

RSOG LEADERSHIP FORUM

Leading the Slow Learners – My Journey

with

Vanesri Kasi

When : 5 February 2016
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Vanesri Kasi

About the Seminar

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn”. The said statement made by a prominent inventor hundreds of years ago may have a lot of truths and reflects the societal dynamics today. There are gaps at every level of the society that require practical interventions. Puan Vanesri Kasi saw the need to assist slow learners in school to catch up with their peers or otherwise the gap will never be addressed. Without a doubt, her pursuit is in line with the spirit of inclusiveness that the policymakers are professing, nationally and internationally. This Leadership Forum intends to explore the journey that Puan Vanesri Kasi of Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (T) Jalan Khalidi, Muar, Johor has gone through in closing the gaps at her level and within the ambit of her responsibility. Apart from her duty, what are the other motivations that drive her to date? What are the challenges faced along the way and how does she overcome them? How does she get her ideas? More often than not narratives from leaders like her could help to open doors of possibilities that all these while has been neglected or underestimated by others.

Summary

The term slow learner is commonly used by teachers and educationists in addressing students facing learning difficulties. These individuals can be classified as those pupils who are of limited intelligence, lack in understanding, comprehension and expression. Ms. Vanesri Kasi shared her journey at the RSOG Leadership Forum on how she provided her students the best possible opportunities to bridge the gap created by their peers and meet the challenges posed by the changing world. Her remedial teaching methods actually begin with understanding their problems. As teachers, they need to be conscious of the specific learning and personal problems that can cause a child to become an underachiever. Thus, the speaker takes a leading role and keeps the lines of communication open to effectively meet the learning needs of such students as she aims on helping slow learners not only in getting them to perform at grade level, but to make them perform at their level best.

In addition to educating the slow learners, the speaker initiated an open and free communication with students to facilitate authentic interpersonal relationships. She believes most of her students experienced various problems that prevent them from having focus on their studies. Therefore, she approached them by using humour to create a relaxed

environment which promotes discussion and learning that leads to adequate guidance and support. According to her, therapy is also an effective approach such as sensory therapy that is used to help calm the slow learners, help reinforce a desired behaviour, and help with transitions between activities. For example, the students will engage in various art activities such as writing words using rice, shaping objects with sand and listening through songs and playing with colours. These are the similar approaches used in Montessori method for young children at kindergarten schools. In educating the slow learners, besides fun learning, the repeat method was often stressed by the speaker. Re-teaching the content that was not learned earlier, games and fun activities, new learning techniques and practices help to eliminate deficiencies that the slow learner is known to have.

In sharing the teaching model that she applied in her teaching style, she utilized 5E's Instructional Model of Inquiry by Inquiry, developed by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) which was an instructional model of learning that demonstrates learners usually build or construct new ideas on top of their old ideas. Each of the 5 E's describes a phase of learning, and each phase begins with the letter "E": Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. The 5 E's allows students and teachers to experience common activities, to use and build on prior knowledge and experience, to construct meaning, and to continually assess their understanding of a concept. Moreover, she focused on narrative teaching method using story structure and problem based learning. This actually makes learning relevant for them by connecting it to their lives, and as it includes not only factual content but the pupil's positive feelings about what is learned to establish the basis for meaningful and autonomous learning. The integration of ICT helps the speaker in her teaching as the students gain knowledge and skills about using computers, giving ample opportunity to use electronic communication, and carefully integrating computer activities into the regular structure of the lesson.

Her winning formula was that she encourages her students to present their own projects together with the assistance of technology to help them understand their lessons better and build up their confidence. She believes the emotional impact of behaviour and culture can influence the learning process because it helps to instil in students a love for learning. When the teacher provides warmth, acceptance and empathy, they feel free to regard their emotions and personal meanings as legitimate content in learning. For instance, she encouraged them by praising them for being persistent in the face of challenges, or for taking responsibility for their work so that they can develop their intelligence through hard work. These students need special instructional pacing, frequent feedback, corrective instruction, and modified materials, all administered under conditions sufficiently flexible for learning to occur. She concluded the session by sharing the 7 habits of leadership by Stephen R. Covey that she can genuinely relate to her experience in leading the slow learners; 1) Value the important over the urgent to avoid the 'crazy busy' mentality 2) Focus on what matters most 3) Seek first to understand those you lead 4) Sharpen the saw ; The blades can be sharpened through classes and trainings 5) Begin with the end in mind means setting the team up for success from the start 6) Be a model for the work-life balance or well-being you wish to see in those you lead 7) Be proactive to lead far into the future.

Issues raised

1. A slow learner needs a class that is specially designed for them in dealing with the challenges of meeting their learning needs which are a variation in presentation methods, classroom climate and instructional. If this variation is not part of the lesson, these students may well create their own variety in ways that disrupt teaching ordinary students.
2. While it is common for children to face learning difficulties, it can be much harder for adults who are facing the same challenge. Learning difficulties faced by an adult can be addressed by letting them to explore the experience themselves rather than teaching them. For instance, try to get them involved in doing presentations or activities that actually reflect the content of the lessons.
3. In the era of information technology today, sharing knowledge and information, communicating effectively, building learning communities and creating a culture of professionalism in schools is crucial. These are the key responsibilities of all educational leaders. However, if teachers themselves are not able to integrate technology seamlessly into the curriculum in the classroom and make it work, then they might not be able to create more value of learning for the students.
4. In a bigger group of slow learners, the speaker recommended the “Blank Page” module. This module is based on the do-it-yourself method. The module should be shorter, varied, repeated in various forms with more hands-on assignments. On assignments, the speaker recommended formative assessment, which is a form of assessment conducted during the course instead of after it has been completed. The students also need more time, more repetition, and often, more resources from the teachers. Regarding the environment, she stressed the importance of ensuring there is minimal distraction and the responsibility of the teachers to ensure there is a change of setting to promote attentiveness and to form a student-teacher relationship. In addition, it is important for the teachers to allow break time.
5. To help a slow learner score a good grade is a challenge that reflects the quality of a good teacher. They actually need to be led by heart and love. Besides good emotional and cognitive support, teachers need to be engaged in higher human skills, and be patient with the students. Teachers also need to interact with care more often, pay equal attention to slow learners in class, and also maintain a friendly relationship to help them to develop themselves.

About the Speaker

Ms. Vanesri Kasi is a remedial education teacher who received a first class honours degree and is teaching students aged from 7 to 12. Though just 25 years old, she has achieved outstanding results in reintegrating children, particularly slow learners, into mainstream schools. One of her methods consists of asking students to work on individual projects, starting with a proposal. Once they have finished their project in line with the protocol, they present it in front of the other students in assembly, thereby gaining in self-confidence. Her

methods have succeeded in sending 14 remedial students back to mainstream classes in just eight months, and several of them have gone on to outperform their classmates. She is one of the finalists of the Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Prize Award 2016.

Contact

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at programmes@rsog.com.my