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## When on the path of reform, go idea-hunting



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**KALEIDOSCOPIIC SOURCES:** Study in-depth what the best educational institutions are doing and adapt their formula

ON a wall at the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership (Institute Aminuddin Baki) stands an observation oft-quoted:

"Good School or Bad School?"

"Over the years, as a reporter, I have never seen a good school with a poor principal, or a poor school with a good principal. I have seen unsuccessful schools turned around into successful ones and regrettably, outstanding schools slide rapidly into decline.

"In each case, the rise or fall could readily be traced to the quality of the principal."

(Fred M. Hechinger, president, New York Times.)

Undoubtedly, educational leadership is the single most important factor in any educational reform initiative.

Every city and town in this country has educational institutions which are landmarks of histories. Within the schools and universities are all kinds of evidence of contributions from their alumni. All these institutions have institutional memories of legends, myths and rituals, ceremonies and continuous achievements. All these institutions have traditions of excellence.

Undoubtedly, the creation of traditions of excellence constitutes another

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important factor for reform initiatives.

Each institution of excellence has its own identifiable, explicit and tangible policies and practices as well as its intangible mix of wisdom which characterises its identity.

In education, the ultimate relationship is of the learner and teacher sharing and mastering particular aspects of facts, concepts, principles, theories, tasks, skills, competencies, one by one and all at once.

Undoubtedly, upholding and practising the philosophy that every learner matters and that every child is unique is another central factor for educational reform.

One critical element of reform protocols is to study in-depth what the best educational institutions are doing. The compendium of insights and evidence of the collective excellence of educational institutions provide the substance of best practices which constitute benchmarks for reform articulations.

Tuanku Jaafar College provides excellent examples of the nurturing of confident and independent students who could look after themselves in multicultural contexts anywhere. Sri Cempaka fires the spirit, nurtures the soul, fosters respect and care for the body and celebrates mindfulness.

Kolej Yayasan Saad has the classic and inspiring formula of the holistic development of every learner by focusing on academic excellence, active participation in rugby, swimming, netball and

other sports and co-curricular activities, mastering musical instruments, being engaged in the school orchestra and mastering English.

The college also has special relationships for healthy competitive activities with Vjiravudh College Thailand and other like institutions.

Junior Mara Science Colleges and other residential schools exhibit leadership in peer motivation strategies for learning and academic success. Chinese schools, especially girls' schools, provide exemplary lessons on discipline, neatness, mastery of filial piety and family values.

Both Chinese and Islamic schools espouse and exhibit the importance of and the value of memorisation. The best of Tamil schools provide sound examples of the transmission of ethnic cultures and spiritual strengths. Aboriginal schools provide lessons regarding ecological intelligence and native wisdom.

Clearly, there are a number of excellent institutions which would provide ideas to be gained from institutional audits of those institutions. In addition to studying the best schools to scour ideas for educational reforms, there are hundreds of retired educational leaders and leaders from all professions from whom ideas for reform can be elicited through focused interviews.

The kaleidoscope of reform possibilities is exciting and enlightening for the discerning community of educational reformers.

At the heart of systemic national educational reform is school reform, teacher education reform and university reform.

Many of the reform initiatives in schools, teacher education, polytechnics and universities are about reforms in curriculum, teaching learning and assessment.

Reform in one sector alone without coherent reform in other significant areas will lead to the phenomenon of reform lag or reform divergence in vision, directions, substance and spirit of the harmony and unity of



reforms.

In an attempt to create a national culture of uncompromising excellence, there has to be the uncompromising will, focus and effort to be the culture that is created.

The culture of uncompromising excellence is built by the countless creative ways towards "breathlessly exciting perfection" inspiring drives of scientific discovery, artistic works, harmonious relationships, knowledge mastery and application and administrative efficiency.



Kolej Yayasan Saad Melaka students performing in Kuala Lumpur last month. The college has a formula of academic excellence, sports and other co-curricular activities.

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