

Teachers need to be creative

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EDUCATION transformation is a government agenda to ensure that Malaysia's education system is constantly evolving.

This is reflected in this year's Teachers Day theme, "Teachers, Catalysts for the National Education Transformation".

The attitude of teachers plays an important role in ensuring the success of this transformation. Apart from the need to change their attitudes, teachers also need to ensure that their students have a positive attitude. Without a positive attitude and the willingness to change, the education transformation will not become a reality.

The question is, how do you change the attitude of students? Typically, teachers use the simplest approach, which is to advise them. For example, teachers advise students who are not interested in Mathematics by telling them about the importance of Mathematics in everyday life.

This is easy but is less effective in changing students' attitudes. Studies show that students only remember 20 per cent of what they hear.

There are teachers who show videos or conduct experiments in front of the classroom. For example, teachers may show a video that explains the concept of transformation.

Such approaches are not enough to change the attitudes of students, as they remember only 50 per cent of what they hear and see.

The most effective way to change attitudes is to provide them with an

experience that can make a difference in the way they see things.

For example, to make students thrifty, they should be taken to an orphanage or an old folks' home to show them how difficult their lives are.

Similarly, to change the attitude of students who have a negative attitude towards Mathematics, students should be given the opportunity to explore their own concepts of Mathematics and not be fed with facts.

There are many strategies that promote active involvement of students in the learning process. Many teaching aids can be used. Studies show that students remember 90 per cent of what they say and do.

Therefore, action must be taken by teachers not only to change their own attitudes but also their students' attitudes to ensure the success of education transformation.

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It doesn't add up

I REFER to "Education: Art of burden" (NST, June 27). The writer laments that a secondary school in Jalan Kuchai Lama, Kuala Lumpur, totals up exam marks of all subjects for every student.

The writer said this practice could be "totally disheartening" and "breaks the confidence of these students".

Do we still have schools that total up exam marks of all subjects for every student? Do schools still give class positions and form positions to students based on their total exam marks?

I am surprised, for I thought schools should have long ago done away with this archaic practice. It is a very time-consuming and energy wasting exercise for teachers.

Besides, the validity of the "total marks" as a tool to evaluate and assess a student's academic achievement is vague at best and irrelevant at worst.

Schools should just grade students' achievements by following the format of the public examinations: Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah, Penilaian Menengah Rendah, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia and Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia.

There is no need to give the "exact" marks for each subject the students had sat for. And certainly, there is no need to add up all their exam marks so that class and form positions can be awarded.

Students and parents alike must have the right perspective about examinations and grades.

They must, first and foremost, recognise that examinations are not instruments for competition and comparison.

The grade a student obtains simply tells him how much of the knowledge has been mastered.

He should know from the grade what he lacks in understanding and

where he needs to improve on.

His grades have nothing to do with the grades of his classmates. There is no need to compare, much less to compete.

What is important is that each child should be encouraged to work hard and to exploit his potential to the fullest, from the very beginning. Each child should know the importance of schooling and education.

Each child should be imparted with the understanding that it is his responsibility to at least pass every subject in all examinations. When a child takes care of his own learning, his marks and grades will take care of themselves.

As for achieving excellence, each child has his own niche subject. Excelling in Art is definitely out for some children, just as Additional Mathematics is for others.

Parents and teachers should help their children and charges identify their strong and weak subjects and motivate them accordingly.

Our children should be relieved of the pressure to perform exceptionally well in all subjects.

I urge the Education Ministry to immediately issue a circular to all schools — primary as well as secondary — to do away with the practice of totalling school exam marks and giving class and form positions to students based on their total exam marks.

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