

TeacherTalk by MALLIKA VASUGI

Views of the Guru do matter

Events big and small, to honour teachers are very much in vogue these days and while they are appreciated, what our *cikgu-cikgu* want is for their voices to be heard in matters pertaining to education and policies.



DILLA has a theory on how they come up with Teachers Day themes every year. She says, "Everybody who's somebody in the decision-making panel writes their suggestions on slips of paper. Then during one of the round-table meetings, one is randomly chosen and the chairperson then announces the Teachers Day theme for the year."

"Stop," I said, before she progressed into yet another convoluted idea. "I don't know how they come up with Teachers Day themes every year, but surely it must have something to do with what's needed presently in the education scene, some national aspiration, objectives of policies ..."

"How boring you are," said Dilla, stifling a yawn, "you are beginning to sound like one of those who deliver pompous speeches that are sometimes read out during the school

assembly. Full of weighty four syllable words ... innovation, transformation, creativity ... anyway what's this year's theme?"

"One aspiration, one agenda," I said. "You can't run away from those words Dilla, when you need to formulate a theme for something that has to do with national education."

I happened to have read up on this year's theme and I told her that there was something mentioned about aspirations as well as knowledge, leadership, national identity and spirituality among others.

"You're a show-off," said Dilla scowling. "Come, come, jealousy will get you nowhere," I said. "You can't avoid these terms ... it's like they are all part of the whole education package."

But I did think about what Dilla had said. If I could have picked a theme for Teachers Day, what would it have been? Come to think of it,

what would other teachers have wanted for Teachers Day?

Or has this special day become just a hyped up once-a-year routine event that just needs to be gotten over with, before we go back to the many duties that await us? Some of them may have more to do with simulating an atmosphere of educational excellence rather than the real thing.

I remembered a time when there was a feeling of anticipation associated with Teachers Day.

Words of appreciation

As a student myself, I looked forward to the concerts we organised for our teachers, the celebrations and the expressions on our teachers' faces when we handed them our handmade cards with little affectionate messages of appreciation.

I remember Teachers Day events in the early years of teaching when my colleagues and I would go back home touched and humbled by the Teachers Day gifts we received; a bar of soap, a packet of instant noodles, a bunch of bananas, sometimes lovingly wrapped in old newspaper or calendar pages with our names misspelt!

They lacked all the sophistication of the designer gifts and cards that some teachers receive from students these days. Yet those gifts were priceless for their intrinsic worth and the feeling of being appreciated that were evoked in us.

I wondered what other teachers thought about Teachers Day and the whole experience of teaching in general.

What was the most memorable Teachers Day in their lives and what were their feelings about it now? What did those who had just

started teaching and those who were near retirement, think?

What about those who were still undergoing their training and what about the trainers who trained them? What is it that teachers really want?

I asked around and the answers I received told me that there was no single answer.

To some extent, the answers were different, yet there were overlapping regions in all of our desires.

Some of them fondly recalled the "old days" when teaching was really teaching without the burden of unnecessary files and documents.

"It is a little ironic," said Mrs Ng who is due to retire in a year.

"Back then when I started teaching, it was the pre-ICT age when we did not have computers.

"All this technology is supposed to help us teachers now, facilitate the teaching-learning experience. And yet, I felt happier as a teacher then.

"I had more time to teach and I never felt as if I was rushing through a syllabus or racing with time just to meet deadlines.

"We didn't have so many different committees and projects then, and yet there was a

sense of quality in teaching.

"So what do I want for Teachers Day? Maybe a day of peace and quiet, some time for reflection," said Mrs Ng.

On the whole, I am convinced that what teachers really want for Teachers Day is not so much the once-a-year recognition of their service and how noble the profession is.

Teachers want to be heard and want to be taken seriously for their opinions.

The powers-that-be should take stock of what they say, as it is teachers who are at the core of implementation of every educational policy related to schools.

It is teachers who know best the feasibility of ideas from the top, and whether it is really possible for planned objectives to succeed not merely on record, but in actuality.

If teachers had a collective theme, it would be something like "We are the ones who teach, hear us."

These aspirations that are so eloquently worded in Teachers Day themes and messages every year, already reside in the hearts of most of us.

It was conceived on the day we first started teaching, has taken root, shaped and moulded itself as an innate part of our teacher-souls.

So listen to us. We are the teachers.



The Views below are from Universiti Putra Malaysia Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) undergraduates. From left: Hema, Siew Li, Mohd Azham (standing), Muhamad Rizal (sitting) Nur Siti Rozaialaina.

When I was in primary school, my friends and I had prepared a very big card for our teacher but to our horror it rained and the card was "soaking wet" when we delivered it to her.

However she was thankful, appreciated our effort and said that it was the nicest card she had ever received. — **Hema Sandragesan**

I often forced my mother to buy presents for my teachers which I would then present to my teachers on Teachers Day.

My hope is for students to truly enjoy school. What I'd also like to see is more open-minded teachers who don't just follow the curriculum, but look into the specific needs of students.

— **Nur Siti Rozaialaina Mahamud**

I gave red roses to my class teacher many years ago but she told me that giving her red pens was more than enough. At that time I didn't understand why, but now that I am on the threshold of teaching, I know what she meant — what satisfied her was our improvement. A simple gift means a lot. — **Chin Siew Li**

I can't wait to begin teaching and experiencing for myself the achievements of my students. What is equally important to me is to change their perspective of life in a positive way. — **Mohd Azham Amran**

Back in school, I enjoyed taking part in the performances we used to put up for Teachers Day. Now I am looking forward to a generation of teachers who are equipped with technical skills creative enough to make learning memorable. I really believe that creative teachers make the world go round.

— **Muhamad Rizal Sadiman**



To me it's emotion bouncing back from teacher to student on Teachers Day. It doesn't matter who you are.

When I came to Malaysia, I realised that sometimes we learn from our differences and perhaps even similarities. It is great that I have the opportunity to travel and study abroad for it gives a new dimension to learning. — **Rouhollah Mahmoudnia (Teacher from Iran who is currently a TESL student in UPM.)**