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Schools to teach Future Studies

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HOW often has a parent or teacher heard a young student complaining about studying a certain subject which he thinks is not relevant to his present or future life?

Often enough? Well, the question or complaint may not surface as much in the future with the introduction of Futures Studies in the school curriculum.

Combining creative thinking with thinking skills, Futures Studies will teach students to articulate their thinking and opinions on things that would benefit them and the nation.

Equally important, they will feel empowered and attain a sense of responsibility and control over their future lives and how they want it to be.

"The analogy is this - if you want to go for holiday, you decide where you want to go, when to reach your destination and how to get there. Then you plan your strategy accordingly," said Dr Azizan Baharuddin, a visiting fellow at the Institute for Policy Research.

The institute is working with the Curriculum Development Centre of the Education Ministry on a programme to introduce Futures Studies to students at all levels.

A pilot project has been completed, and in the first stage of its introduction Futures Studies will be taught in schools in five States - Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Perak and Malacca.

"About 200 teachers have been trained and the CDC has prepared a guidebook on how they can teach Futures Studies to students."

Azizan said Futures Studies is a tool for thinking which can be applied to any subject.

"Students will be taught to look at the reality of life and envisage their possible future, probable future, and desired future. The idea is to help them decide how they can make the world a better place for themselves."

Futures Studies can be integrated into the existing subjects and taught to students at all levels.

"For example, in English language, students may be asked to describe Kuala Lumpur 50 years ago and 50 years in the future. The aim would be to enable them to analyse the past as a tool to envision a probable and preferred future for Kuala Lumpur, and to inculcate a sense of responsibility and concern for future generations."

In Consumerism, students are taught to study the various types of advertisements, analyse how they influence and manipulate consumers' lives, and learn to create advertisements which do not manipulate consumers but still fulfil the social obligation of imparting information.

In Geography, Futures Studies can be used to show the difference between geographical conditions in the past and compare them with those of the present as a guide towards building a nation with balanced physical and spiritual development.

In Tamil Studies, Futures Studies can be used to show how Tamil can be used to overcome weaknesses encountered during the 20th century and contribute towards a better society.

"This is one subject where students are allowed to be critical," said Azizan. "They learn to analyse problems and suggest ways to overcome them. For instance, Standard Five students in a Negeri Sembilan school wrote a

letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad about the open
burning of rubbish."

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