

Whither the curiosity for a better Malaysia
Malaysian Insider
Sept 9 , 2013
BY RAHMAN HUSSIN

"The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of the mind for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards." Anatole France.

I grew up listening to many stories of how wonderful an experience of going to school in the early years following the declaration of Independence in the year 1957. Irrespective of your differences, everyone sort of bond together during their school years.

Picnics at the park during the weekend with your schoolmates, regardless of religious and racial creed, was the norm back then. In fact, in the words of my now deceased grandmother, "It would mean the end of the world for me if I didn't go to the park with my friends." Such was the bond they had back then.

But, I aim to not discuss the strong social bonds that exist back then but instead I want to talk about the learning experience of the yesteryears. More precisely, the freedom of thoughts and the soul of the education experience that they went through.

As I grew up, I have this habit of talking to people and asking them what it was like learning and being educated in the early 1950's, 60's and 70's. I liken this exercise as my time-travel machine, getting insights and stories from various people, since I was born in an era where some believe was the beginning of the decline of Malaysia's intellectual progress.

In summarising all these experiences, I arrived at the conclusion (at this point I hear someone disagreeing with me on scientific grounds of my methods) that they were all learning and being educated in an environment that not only encourages questioning but also indulges curiosity and freedom of thoughts.

Not only was I convinced that the conclusions I made were one of the primary drivers of excellence, I believe wholeheartedly that the aforementioned environment sets these individuals up for greater success in the coming years of their lives.

A businessman I met in my secondary years in school said this to me, "Back then, we pride ourselves in asking tough questions in class and the teachers will reward us accordingly, even when we ask the most menial of questions, such as why do we have to learn in school, why can't we just play all day?"

Until today, I remain regaled by stories from the glory days of yesteryears. I went through a different learning experience altogether compared with the uncles and aunties that I hear stories from. I, like most of my peers today, went through the daily Sekolah Kebangsaan and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan in our bid to realise our dreams.

I started my schooling years believing in the fact that this was the place where all my questions will be answered, a place where I could begin the long and arduous journey of realising my dreams and achieving my full potential, after all at the back of my first exercise book; there it was the National Education Philosophy that reads:

"Pendidikan di Malaysia adalah satu usaha berterusan ke arah lebih memperkembangkan potensi individu secara menyeluruh dan bersepadu untuk melahirkan insan yang seimbang

dan harmonis dari segi intelek, rohani, emosi dan jasmani berdasarkan kepatuhan dan kepercayaan kepada Tuhan. Usaha ini adalah bertujuan untuk melahirkan warganegara Malaysia yang berilmu pengetahuan, berketrampilan, berakhlak mulia, bertanggungjawab dan berkeupayaan mencapai kesejahteraan diri serta memberikan sumbangan terhadap keharmonian dan kemakmuran keluarga, masyarakat dan Negara.”

Surely, an important piece to realise, if not the fundamental guidelines of this philosophy is to promote and nurture the sense of curiosity. In addition, an environment that supports curiosity and allow for questions to be asked goes a long way in creating critical-thinking among students, who undoubtedly will be an important asset to this country.

Boy, was I in for a rude awakening. At the age of 10, I was made to sit outside the classroom as a result of me asking the teacher how does scolding students in public help achieve the National Education Philosophy. Curiosity wasn't a welcome guest when I went through school, and today it is still not welcomed in classroom.

Why are we doing this to ourselves and, more importantly, to the future generation of my beloved nation?

Fifty years on since the inception of Malaysia, curiosity has gone from a celebrated trait to a trait no one cares about. Let us change this Malaysia. We can start by encouraging and allowing our kids to ask questions and not punish them for doing so.

For a better Malaysia. - September 9, 2013.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/whither-the-curiosity-for-a-better-malaysia>