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Desperately seeking balance

More than book-smarts, schools should instil in students innovation, empathy

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

IT IS interesting to hear Mr Philip Yeo, the special adviser for Economic Development (Prime Minister's Office), share his experiences when he was a student, as well as his opinions on the pertinent issues of competition and creativity that are extremely important to Singapore's education landscape.

In the report, "Students need to 'tinker' around to be creative" (May 8) by Alicia Wong, Mr Yeo also commented briefly on students who are currently applying for scholarships, and encouraged them to endeavour beyond academics.

There is an almost unanimous consensus that Singaporean students lack significant degrees of creativity, and that our students are comparatively more book-smart than street-smart. Much has been done by parents and teachers — key drivers of education — to expose their children and students to a diversity of co-curricular activities and competitions, but it is our

teaching-learning pedagogy that demands tinkering.

Together with the institutions, the Ministry of Education (MOE) — while remaining cognisant of basic academic requirements and standards — must push educators to be more flexible and innovative in their approaches. The proliferation of the Internet means that the mere transfer of knowledge and information is insufficient; classrooms must be platforms for interactive discussions, exchanges and active flow of idea-concepts.

Beyond the classroom, equilibrium has to be struck between pragmatism and ambition. While it is unfortunate and negative that some students choose to remain buried in their textbooks and examinations, there is also the tendency for others to venture to the other extreme: Endeavouring in programmes, activities and projects for the mere sake of boosting their curriculum vitae and portfolios.

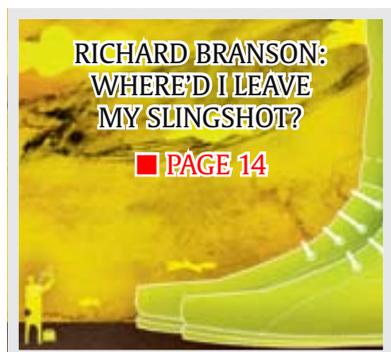
They astutely see that it is in their interest to blindly engage in the aforementioned,

and eventually see pre-college education as an extended application process for scholarships and university admission. They burden themselves with a plethora of competitions and commitments, and struggle with their counterparts to emerge as the *creme de la creme*.

Rather than lending a helping hand to those who might be weaker in other aspects, the individualistic and pragmatic attitudes drive them away. Indeed, a balance desperately needs to be achieved to prevent such students from sinking deeper into the quagmire.

Mr Yeo is right to finally contend that the advent of globalisation naturally means that competition from all parts of the world is inevitable. As we remain steadfast in our policy of meritocracy and preparing our students to meet an assortment of challenges, there should also be a fundamental baseline to maintain that sense of belonging among Singaporeans.

After all, the welfare of our students must always come first.



MBS is symptomatic of our slapdash building culture

Letter from Errol Goodenough

I REFER to "Caught up in the rush" (May 6). The building and other glitches at Marina Bay Sands (MBS) became newsworthy because it affected and inconvenienced important visitors, after months of publicity on how iconic the integrated resort was supposed to be.

In fact, these glitches are nothing new. The

average Singaporean experiences many such glitches in everyday life: Spalling concrete in flats, popping ceramic floor tiles in private condominiums, burst pipes and sewers, collapsed ceilings in shopping malls et cetera.

All these are symptomatic of a slapdash building culture to "rush it, then repair it" which has stayed with us through the decades.

In the MBS instance, what is surprising is the slew of let-downs coming so soon after an assurance was given in a recent interview by the owner, Mr Sheldon Adelson, that the resort would not open "until it is right, whether it is delayed or not delayed".

Against the frenzy to get things off the ground, Mr Adelson's assurance appears to have fizzled into mere business rhetoric.

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