



Use Mexico as a model

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Comment

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PERHAPS it is only natural that some parties raised concerns about making History a must-pass subject. We may learn patriotism through the subject but, like loyalty, patriotism cannot be measured in any meaningful way through written examinations.

There are no Key Performance Indices (KPI) for "intangibles". We need to consider another acronym: KIP -- Key Intangible Performance, which does not anchor in numbers and percentages, but rather values, ethics and quality of being.

Still, given Malaysia's education landscape, examinations can do wonders to change behaviours.

Without the spectre of tests, there is no guarantee that the allotted period is not swapped for another examination subject. After all, our successes are measured almost entirely by examination results and performances. So is our reward system.

In other words, with no exams, History will quickly remain history. But others have argued that even with exams, the behaviour change will be transient.

Once the test is over, all will go back to normal! The cases of Civics and Moral Studies have been used as examples.

How should History be taught? Some eminent scholars and historians say that History should be dealt with "holistically".

Here, I would like to share the experience of my son who decided to study Spanish in Mexico upon graduating from a university in the United Kingdom.

He is still in Mexico, immersed in the culture, history and heritage of the Republic.

He is very much a Malaysian but enjoys "being a Mexican".

He was in Malaysia in September for Hari Raya Aidil Fitri but rushed back to celebrate the 200th year of Mexican Independence.

His introduction to Mexico is illuminating and instructive indeed.

He learns Spanish not only in the context of conventional grammar classes but also Mexican history, culture and heritage dating back to the early years of Mesoamerican civilisation.

The lessons embody elements of inherent patriotism through deep understanding of the interactions of history, culture and heritage infused over time.

The context and nuances strengthen the foundation and significance of history upon which the rest are built, gradually supported by the language.

He visited museums with well-preserved artefacts all over Mexico. He went to many heritage sites of the days of the Aztecs and various cultural centres where visitors observe and even take part in some of the traditional rituals and dances.

There are exams, of course, including that of the Mexican dances, but it is not about regurgitation for the sake of achieving an "A" or remaining oblivious to the subtleties of what Mexico is all about.

In his first two months in Mexico, he went to Taxco to sample the lifestyle and integrate with the locals.

This indirectly forced him to immerse himself in the culture and language of the local community. Only after such an experience did he return to the Autonomous National University of Mexico.

Almost every city in the Republic exudes cultural awareness. Metro stations are designated as focal exhibition centres to acquaint the public of aspects of history-cultural consciousness.

Every metro station represents a timeline of history, from the birth of the 1917 Constitution to notable presidents including Aztec emperors.

Streets after streets take the name of national heroes such as Benito Juarez or Miguel Hidalgo.

Artists, poets, muralists and authors are also given the same respect and recognition for enriching Mexican culture.

They can be likened to free and endless outdoor museums for all to learn and reflect so that Mexican history remains alive all the time.

Mexicans stand proud buttressed by a deep appreciation of their historical past rooted in one common single language which is spoken and cherished by all.

While they proudly acknowledge their indigenouness, they remain a community of mestizos.

This is where Malaysia deviates from the Mexican daily experience of multicultural mestizos reaching a matured level of unity without having to worry about being unpatriotic.

Malaysia is still thematically centred on food and festivities. We withdraw into the comforts of our ethnic cocoons, shutting out the historical-cultural-heritage significance surrounding us.

Come Christmas and the New Year, we superficially sample Malaysian multiculturalism yet again.

So perhaps in seeking out a holistic approach to History, Mexico could be a country to learn from!

It has perfected the art of achieving 1Mexico by harnessing the KIP-intangible dimensions of language, history, culture and heritage holistically.

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