THE NEW 3Rs?

MUCH has been said about reforms in education for the 21st century globally. Some contend that numeracy and literacy are no longer adequate unless we are able to unlearn and relearn at the same time.

With so many skills that need to be acquired, what are considered out-of-date could hamper learning unless there are effective ways to discard them. And replace them with something "new".

This is particularly important when it comes to what is termed as Paradigm Shift or Mindset Change, from that of the 20th century to present day. It perhaps includes the Post-2015 Development Agenda with the shift from the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) to Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030) as commented on in this column last week.

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We also hear that the 3Rs of Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic are no longer sufficient, given new advances in technology related to computer skills in particular. Students and teachers are expected to be savvy beyond the traditional 3Rs.

Indeed, the notion of teaching and learning through chalk-and-talk is outdated and must be replaced by the use of various multimedia to facilitate what are to come, namely individualised learning and a class of one. In this context, the old ways of face-to-face teaching and learning are gradually being substituted by a virtual version, if at all. For the moment, blended learning is in vogue where both versions of face-to-face teaching and learning are accommodated.

Of late, however, in the wake of school violence such as the recent incident in Oregon's Umpqua community college in the United States, critics say there is another set of 3Rs in the US, viz. the use of Rifles, Revolvers and Repeaters.

President Barack Obama said: "We are the only advanced country on Earth that sees these kinds of mass shootings every few months." Ironically, here is a country that aspires to control violence worldwide by launching a "war on terror" but cannot do much when its schools are turned into shooting galleries periodically. Put this in the context of the recent carnage that occurred to the hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan and we discern the indiscriminate use of the new 3Rs US-style. Of course, the killing of non-Americans can be easily dismissed as "collateral damage" to absolve the heinous act in the eyes of the world.

Interestingly, Obama said: "When Americans are killed in mine disasters, we work to make mines safer. When Americans are killed in floods and hurricanes, we make communities safer. When roads are unsafe, we fix them to reduce auto fatalities. We have seatbelt laws because we know it saves lives.

"So the notion that gun violence is somehow different, that our freedom and our Constitution prohibits any modest regulation of how we use a deadly weapon, when there are law-abiding gun owners all across the country who could hunt and protect their families and do everything they do under such regulations, doesn't make sense." He lamented without realising that these are the exact frustrations that the international community has when it comes to the killing of thousands of innocent lives of non-Americans.

Admittedly, physical violence such as bullying and abuse is reportedly on the rise especially due to the pressures of life, and schooling is hardly able to cope with the incidences. More worrying still is the rising number of suicides as demonstrated in many countries that place undue emphasis on education *per se* without regard to the aspects of social well-being.

It is of concern that one of the aspects of the six student aspirations, namely ethics and spirituality, seems to be falling by the wayside as the first wave of transformation envisaged in the Education Blueprint is coming to a close. It is difficult to imagine how the second wave can take off in a comprehensive manner, devoid of a full understanding of ethics and spirituality, let alone its effective implementation as part of transformed education in the future.

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