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Pathway to positive outcomes

A teacher gives her take on the importance of instilling good values and tapping children's talents and skills, as these define their character.

By GOH MUN TING

THE primary school that I teach at – SJK (C) Lee Min in Port Klang, Selangor – has an enrolment of 121 pupils. They are a contented lot and can be both attentive and playful during lessons.

Being the English language head in a small school surrounded by a homogeneous community, getting my pupils to learn English is a daunting task.

They lack the exposure though the community lives approximately 15 minutes from the busiest port in Malaysia, approximately an hour's drive to the state capital. English is not spoken very frequently within the 2km radius of the school.

Primary school pupils spend 380 minutes daily in school. They read, write and have knowledge imparted to them on various subjects. They are constantly fed with facts five days a week and 38 schooling weeks a year.

In the six years of primary schooling, most pupils are equipped with literacy skills and knowledge before they move on to secondary schools.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar recently said that graduates make up 161,000 of the current 400,000 unemployed in the country.

Bank Negara has attributed this "pandemic" to the fact that our graduates lack communication and problem-solving skills.

Malaysian graduates are said to have little self-confidence and interactive skills and many don't display leadership or management traits. Many graduates are also "not job ready".

As a teacher, I've decided to address this problem in my own way with the pupils in school.

The British philosopher Herbert Spencer said: "The great aim of education is not knowledge but action." With this in mind, I decided to make learning more authentic and stimulating.

I have brought in activities such as role playing in a marketplace.

During the exercise, pupils learn to sell and buy goods, hire or work for their

friends at the "stalls" and learn to earn and make profit. By doing so, they apply their knowledge of English, Mathematics, Moral Education and Civics as well as their soft-skills.

My charges enjoy such activities as it allows them to take on a more "adult" role. In one recent game, it was the son of a local grocery shop owner who made the highest profit.

In this case, observing his parents and his daily interaction with customers at the shop must have helped him.

In the publication *Overview for Authentic Learning for the 21st Century*, Dr Marilyn Lombardi mentioned that learners look for connectivity and practices between what is being imparted to them and exploring new context.

Authentic learning deals with real world relevance where learners tackle different problems.

Learners apply their interdisciplinary perspectives which allow them to see the relationship between their learning in the classroom to the real world.

This learning method provides pupils with the opportunity to constantly engage in metacognition, which I strongly believe is vital in getting our pupils to be critical thinkers. This wasn't my only attempt at teaching out of the classroom.

I began to suggest more field trips for my pupils, so that they gain more exposure and more engagement with real-life activities.

During a school trip to Kidzania, the pupils learnt the importance of learning English outside the classroom.

The engagement I was looking forward to in that trip was the real-life interaction with the staff to attain information for various purposes.

That day, the children saw the hidden potential in some of their friends.

The new boy who had just come to our school had become popular overnight because of his fluency in English.

Others discovered that the class clown had other talents – he was a great team leader and problem solver.