

Passion trumps instruction

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Comment

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THE news to boost creativity and innovation in schools cannot come at a better time; after all this is the Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Indeed, learning is all about creating and innovating, rather than memorising and regurgitating as we are accustomed to.

Admittedly, however, the latter is easier, which is the reason it has been the mainstay for a long time.

For the most part, learning is deemed to have little to do with thinking, at least not to the extent required to be creative and innovative.

It has little to do with anything "new" as such and therefore remains predictable (and dull) and the preference for most people.

The teachers who lead in such a process are less challenged and left in their comfort zones without having to worry about rocking the boat.

For every question there is only one "right" answer and this suits the mode of rote learning well.

Scoring the maximum number of As is also often based on routine examinations that test memory more than understanding.

Spotting examination questions is made simpler and more accurate.

But this will be history soon.

There will be a transformation in the school curriculum (hopefully this includes the school milieu as well) and it will be based on creativity and innovation.



It promises to make learning fun and not examination-oriented.

It is aimed at promoting critical thinking and creating balanced human capital, especially at the primary levels.

Indeed, this is most apt because studies have shown it is at this early stage that you produce numerous "new" ideas compared to later in life.

For example, if you were to ask how many things you can make out of a paper clip, those age five years and below can come up with more than 90 ideas, compared with fewer than 10 for those who are much older!

In other words, people are innately creative.

What kills this creativity, ironically, is the school system (such as in Malaysia), stress on regimentation, and a one-size fits all environment and methodology.

Learning is often unidirectional, and deviations from the norms, such as making mistakes, are not tolerated.

In fact, in some cases these are considered punishable "crimes" and not to be repeated.

In reality, learning is about making mistakes, and you learn from them.

As it is often said: failure is the road to success!

Currently, learning is not about discovery but spoon-feeding supplemented with tuition and tons of homework.

Little time is left, if any, for self-learning and reflection that would promote new ideas and creativity! Learning is limited to finding the single correct answer, instead of asking many right questions.

And that is why when it comes to question time or discussions, the Malaysian crowd is among the most passive!

It is no wonder that by the time you finish school, your "creativity quotient" is severely diminished although you may or may not have a better intelligence quotient (IQ).

Even then the IQ that is developed is so skewed towards the linguistic and mathematical horizon, void of many more important "intelligences" (some of which are not "teachable") that make a whole human being and not just a human worker.

The term "human capital" is a cliché that has been repeated without realising its dire limitations.

As a result, we produce mostly left-brained thinkers instead of whole-brained innovative thinkers.

The former are more noted for similar incremental improvement, whereas the latter out-of-the-box changes.

Before we dare to dream about transforming the school system, we have to start by changing ourselves first, policy makers included.

Are we ready for this? The aid of technology is certainly welcome but they are nothing but enablers.

The axiom "garbage in, garbage out" is still relevant.

We went through the fiasco of the "one teacher, one laptop" scheme not too long ago which proves Information and Communications Technology is not the solution if individuals are not transformed first.

And to do that the formula is rather simple -- teach less so that you can learn more!

Aside from the curriculum, the rigid and over-regulated environment must be changed simultaneously to facilitate experimentation and active participation.

In short, making mistakes should be allowed.

It is difficult to imagine how the "new" curriculum would be effective if everything else -- which is non-conducive to creativity -- remain the same.

For example, if you have an overcrowded classroom, the emphasis would be on control so things do not get out of hand. Immediately fun flies out of the window and we are back to square one.

When all is said and done, learning must be driven by passion, rather than instruction!

* The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia. He can be contacted at vc@usm.my

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