

21/05/2000

Of a teacher who did it successfully his way

Ahmad A. Talib

AS a teacher, Mr Wee taught his primary school pupils arithmetic. He was one of the better teachers, strict but fair, friendly and yet firm. He was given a difficult class to handle, partly because of his image as a disciplinarian and partly because the other teachers were reluctant to manage a class of naughty and rowdy pupils.

But after two weeks into the first term, the pupils were less naughty and rowdy. In fact, it was quite apparent that they were eager to learn and spent more time reading their books. Some even signed up as library assistants where they had to stack books and tidy up the small reading area.

Later, the real reason for the pupils' transformation was revealed. Mr Wee's reputation as a black belt judo exponent became known to his class and this alone discouraged the pupils from any tendency to be naughty. Mr Wee also imposed a one-sen fine per red ink - that is one sen for every mistake in arithmetic.

The teacher maintained a proper record of the fines he collected. This was certainly an unconventional way of punishing his pupils, but the whole school and his pupils came to accept it after a few weeks. One sen wasn't going to make anyone rich but Mr Wee's reasons for introducing the fine made others consider introducing it too.

Each time Mr Wee looked after a Standard Six class, he would impose the one-sen fine per red ink and the money would be put in a big container. At the end of the year, his class would use the money to pay for a big farewell party. The school headmaster would be the guest of honour and a prize presentation was also held.

The party was often lively. At the end, the pupils would cry as they went their separate ways for the long year-end holidays. A few would move on to other schools and they probably would not see each other again. Mr Wee too would cherish such moments as he proudly displayed a chart which showed how the red ink became less and less over the months.

A few parents who, earlier in the year, had complained about the fines were among the most pleased since their children had shown a marked improvement in arithmetic. Pupils from other classes would often laugh at their friends who were unfortunate enough to be placed under Mr Wee's care, but inevitably ended the year on a note of envy.

His pupils would go into secondary schools with a stronger foundation to take on tougher subjects. He has also instilled a sense of discipline among them, while giving them a dose of much-needed confidence along the way. Mr Wee would often tell his pupils: "You do well, you get good marks. You fail, I give you a black mark."

Obviously, Mr Wee is no ordinary teacher; his success should be emulated by others in the profession. The Penang-born wasn't afraid to defend his teaching methods but he was also fortunate to have the support of his headmaster.

In the last few days, many schools celebrated Teachers' Day by having various activities in their schools. At the national level, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave away the Tokoh Guru awards as the nation acknowledged the contribution by these individuals.

Teachers and pupils should look up a sajak penned by Usman Awang in 1979. Dedicated to teachers and titled Guru O Guru, national laureate Usman wrote:

Dialah ibu dialah bapa juga sahabat  
Alur kesetiaan mengalirkan nasihat  
Pemimpin yang ditauliahkan segala umat  
Seribu tahun katanya menjadi hikmat  
Jika hari ini seorang Perdana Menteri berkuasa  
Jika hari ini seorang Raja menaiki takhta  
Jika hari ini seorang Presiden sebuah negara  
Jika hari ini seorang ulama yang mulia  
Jika hari ini seorang peguam menang bicara  
Jika hari ini seorang penulis terkemuka  
Jika hari ini siapa saja menjadi dewasa  
Sejarahnya dimulakan oleh seorang guru biasa  
Dengan lembut sabarnya mengajar tulis-baca.  
(END)