

Why the focus on straight-A students?

BASED on the Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) results last year, less than one per cent of the students who sat the examination obtained straight As.

Parents were unhappy, but that could be the reality of the performance of students. It is also reflected in international assessments, like the Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), where the nation has consistently been in the bottom three of the graph.

However, my concern is not so much the grades but, rather, the other 99 per cent of students who were not the top achievers and the issues that teachers faced when trying to get them to comply with the PT3 assessment.

My focus is on how teachers deal with evaluation and assessment. Are teachers given knowledge and skills to know the importance of the process and product in the education system?

The reality in Malaysia is that we have been fighting this battle our whole academic career. We are so concerned about the product (results and grades) that we ignore or sideline the process (pedagogy of teaching and learning, understanding students of different achievement abilities, evaluation process and the process of students becoming holistic).

Nobody is to be blamed because we are still influenced by the British way of education and as-

essment. But do we realise that even the British education system is being criticised by its own people?

In Malaysia, the PT3 assessment is a sure way to go for a less examination-based and more holistic assessment.

When school-based assessment was first introduced, many teachers were worried as the training and technicalities involved were too much for them to digest in such a short period.

Some demonstrated, some took optional retirement, many poured out their feelings on blogs and social media, but the system has to go on.

We need to keep up with our philosophy of education, which is to develop students into holistic individuals, and not just cognitively intelligent community who are unable to face emotional and day-to-day challenges.

However, the issue of helping teachers cope with teaching and assessing based on formative and summative assessment still needs improvement. Teachers use trial and error to get students to learn, complete their homework, projects and formative assessments.

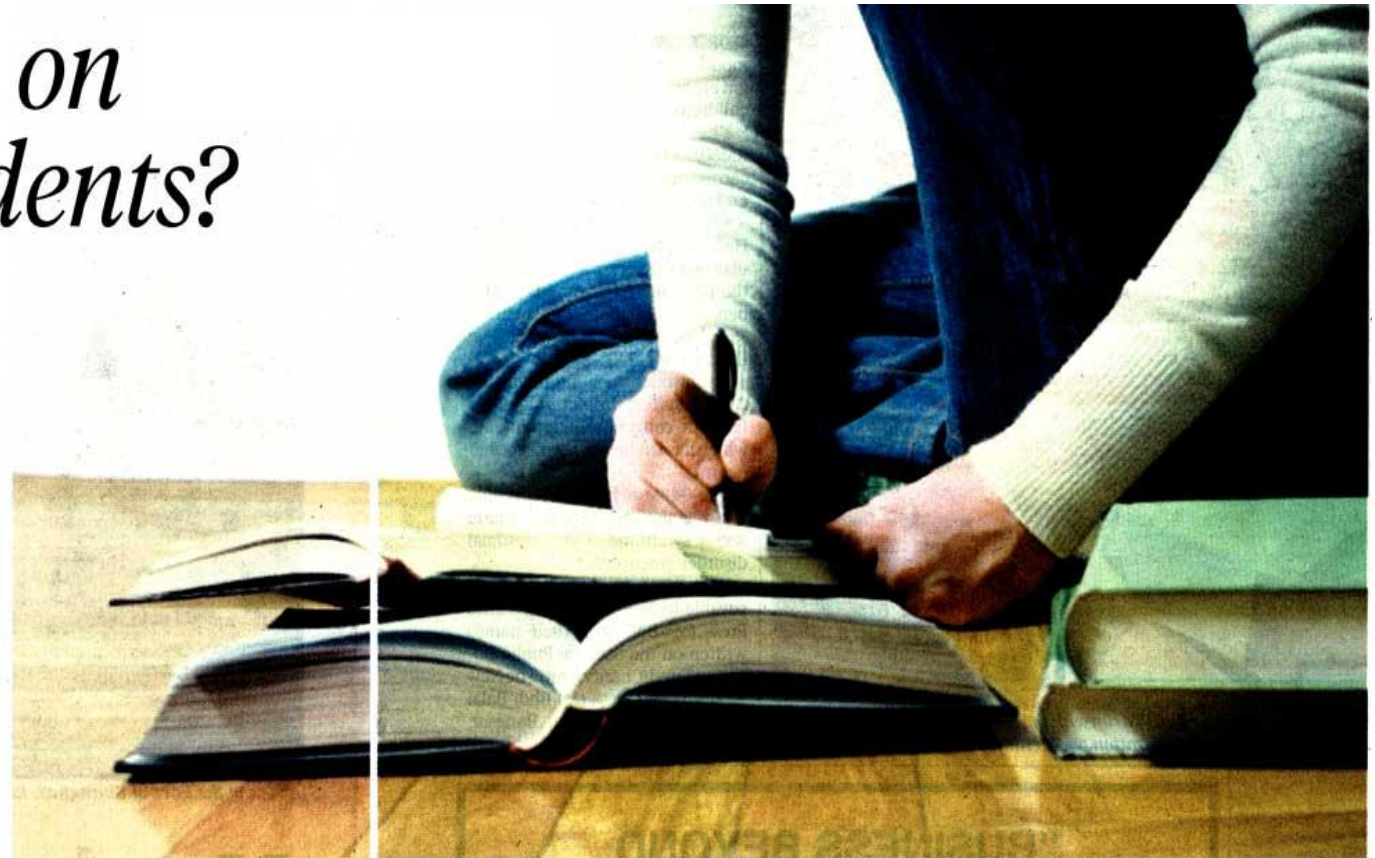
They become burnt out, use emotional threats and other methods, while others are caring and compassionate. Some reach out in unethical ways, like getting students to copy other students' work to reach a certain grade. All this is rampant when process is sidelined in education.

Most developed nations, like New

Zealand and Australia, are more concerned about process rather than product. I find both equally important but once students are clear what the process is all about and how to go about it, the product is achieved in a better quality state.

For example, primary schools in Japan have a nurse and dietician in their school system.

These two authorities are part of the teaching team and join teachers to teach students about having good eating, sleeping and other physical habits to ensure that they



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can develop into young, healthy individuals. Such a process from young has been followed for years and we can see for ourselves that obesity and sickness are never serious issues in Japan.

Thus, for our teachers and the Education Ministry, the need to focus on process is as essential as the product.

Of course, there will be the normal woes of having to finish the syllabus on time, completing record books, getting projects done, evaluating projects and written work, and getting marks online.

But if the focus is on product only, the aim to develop holistic individuals out of our education system will be only a myth.

PT3 shows us that all these years, we have been focusing on cognitive abilities. We need to balance with other emotional and physical quotient.

We are on the right track, as what most developed nations are moving towards to, but the support of teachers, parents, community and media is needed. Why always focus on the best students?

What about students who have

shown great potential even though they are the marginalised or poor? What about appreciating teachers who help marginalised students improve in their school and, later, in life? This is something that Malaysians have to think about if we want to become a developed nation. It's time to focus on process and product rather than just the product.

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