

Build confidence in our children

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REFERRING to “We need a complete overhaul of our education system, says NUTP” (The Star, Oct 18), we are of opinion that there is no need to overhaul the entire education system.

The present education system that requires students to sit in lectures/class and listen to the teachers is still useful in certain aspects. For example, we still need theories, explanation of knowledge, and morals to be described in lectures. So, there are only certain areas that require change. One of them is the need to address our students’ inability to speak in public. We are too aware of students, aged 18-23 years of age, shivering with fear when asked to speak in front of their class for six minutes. This condition speaks volumes about our education system. Hence this is something we must address.

We took pride in seeing our Prime Minister Tun Mahathir standing tall at the 73rd session of the General Assembly at the United Nations in New York, in Septem-

ber. Also, the world noticed that, when interviewed by television stations, he answered questions wittily for 20 minutes without referring to any notes. We also felt proud seeing the young Youth and Sports Minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman stealing the show at the World Economic Forum on Asean in Hanoi, also in September. Tun M and Saddiq are rare examples of eloquent Malaysians who make us proud. Being able to speak and explain the gist of a matter well to the public is one of the products of education. When a graduate steps into the real world, his academic resume will not be considered as much as his ability to work and speak well.

But sadly, something that I (the first writer) have observed in my 30 years of teaching in university is that only three or four students out of a class of 30 are able to speak in public. The rest can’t. Therefore, we think that our education system needs to develop our young and build their confidence to speak well in public.

First of all, confidence-building is best begun early. It is a bit too late to build confidence at university level (although some might succeed) as it is much easier to mould a person from below the age of six. So confidence-building has to begin at home, and in kindergartens and schools.

To build children’s confidence, other than showering them with praise, care and love, we also need to nurture them to do certain activities regularly. For instance, we can have fun in taking turns speaking, reading or playing with them. That shows that we believe in what they do and say to us. As they grow older, they can be encouraged to do more activities, such as reading their ABCs aloud, standing in front of us (or anybody else). Then we move on to asking them to do something such as reading sentences, reading stories, and lastly telling stories to us. The bottom line is, it is about performing in front of others, to overcome shyness. Some cultures do not allow children to do things

in front of adults.

Secondly, to build confidence, primary schoolers must not be made to feel embarrassed, for instance, when failing tests. Hence primary schools should not only focus on pupils passing tests or examinations. More attention should be given to their participation in activities, not passing or failing exams. We too must not threaten pupils about examinations. To promote confidence, one must not be exposed to anxiety-provoking conditions, such as being perpetually threatened about something.

For example, I (the second writer), when attending a primary school in Scotland, didn’t know that we were being tested. The tests were conducted in such a way that we did not know that it was a test. We thought the tests were normal class activities. And, the results of the tests were not announced to us. Instead, they were given to our parents. So, we did not feel anxious about tests. Nor did we feel inferior if we did not do well in the tests. Thirdly, it should be inculcated in children that trying hard matters more than passing tests. They should be encouraged to give something a try instead of fearing failure. Inculcating the idea of trying over and over again will encourage perseverance.

From a psychological point of view too, if a person is constantly

threatened about anything, it may create fear in him or her, whether consciously or unconsciously. Have these constant reminders about scoring well at school created fear in our children and robbed them of the ability to speak in public?

Being perpetually monitored and reminded about failing creates stress and worry which, we think, begins a cycle of no-confidence. Then an inferiority complex may develop. One of the reasons a person is not able to speak in public is inferiority complex.

We want children to grow into confident adults. So, parents and schools should not create an anxiety-provoking environment. Instead, they must be free of anxiety. Let them know we believe in their efforts. Encourage and guide them to speak and express what they think. Then we may have more Tun Mahathirs and Saddiqs.

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