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Self-esteem of a nation



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INNER STRENGTH: The bedrocks of national unity are founded in homes and schools

IN 1987, the National Union of the Teaching Profession submitted the New Secondary School Curriculum Memoranda to the Education Ministry. The overarching theme of the memorandum is: Towards a balanced, flexible curriculum which builds self-esteem among students.

Millions of students have gone through the curriculum. However, what of the self-esteem, self-concept, self-confidence and character-building?

Twenty-five years later, studies and anecdotal reports, particularly, from employers, observed that typically, students lack skills in communication, teamwork, leadership, language, interpersonal and other soft skills.

Among students who do not do well in interviews, the lack of self-confidence and self-esteem is observed.

It is not acceptable to have a school system where education becomes subversive and its graduates do not have high self-esteem because of detractors in the system and in the wider culture. It is the sacred responsibility of the education system to ensure that the self-esteem of every learner is developed.

The education system has many significant ideas but there seems to be more ideas than champions. Champions connected to power groups and individuals of a particular era cease to be champions when the individuals or groups retire or move to some other power domains. Policy and practice amnesia exist because of discontinuous commitments and leadership.

It is necessary and urgent to cultivate leaders who are mission-driven

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rather than those driven merely for personal interests or for approval of the patrons of the times.

Systems that are forgetful lose the strength of synergy and energy that comes from historical foundations.

A failed nation is a nation where social capital is low and the people do not trust themselves, each other, or the leaders.

If a society allows itself to be led by ignoble leaders, the society is headed for self-destruction. If a large number of citizens disowns the other half, the nation becomes divided. When society is disintegrated, the society and nation fail.

However, a nation where the majority of the people have sound self-esteem and respects each other is a nation with strong social capital of bonding, bridging and linking across races, cultures, class and other backgrounds.

Malaysia cannot afford to be a failed nation. The bedrocks of national unity are founded in homes and educational institutions.

Schools, universities and communities must be led by enlightened leaders with sacral self-esteem, upholding the highest principles of justice, equality and rights.

The society fails when it follows blindly those who are not noble souls and those who are mean in their thoughts, intentions, plans and schemes. A society becomes a better entity when its members appreciate each other.

Bloggers and others, who could not find self-esteem support systems in official domains, seek other domains of support and voice. Healthy self-esteem is based on inner self-worth and character qualities rather than on external factors.

The recognition of accomplishments, positive self-talk about belonging and support system foster the growth of resourcefulness, loyalty, responsibility and integrity.

The cluster of notions of self-esteem includes emotional well-being, self-image, self-concept, self-discipline, self-worth and self-actualisation. The know-how on nurturing self-esteem is available. The guidance or template can be examined and adapted to be compatible with the Malaysian culture and aspirations.

In 2003, Nathaniel Branden and Robert Reasoner, the gurus of self-esteem, were invited to Malaysia for the International Self-Esteem and Peak Performance Conference.

Branden, the leading pioneer in the field, wrote The Six Pillars of Self Esteem, which is regarded the definite work on the subject.

The six pillars are: living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully and personal integrity.

Malaysians have written books on self-esteem and an association was also formed to nurture self-esteem among Malaysians. But what happens when people disown themselves? Is it the failure of the school system or the success of negative forces outside in society, manipulated by a small group of toxic leaders?

Voltaire's double-edged observation invites caution in criticisms as well as wisdom in appreciation of what is true, right and good: "It is dangerous to be right when established men are wrong. Appreciation is a wonderful thing: it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well."

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We must be steadfast in our resolve to build a successful nation with a citizenry with sustainable high self-esteem. Educational institutions must ensure that the formal and hidden curriculum nurtures a sense of belonging, competence, worthiness, confidence, wit and humour. Not to do so means that leadership and professions, particularly, the teaching profession, have failed the people.



Students participating in a chess competition. Educational institutions must ensure that the curriculum nurtures belongingness, a sense of belonging, competence, worthiness and confidence among students.

< 1 / 1 >

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