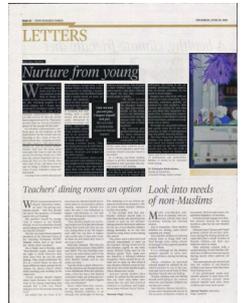


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## MUTUAL RESPECT

# Nurture from young

**W**HEN I ventured into educating students and later future teachers in the field of Moral Education, it was a big turning point in my life. Teaching English is so much simpler but I found more meaning in teaching a subject that helps transform lives. One of the essential characteristics of educators like us is to be the role model that is expected out of us. That is not an easy chore, as "you are not able to please all the people all the time".

As a student representative, I politely gave up my position as the head prefect as the school was not listening to the voices of the students when they complained about the dirty canteen. Only after such a drastic act did the school administrator look into the issue more seriously. But I had to take the risk and do the daring, drastic act. I felt that the school respected me as a head girl but not my friends, who were part of me, and there was no use in being a student representative if your collective voices are not heard.

Coming from a multicultural and multireligious background, I find mutual respect is the most essential element in building a harmonious society. Our forefathers have built a nation based on trust, integrity and harmony, based on their unique historical and cultural diversity. After years of building and scaffolding such a solid nation, why are we so easily distracted by actions of certain bad

apples, especially in the education system of the country? Everyone is so sceptical about the other, yet we all work towards developing a holistic nation. Thus, the values put across by individuals called "educators" are always considered, observed and judged by the whole nation.

In a recent incident, where a certain educator told students to have their drinks in the toilet followed by a joke of ensuring that they don't drink their own urine, the matter was not seen as anything serious but rather as a misunderstanding by the students and parents, who listened to their children and lodged the police reports. I still find it difficult to digest the fact that students should drink in toilets.

My more serious question here is, does the educator respect the right and responsibility of the other; that is, the vulnerable students who can only express their rage to their parents or other teachers?

My curiosity gets greater thinking about the other educators within that school community and what their reaction was when such statements came from a person of authority. Do all educators agree that students should consume water in the toilet?

In a strong top-down system, respect is greatly mentioned in all documents and speeches but mutual respect is still lacking.

Accepting an individual for what he or she is and what he or she presents to be is to respect that individual. But being in the education profession, the expectation of society anywhere in the world is much higher.

Respect may exist from mild acceptance to total admiration. And, naturally, educators globally are admired by their students, their parents and society for who they are and what they transform students to be. Consequently, respecting someone comes down to a judgment one makes, and like any judgment, it is a choice.

We weigh the observed evidence and screen every bit of our own prejudice in light of consequences that will follow from the choice.

The final thing that determines whether you respect the other is how much you respect yourself. I am me and you are you. I respect myself and you. We can build a relationship based on mutual respect, and this is beyond the power of individuals and authorities. Rather, it needs to be nurtured from young.

**Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan,**  
Faculty of Education,  
Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

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