

CommentInsight & Opinion

Allow Hong Kong youth the space to dream big

Sky Siu says the dispiriting finding that most Hong Kong young people lack confidence in their ability to achieve goals is a wake-up call for society to empower them – by listening to their needs and views

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Sky Siu

“If you can dream it, you can do it.” Walt Disney’s famous words don’t seem to be resonating with young people in Hong Kong today. In a recent survey of nearly 1,100 people aged 18 to 30, 55 per cent said they do not have a dream or are still seeking one. In [another](#), four in five Hong Kong teenagers do not know how to achieve their goals or lack confidence in their abilities.

It’s sad to see; with a lack of direction, young people in Hong Kong are more vulnerable to high-risk behaviour.

We hear constantly that the narrow focus on academia and lack of diversity of future options limit the potential of youth today. While we recognise the importance of working hard at school, learning cannot just be focused on academic pursuits; holistic growth is equally essential to build character and values.

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Rather than giving our children and youth the room and support to dream about becoming a jazz musician, landscape photographer or graphic designer, we confine them to school work that would “benefit” their future. We need to recognise that there are other ways to develop talents, and every young person is different. Hong Kong is a modern society, so our attitudes and mindsets need to catch up and allow the younger generation to grow up more freely and happily.

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To do so, more needs to be done to strengthen existing programmes that develop young people’s talent and interests. Let’s go beyond extracurricular sports and programmes.

I believe that successful career development relies not only on skills but also values and personality traits. What is more, youth today are often criticised for being lazy or giving up easily – persistence and goal-setting may well empower our youth to take back control of their future.

International Youth Day falls on August 12, and this year’s theme is “Youth Building Peace”. Empowering them to reach their potential and encouraging them to contribute to society is crucial in building and sustaining peace.

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Having said that, social inclusion is a criterion for young people to be active contributors. It means allowing young people to participate in decision-making as well as having access to quality education, health care and basic services. History has shown that if we exclude youth from political, economic and social spheres and processes, the risk of conflict and violence may rise.

Today, people under 30 make up half the world’s population, but they are not always given an opportunity

to be part of the decision-making process. Let's do things differently in Hong Kong, and invite our young people to share their opinions and initiate change.

Sky Siu is executive director of the KELY Support Group

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The space to dream big