

Our stifled children – past, present and future?

Letter from Rachel Lim Mei Hui

I WAS recently walking by a kindergarten and saw, through the window, a teacher singling out a boy and saying exasperatedly: “Look at what you’ve done! Why did you colour the person’s face blue, when everyone else coloured it beige?”

The boy hung his head in silence. Why are we stifling the creativity and spontaneity of our children?

This young boy has just learnt that it is not in his interest to stick out like a sore thumb, that he should follow the crowd and do only as others do, that people cannot be

blue, that he must conform.

There is almost no debate among educators that a child’s curiosity and, hence, creativity should not be hindered but, instead, directed by the adults in his life.

To an extent, anything that engages his interest or imagination is a type of brain “fertiliser”. Research indicates that if positive emotional signals are not similarly met by adult figures, the power of the initial emotion can be suppressed or lost.

It is supposed to be an age of entrepreneurial endeavours, thinking out of the box, pioneering advances and vibrancy. Is this possible if we do not get it right from

the start?

Such attempts at streamlining behaviours used to be commonplace. My friend was slapped by her kindergarten teacher 20 years ago for calling a round shape a “ball” instead of “circle”. Will this still be the system when it is my son’s turn in three years’ time?

To all teachers and anyone who meets young ones: When a child is joyful, be joyful; if he is excited about a discovery, be excited with him; if he is trying to be creative, spur him on. In this way, you would show him the value of those emotions.

That poor boy. He must have felt blue.

■ ARE SINGAPOREAN CHILDREN LAZY?

I could not believe it when I saw a grandmother lugging her three grandchildren’s school bags early one morning in front of Clementi MRT Station.

The children carried nothing while the elderly woman dragged a milk crate fashioned onto a luggage carrier filled with three backpacks.

It was no wonder a National Serviceman was photographed previously with his helper carrying his bag.

Perhaps some children here are plain coddled? It was nice that the woman was escorting the children to school, but should they not be hefting their own homework?

LETTER FROM YUKARI SAKAMOTO

What makes a good teacher great

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

IN LIGHT of recent transgressions involving a small number of teachers here, Mr Jedidah Tan wrote a poignant piece, “What values and from whose perspective?” (Feb 23).

He expounded on challenges faced by teachers today, the importance of having multiple stakeholders involved in education and observed that students tend to lose their moral compasses when adults “say one thing and do another”.

I figured it would be meaningful to look back on my personal interactions and

identify common characteristics that made some of my teachers outstanding.

Excellent moral conduct, proficiency in expression as well as mastery of syllabi and methodologies should be a given. But those who added value to my schooling adventure possessed something more.

From my experience, two distinct factors make good educators great: First, the ability to motivate and empower students to do their best regardless of their ambitions; second, to be constantly cognisant of their students’ demands and expectations.

Due to the general rigidity of our

education system and the focus on academic achievements, it becomes convenient to judge an individual’s worth or abilities based on his report card.

Working closely with parents, a great teacher is deeply aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his students and encourages them to better themselves progressively.

My teachers were not hung up on class or school rankings; they were more concerned about engaging students and demanding improvements in or outside the classroom.

A great teacher always puts himself or

herself in the shoes of the student and fully comprehends the elements of pedagogy from the student’s perspective.

Even with the most monotonous or didactic curriculum, great teachers have the capability, under the most unfavourable circumstances, to enthuse participants without compromising the quality of instruction.

From the creative employment of information communications technology to the incorporation of independent learning methodologies, the great teacher empathises with the student.

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