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BETTER EDUCATORS

Let teachers continue higher studies

LIFELONG learning is one of the underlying philosophies in our education system. It focuses on a holistic perspective on the role of education, either formal or informal, in an individual's life cycle.

It confirms that learning, seen as a continuous process in life, plays an essential role in enabling individuals to adapt to and to deal with new opportunities and challenges in their lives and the environment they live in.

In 2011, the then-Higher Education Ministry launched a blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia 2011-2020. The blueprint acknowledges lifelong learning as the third pillar of human capital development, after the school and tertiary education system.

One of the crucial questions here is how many individuals buy into the idea of lifelong learning? Do educators in schools ensure that they venture into formal and informal lifelong learning as their vocation, other than disseminating knowledge and educating the students in their classrooms? How much support do educators obtain when they decide to continue their studies and obtain more knowledge?

I have come across dozens of educators who yearn to continue their formal tertiary education, but face obstacles and challenges, such as not approved by the school

headmaster, family commitment, challenging physical wellness and weak inquisitive mind to conduct research, among others.

In the last one and a half decade, several of my postgraduate students struggled to complete their master's or doctoral studies due to the challenges they receive from their headmasters. In any system, if the headmaster does not support the educators to go for higher education or support their study leave, then, the chances of that educator going on to the next step of lifelong learning is slim.

Many a time, I have had to counsel my postgraduate students who cried and grieved because their headmaster would not release them as they are good and productive. So the prize for a hard-working teacher is more work and less opportunity to improve himself or herself.

This situation has got to change if we want our education system to transform to a more positive climate.

Students who see their teachers passionate about learning and gaining knowledge become excited themselves, and the ripple effect is something we all look forward to.

What many administrators of schools do not understand is that when their teachers continue their studies at the tertiary level and come back to serve the schools, they are going to be more equipped: Knowledge, skills and

value wise. They will be more innovative in their teaching pedagogies, use technology more extensively and face job challenges more positively.

The best learning happens on the job, which means a teacher who undergoes higher tertiary education would be able to reflect and evaluate what educational approaches work and what needs to be adapted in their own classroom. They become creative in their daily teachings, and the students as well as the school, benefit from all the fruits that the teachers bring back.

The mindset towards learning must transform in order to create a learning society. It has to start in schools and headmasters play an important role in ensuring that teachers are provided with every opportunity to improve themselves, so that they can serve the schools and the students better.

We need educators to be a learning society where all participate in and contribute to learning throughout life, to become constructive social agents — individuals who are able to think critically, rationalise, act, reflect and respond appropriately to the multicultural, social and educational challenges they face as individuals and as a collective group.

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