

# Unity without diversity ends in repression

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THE establishment of education under the Federation of Malaya in 1956 allowed for ethnic diversity. A national system of education acceptable to the people of the federation as a whole which would satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention of making Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the languages and cultures of other communities living in the country. (Malaya. Report of the Education Committee, Federation of Malaya, 1956, p.1) The four strands of different primary education: Tamil, Chinese, Malay and English schools in the early development of education in Malaysia is a typical example of the current global citizen concept. Having different languages and culture within one country can enable nations to understand what diversity is and how it can become our strength. Diversity creates curiosity in students. By being exposed to different peoples and cultures, students may want to learn more about others which can give them insights into how and why a certain system works and possibly encourage them to change themselves for the better, if necessary. Diversity prepares students for the real world. Students who are exposed to different cultures and religions are able to take a stance on subjects or issues and be able to voice their opinions from an informed point of view. In today's global society, without any prior knowledge of other peoples, ethnicity, culture and religions, students are often stuck with a limited view of the world. If the scenario continues, such students might end up being narrow-minded and live within their own group of friends and community. Anything out of their own belief system is seen as not normal or acceptable. It can lead to extremism in isolated cases. The encouragement of diversity benefits society. It enables individuals and communities to experience things outside of what they normally do. Diversity in schools can be used to bridge students from different ethnic groups. Values of multiculturalism such as mutual respect come naturally. Diversity enables a nation to be culturally sensitive and provides students with a sound start to being culturally sensitive to others. Students who grow up in positive multicultural environments stand tall in different parts of the world as they have been exposed to values of tolerance and goodwill towards others. However, unity that does not include diversity ends up in repression and hegemony. I am hoping such a situation will be understood by one and all in our school system.

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