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## Arts education: Start young

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

IT IS heartening to understand that the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) – through the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) steering committee – has taken tangible steps to increase the status and prominence of the arts in Singapore and to heighten excellence in artists, musicians, professionals, et cetera.

The report “‘Larger role’ for the arts in Singapore” (Feb 12-13) reflects the chief challenges – identified by the committee – that plague Singapore’s cultural and arts scenes. That is, the lack of sustainable appreciation of the arts, the need for empowerment of industry workers and correspondingly increasing their skills or productivity, as well as to synergise public and private sector efforts to support the industry collectively.

Even though these concerns are valid, the focus should be premised upon the implementation of assorted recommendations to gradually address the mentioned objectives.

Minister Lui Tuck Yew’s assertion – in his brief response to the interim report –

Existing art-based initiatives or cultural education programmes carried out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and its respective institutions are often superficial.

that Singaporeans have to broaden their definitions of the arts and culture is certainly not a tangible solution for the dearth of arts appreciation.

Furthermore, continuously expecting art groups and performers to speedily scale peaks of excellence will not yield results if there is a significant absence of financial, resource-based and manpower support rendered.

The true panacea lies in the active engagement of the arts from a young age.

Existing art-based initiatives or cultural education programmes carried out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and its respective institutions are often superficial; with educators and students merely going through the motion.

As a student, the general perception towards the arts was one characterised by apathy and lethargy; with many of my counterparts dismissing the arts and culture – in the form of musicals, concerts, instrumental performances, dramas – as being high brow and highfalutin.

There are a few reasons for these perspectives. First, many of our parents were

not interested or exposed to these elements; hence, art appreciation was not part of our childhood years.

Next, sessions dedicated to arts appreciation were either monotonous or unproductive, with many in the form of pedantic lectures and PowerPoint slides that put individuals into sleep.

Finally, institutions have very laissez-faire attitudes towards the arts and do not adequately engage community partners to promote such cultures.

Art education methodologies must start to involve parents and working professionals to a larger degree; so as to allow them to comprehend the general elements of performances and artistic presentations.

They are in prime positions to influence their children to be more cognisant and sensitive to these artistic and cultural aspects.

Schools can also develop partnerships with local theatres, art-based non-government organisations (NGOs) and community associations to gradually broaden the horizons of their students and teachers.

Most importantly, the MOE must work closely with the MICA to review existing programmes; so as to weed out antiquated teaching pedagogies and, subsequently, get students more involved and passionate in the arts. Even though the impetus ultimately lies with the students themselves, the administration can do its part to facilitate these experiences and, hopefully, inculcate interest one step at a time.



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