

Exams more meaningful with constructive feedback

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

I refer to the report "PSLE not 'be-all-and-end-all'" (Nov 17).

Standardised assessments have received a bad reputation in Singapore because we have been conditioned to be obsessed with the end result per se.

To improve teaching-learning pedagogies, educators need to inculcate within students the notion that examinations can help one grow, if they are managed meaningfully.

The Ministry of Education could introduce constructive post-paper feedback and review after the examinations, giving students further information — beyond the grade — on



Singaporeans 'have been conditioned to be obsessed with the end result' of standardised assessments. TODAY FILE PHOTO

how they have performed, and encourage educators to identify areas for improvement.

Since learning is a lifelong process, we want to help schoolchildren

recognise their academic strengths and weaknesses, which could also affect their choice of secondary schools. For instance, diagnostics for the English examination would encourage the student to strengthen his grammar or vocabulary, and whether he needs to write and read more regularly.

A friend once shared with me an unconventional strategy by one of his educators. When the scripts — an English essay, for example — were first returned, there were no scores, no marks and no grades.

Instead, little ticks or crosses, coupled by annotations, adorned the papers. The class, unaccustomed to such a practice, began to badger the teach-

er, claiming that he had forgotten the all-important component.

The teacher stood firm and for the next hour analysed the test with the class — discussing question analyses, essay structures, common pitfalls, assessment criteria, key terms, writing techniques and so on.

At the end of the test evaluation, before giving them their provisional results, he instructed the class: "Now, how would you grade your own submissions?" The results rarely differed.

If standardised examinations can set a healthy precedent of providing paper feedback and comments, schools would then be galvanised to do the same for their students.

Is S'pore's ecosystem ready for the International Baccalaureate?

FROM YVONNE WONG

I have done research on the International Baccalaureate (IB) in my consultancy work, and would like to share my views.

Some of the learning outcomes of the IB curriculum are critical to nurturing children with global perspectives and skill sets. However, it is not for everyone and I mean this from the learning and performance perspec-

“Students who are vocal and articulate tend to perform better in such a setting compared to the more introverted students.

tive rather than the financial.

The curriculum encourages self-discovery and the lesson plans are open ended, which not all parents, students and teachers are comfortable with.

The students are encouraged to challenge status quo while teachers facilitate. Students who are vocal and articulate tend to perform better in such a setting compared to the more introverted students. Hence, it

is best if children are exposed to the programme before they enter primary education.

The IB emphasises self-motivation in continuous learning over knowledge acquisition alone, as this is more sustainable in the long run. This may not sit well with parents who focus on the extent of their children's academic knowledge. In fact, students who are strong academic performers may not excel in IB and vice-versa.

Also, a child's ability to pick up analytical skills and a holistic perspective is influenced by the environment he grows up in. In a way, the IB relies on the ecosystem that we can provide for each child.

The call for the Ministry of Education to offer the IB to more students is a good one, but it will take years of gradual changes before its strengths can be integrated into Singapore's education system.

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