

March 7, 2005

SLASHING OF CHINESE-LANGUAGE SYLLABUS

Education cannot, and should not, teach all

I REFER to the letter, 'A pity to forgo lessons on customs, practices' by Mr Ronald Chan Wai Hong (ST, Feb 3), and the debate on the revamping of the Chinese syllabus in line with the Ministry of Education's 'Teach Less, Learn More' philosophy.

Why expect the education system to teach its students everything they need to know?

Even if things are taken out of the syllabus for the sake of greater depth as opposed to greater breadth, why can't one do one's research into Chinese customs, culture, literature, art, science and whatever else one's heart desires to know?

Education is meant to instil a desire to know more, and create a hunger for knowledge with the means with which to appease that hunger.

If a literature teacher chooses to teach the poetry of Sylvia Plath, it is easy to ask why she does not teach William Shakespeare or Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

But the skills of literary criticism imparted in the course of examining Plath's work enable the student to read anything, and to appreciate it from a literary perspective.

The education system cannot teach us everything we need to know, and we should not know only what the education system imparts to us.

We cannot feel we know only as much as we study in order to pass examinations. It would be most saddening to feel we should know only as much as we are to be examined upon.

I believe education has great potential to awaken the spirit of the individual by giving him purpose, passion and drive to continually ascend new heights, and, in turn, to awaken the nation to rise up beyond its believed limitations because the world is, indeed, our oyster.

And that is why I am a teacher.

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