consciousness. Amid the busy and stressful lifestyles many of us lead, it allows us to think beyond ourselves for a moment and consider how we can play our part in building meaningful social bonds with those around us.

The recent subjective well-being study by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre reaffirms that those who give back to society are generally happier and more satisfied with their lives than those who don't.

SMU's dedication towards realising the pro-social potential of their students is laudable. Perhaps other higher institutions would consider adopting the idea in their organisational practices.

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