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## COLUMNIST

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### Education reforms that are ideal

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Fast Review, Publishing & Printing International Journal(US Published)

#### MATTERS THAT NEED ATTENTION: Consensus building crucial to charting our future

REVOLUTIONS, reforms, renaissance, reengineering, transformations... call them what we will, are all on a continuum of pervasiveness and depth of departure from the status quo existence. All are about changes, controlled or liberated. The question is always, why are changes desired and who wants the changes and who would benefit and lose from changes.

Reforms are about maintenance of the status quo or of charting out new contents and directions. Reforms can be superficial, facelift or of deep changes and of new paradigms. The actors in the change processes are important. However sincere or transparent reform processes are, with sophisticated Protocols, there are always the elites of particular ideologies who would manipulate and mobilise resources to get the most out of reform initiatives.

Reforms are always about policies, practices and initiatives. There are embedded and hidden philosophers and practices in reform initiatives. It takes philosophers to tease out and elicit philosophies, whether mature ideologies or schools of thought to elicit philosophies from reforms. But in Malaysian society there are very few people trained as practical philosophers.

Malaysia is now embarked on the journey of great transformation in government, in economics, in rural development, and, now, in education. The means and protocols used in getting at the reform ideas in any sector are as important as the ends. Poor means will lead to the merely mechanistic recording and reporting of deep level discourses and lose fundamental principles and policies. Also mechanistic protocols generate mundane recommendations and unexciting and uninspiring contents and directions of change.

Strong and robust reforms examine how ideas are mined and what ideas

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are excluded wittingly or unwittingly. Strong reforms also identify the ideas which are promoted by reformers and those ideas dismissed by reformers from the outset. For national reforms consensus-building is critical. Reform protocols must also take cognizance of those managing ideas and thoughts and ensure the prevention of the subtle phenomena or inclusiveness and exclusiveness of ideals and ideas.

Beyond the face to face meetings and the roundtables and the parliamentary questions there are other equally rich or richer sources of ideas for reforms. The public media as well as the blogs are the treasure houses of reform ideas. The thousands of letters as well as the editorials and columns in newspapers, and talk shows have already over the years generated many relevant and robust ideas of reforms. The scouring and classifying of such ideas may prove to generate more diverse corpora of reform ideas than those of recorded verbal feedback and opinionated stances.

The easy part of reforms is the known opinionated stances of individuals and the ideologies of pressure groups and political parties.

The harder work of reform is to reach at the tried, tested, proven and potentially exciting ideas of professionals. Also the harder challenge is not to be trapped by that stereotyping of professionals by their certificates or experiences and the assumed expertise in educational fields. The selection of experts and the credence given to expert knowledge must mindfully and meticulously distinguish those who contribute towards the broad overarching framework of changes and those who contribute in specialised domains. The strategic presence of mind must be there to ensure no philosophic contradictions of policies and practices.

The fundamental assumptions of change must be fully understood. The surface level and deep level nature of the Malaysian society of the future we want to build must be clear. There has to be clarity of the articulated ideals of society and the covert unarticulated agenda of various groups. Among the matters that must be addressed by educational reforms are the following:

CAN we have reforms where no children are given zero in assessments?;

CAN we have reforms where there are no overt or covert discriminations by individuals in power or by mechanisms of power?;

CAN we have reforms where the rights and interest of the child and the future of the nation override the interest of pressures groups or sectional interest of political parties?;

CAN we have reforms regarding practices which liberate teachers and students to learn and discover together and not just to use education as the means for the transfer of and recirculation of elites and their ideologies?;

CAN education reforms ensure coherence and consistency with other reform initiatives in other sectors?;

CAN reform initiatives in education lead the way for the society towards higher levels of sensibilities with an eye for contributions in the building of global civilisation?;

CAN educational reform ensure the development of sound confidence and self-esteem of every learner after over 15,000 hours of schooling?;

CAN educational reform create conditions for the development of talents and potentialities of every learner?; and,

CAN educational reform unequivocally ensure that the teaching

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profession reclaims its noble and high status as a profession?

The best of reform ideas can undergo any test of contemporary as well as future relevance, comprehensiveness, coherence, and the problems emerging from the suggested solutions, and strategic novelty and common sense.

Eric Hoffer observed that "There is a tendency to judge a race, a nation or any distinct group by its least worthy members". Let not reform initiatives be judged by the least worthy members of reform champions from the gallery. Let reform initiatives be driven by the caring, mature, sound and sensible members of society who are not for any partisan or selfish interest.

Reform changes must aim for tangible social justice results which address the needs of the most vulnerable in society, and, with the most forward looking and futuristic ideas, with confidence that a democratic way of life will be protected in transparent ways.



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