

Creativity vs Conformity

27 FEBRUARY 2017 @ 12:00 PM

I AM initiating a book to be written by academics in universities and teachers' training institutes. It will be about HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) and how HOTS can be taught under various subjects in schools. One of the characteristics of HOTS is "thinking out of the box". It includes aspects like creative, critical and innovative thinking. Now, I am quite worried about how we will approach this HOTS issue in a rational manner. In New Zealand, when I was teaching a group of Pacific youths about spirituality and self in a pathway class in the university, a student asked me a question: "Can one become pregnant without having sexual intercourse?" Knowing where they were heading, I calmly redirected the question to the rest of the class. By the end of the two-hour discussion, there were many ideas, controversial and scientific, that were discussed. HOTS can be taken as the ability of students to transfer the knowledge into various situations, having critically analysed a situation and finding suitable ways to solve open-ended problems. This is indeed a simple yet important process, which older generations have been passing down to the younger generations. In times when people were living in caves and hunting for their day-to-day sustenance, the children used to follow their fathers to learn hunting skills. It was all about learning in different real-life situations and later applying the knowledge and skills learnt. Now, let's bring the scenario to our Malaysian classrooms. We want to move towards a developed nation. We introduce many new approaches and strategies in our teaching and learning processes. We hope our students will be critical, creative and innovative at the end of their educational journey. But, at the same time we expect students to conform; conform to practically everything in their lives — from the way they talk, the attire that they wear, their choice of words for spoken and written language, the courses they sign up for. And, on the other end, we boost creativity, critical thinking and innovation. How are the students going to cope with such an irony? It's like a speech I once heard: "The university student's involvement in a certain activity is like this analogy. They can swim but there should not be a drop of water on their body." Is this a practical way of guiding our future generation towards a globalised nation? The Education Ministry needs to research HOTS from time to time to ensure that students are provided the space and time to get into the HOTS that suit the Malaysian identity. Or else, it becomes a hypocrisy as creativity and conformity are like North and South Poles.

DR VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN

Senior (Research) Lecturer,

Faculty of Education,

Universiti Malaya

Read More : <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/02/215755/creativity-vs-conformity>