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Perceptions of Ethnic Otherness: A Study of Malaysian Children

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Introduction

After 50 years of independence recently there has been much discussion on national unity and integration in multilingual, multiracial and multiethnic Malaysia. Despite this relatively long period of independence the young are still segregated by ethnicity and religion. With a view to the education system, helping to instil national values and a sense of oneness, a compulsory course called Ethnic Relations was introduced in all public universities in 2007. Moreover, the government has also developed a number of programmes to encourage the different ethnic groups in Malaysia to socialise and mix with each other. For example the government allocated RM25.8 million for the implementation of the Students’ Integration Plan for Unity (RIMUP). The programme aims to create an environment where primary and secondary students can mix freely and learn about each others’ cultures and customs.

All these efforts suggest the importance of racial harmony and understanding in nation building especially in a multiethnic and multicultural country like Malaysia. Malaysians – be they