

Don't focus only on academic smarts



By KWAN JIN YAO

MERITOCRACY has been a key cornerstone of Singapore's socio-economic structure and – as stated in the article, “MM Lee: Meritocratic schools drive Singapore” (*my paper*, Jan 14) – meritocratic educational institutions “enable the brightest and the best to rise to the top”.

Under the policy of meritocracy, a student's progress and advancement are dependent on his ability and credentials, which encourage the student to excel in certain aspects in order to emerge among the *creme de la creme*.

Such a route to success would not be aided by a student's connections, or by his ethnic or family background. Instead, the onus would be solely on the individual to demonstrate that he is the most deserving.

Selection based solely on merit promotes competition which, in an academic setting, constantly spurs students to outperform each other.

However, the “chink in the armour” lies in the fact that a person's merits are judged based overwhelmingly on his academic portfolio, without equal consideration of his **co-curricular** accomplishments, character, and other skills and talents.

While scholarship boards and universities have begun to diversify their selection and application processes, earlier stages of the education journey still rely heavily on examinations and grades.

Meritocracy cannot premise itself only on scholastic merits. Otherwise, we run the risk of alienating talents who might excel in areas like art, music or sports.

Having said that, however, I have also seen how students in a top school skillfully manoeuvre from one endeavour to

another and commit themselves to a plethora of activities, for the purpose of **beefing up** their curriculum vitae to give the impression of being outstanding all-rounders.

Even community service, which is supposed to be a platform for students to experience volunteerism and render services to beneficiaries, has been brutally manipulated in order to be presented as “achievements” on their resumes.

Given that many of the talents who have emerged from the meritocratic education system – further filtered by lucrative scholarship offers and public-service job offers – will manage the civil service, we cannot risk having an “elite class” that is **ignorant** of socio-political values and sensitivities.

When these talents do not have the ability to communicate their perspectives or promote their recommendations to the people on the ground, the latter will lose faith and discontentment will spread against the perceived “elitism”.

Taking a wider view of meritocracy and providing more opportunities are the way to go.

We must allow top students with different characteristics and talents to rise and, simultaneously, inculcate the necessary awareness to combat social lethargy when they step into the workplace.

Successful individuals should not excel only in their personal fields; they should go out of their way to do something for the society that has groomed and nurtured them.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

Meritocratic: 精英制度 jīng yīng zhì dù

Co-curricular: 课外活动 kè wài huó dòng

Beefing up: 加强 jiā qiáng

Ignorant: 无知的 wú zhī de

Why move HDB letterboxes?

CONTRACTORS have recently hacked away the structures supporting residents' letterboxes in the Tampines Housing Board estate.

I thought the move was part of a relocation exercise for all the letterboxes in the estate, but this is not the case.

The letterboxes have been relocated temporarily to structures made of bricks, and will ultimately be returned to their original locations.

Is this not a wasteful exercise? The existing base structures are in perfectly good condition. Building materials and other resources are being wasted to construct the temporary and new bases.

Is the same thing being done in other Housing Board estates as well? What is the rationale for doing so?

MS TONG JEE CHENG

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