

Raising the Bar

At the start of a new school year school principals around the world will no doubt talk about the importance of working hard and achieving good results. The principals will emphasise the need to pay attention to the teacher in class, to keep a tidy desk drawer, to complete homework and to revise thoroughly for tests. They will also mention the advantages of minimising the amount of television watched or computer games played or time spent maintaining contact with friends on social media.

I am sure that each principal has good intentions when they convey such messages and have the students' interests at heart. Whether the students are listening to such messages or they are willing to take any notice are very different matters. Too often we think that the messages we hear do not apply to us.

This morning I would like to talk about the importance of focusing on school work with the aim of not only doing well but really excelling in everything that you undertake.

This year's Form 6 will be the third group to take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (the HKDSE). The Form 6 students have spent the past two years working hard on their core subjects of English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies plus one or more elective. It is a long journey from Form 4 through to the DSE examinations although the Form 6s will say that the time has passed very quickly. Their thoughts are on which university they hope to attend and which course they would wish to undertake.

However, more young people are applying to universities in Hong Kong and overseas meaning that the competition is intense and the opportunity of getting into a university or course of your choice is becoming increasingly difficult. The marks required are often much higher than the minimum entrance requirements set by the universities. In the new DSE the minimum entrance requirement is a Level 3 in English and Chinese Language, a Level 2 in Mathematics and Liberal Studies, and a Level 2 in at least one elective. In reality, the levels required to actually gain a place are much higher. Indeed, I would say that you need at least a Level 4 in all subjects taken in the DSE and

for many popular faculties and courses the requirement will be Level 5, 5* or 5**.

The simple fact is that every boy in Form 4, 5 and 6 should be aiming for at least a Level 4 in each subject studied at school. Anything less might not be enough to secure a university degree pathway.

Last weekend I read an interesting story in the international media. American endurance swimmer, Diana Nyad, became the first person to swim the treacherous waters from the island country of Cuba to Florida in the USA. Nyad first came to international attention in 1975 when she swam the 45 kilometres around Manhattan Island, New York, in just under eight hours. In 1979 she swam the 165 kilometres from the Bahamas to Florida in 27.5 hours. On this occasion her swim was further and took longer - in fact, she swam the 177 kilometers, without stopping, in 53 hours. For those of you who dive into the swimming pool this Friday at the Swimming Gala heats, her accomplishment equated to swimming 3540 lengths of the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park Swimming pool in 2 days, 5 hours: non-stop. I challenge the SPC swim team members to do the same! If you take up this challenge and complete the task then I shall present you with a trophy and a certificate!

Unlike our local swimming pool, however, the swim from Cuba to Florida leaves swimmers at the mercy of storms, strong ocean currents, jellyfish and sharks. Diana Nyad's achievement was truly outstanding. What made it even more remarkable was that this was her fifth attempt. Her first try was in 1978. Miss Nyad turned 64 years of age just recently; she is only a few years older than me! When asked why she kept getting back into the water after four previously failed attempts, she said that it is important that you never give up and must continue until you have achieved your goal - no matter how long it takes. In her case, the dream took 25 years to come true.

For many of you, securing a place at university or swimming a great distance will require raising the bar. In both cases, your current performance might not be up to standard. How high do you want to reach? Simply achieving pass marks in Forms 1 to 3 should not be the aim of each boy. Maybe the aim for the junior boys should be to achieve a minimum of 70% in each subject rather like the boys in Forms 4 to 6 who should aim for at least a Level 4 in each subject.

In the case of Miss Diana Nyad she did not sit back after swimming around Manhattan Island. Rather she raised the bar and challenged herself to reach a

far greater goal. She has now entered the record books as one of the world's great long distance swimmers.

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