Provide opportunity for needy but deserving students

BY TEO CHIN KER

YEARS ago, as a Catholic High student, I attended a summer programme at the prestigious Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

There, I was exposed to an in-depth study of biology by way of animal dissections, field trips to dinosaur fossil sites and lively class discussions.

So, naturally, I am in favour of more overseas academic programmes for our students.

Exposure to new cultures is a great step towards a holistic education — a bit more useful than the rote-learning practised in so many of our schools today.

Students will also enjoy making friends with foreign students, crossing any cultural prejudices and barriers.

On my trip, I learnt that Americans are actually friendly and traditionally conservative — quite different from the portrayals of rampant debauchery and racism on TV.

But how does a school decide who goes on exchange programmes and who does not?

Often, I have seen that well-off students get preference — leading to disappointment among their poorer peers.

This is unfortunate, and I hope that the Ministry of Education's new $4.5 million fund will be used to help needy but deserving students go abroad.

However, I also hope that too much emphasis is not placed on exchange programmes and on those students who participate.

We have limited funds for educating our youth and most of the money should go towards our long-term goal of creating an optimum class experience, with smaller class sizes and better teachers capable of motivating even the weakest students to realise their potential.

The writer has a place to read economics at Singapore Management University

GROWING PAINS

Let's talk about student exchange programmes

Youngsters share their views on the Education Ministry's $4.5 million fund to help schools give students overseas exposure

BY DESMOND CHAN

I APPRECIATE the aims behind the new twinning fund, but I am concerned that some exchange programmes may be lacking in focus.

It would not do to spend good money on a trip which turns out to be more of a sightseeing vacation than a learning experience.

That would be a waste, and would also be unfair to the students who are not selected.

While it is well and good to get students to appreciate cultural diversity, and for schools to establish contacts with their foreign counterparts, the focus of the programme should be to give the youngsters an integrated learning experience.

The term "twinning" refers to a school pairing up with an overseas institution to conduct exchange programmes, usually lasting at least two weeks.

For many tertiary students, overseas study and internships occur concurrently during exchange programmes, and they are assessed on their job and study performance to ensure that they take the programme seriously.

Likewise, for primary and secondary school students, overseas trips should be properly structured with projects that involve interaction and active learning.

Also, those with the top grades should not always be the ones to go.

The writer is a third-year communications major student at Nanyang Technological University

Hopes high — fund will open cultural doors for many

THE newly set up school twinning fund will help students broaden their horizons and enable them to gain a global perspective of different issues.

I never went on an overseas exchange programme — it was always too costly for me. That's why I believe that this fund will come in handy to those who aspire to interact with different cultures and expose themselves to a different education system.

At Hwa Chong Institution, we often play host to students from various countries.

One — German student Jennifer Kroeger — even passed up the chance of studying in university a year before her peers to experience the lifestyle of a college student here.

We also get students from China and Taiwan, who come in at different periods of the year to participate in the institution's activities.

Our students, too, go overseas and learn a great deal.

Second-year student Bay Ming Jun, 17, said: "I managed to forge a firm friendship with a Taiwanese student. It was certainly an invaluable experience to go to Taiwan."

He was able to fork out the money required for the trip.

Now, the Ministry of Education's $4.5 million fund has fuelled the hopes of students like me.

But just a thought: The cream of the crop should be given priority, but please also give a chance to those who may not be that brilliant or rich.

We, too, will cherish the experience.

The writer is currently preparing for his A levels at Hwa Chong Institution.