

MALAYSIA

‘The Role of Special Classes, Resource Rooms and Other Arrangements in Regular Schools - Meeting Individual Educational Needs while Forming a Cohesive Society’

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1. INTRODUCTION

Special education in Malaysia provides educational opportunities for pupils with special needs such as those with visual impaired, hearing impaired as well as children with learning disabilities. To meet special educational needs of the individual children, Special Education Division, Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided educational opportunities and facilities through the following programs:

- Program for Visually Impaired Students
- Program for Hearing Impaired Students
- Special Education Integrated Program (in regular schools)

Through the programs listed above, students with special educational needs are enrolled in either in Special Education Schools (Primary and Secondary Level) or Primary and Secondary Regular Schools according to their disabilities. Most of the students with hearing impaired and visually impaired are segregated from mainstream schools and learn in special education schools for the deaf and blind. However, most students with learning disabilities learn in special education classes in regular schools under Special Education Integrated Program.

2. SPECIAL EDUCATION INTEGRATED PROGRAM

The main aim of special education integrated program is to ensure that students with special needs can learn in a least restrictive environment. This enables the students to learn in a normal learning environment and enhance social integration between children with special needs and their mainstream peers in as many school's activities as possible. Thus, they will also be able to develop their social and communication skills effectively.

All the special classes in regular schools are equipped with appropriate teaching and learning facilities to ensure that the students can learn in a conducive learning environment equitable to their peers in the mainstream school. Special rooms and special activities are also provided to help the students develop well physically and mentally. These are as a result of good collaboration between the MOE and other agencies such as the NGOs, private companies and organizations. This paper therefore, intends to look at the functions of the special classes, resource rooms or any special activities run in our regular schools and how they are utilized to meet special educational needs of individual children.

3. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS

3.1 Special Resource Room

One of the special rooms designed in Malaysian special education integrated program is a multi sensory room called Snoezelen. Snoezelen is a multi sensory room which provides multitude of opportunities for people with sensory impairments. It became a realization as a result of smart partnership with a private company namely Procter and Gamble Sdn. Bhd. involving a cost up to RM 206,000.00. It was developed in January 2008 and for the time being only one school in Malaysia has such a room that is Sekolah Kebangsaan Presint 9(2), Putrajaya. It is fully-equipped with all the relevant equipments to stimulate the sensory organs in the body (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch senses).

This room facilitates the students and any individuals in various aspects such as increasing the concentration ability, increasing self awareness, enhancing greater social interaction and communication skills, increasing adaptive behavior and increasing self morale. It has many beneficial effects on the students and it is undeniably worth the cost spent though there are still rooms for improvement in the aspects of support service from experts in various fields.

3.2 Pre-vocational Activities

Malaysia, specifically the Ministry of Education (MOE) is committed to the concept of “total rehabilitation” which entails a multi-disciplinary approach. This includes medical, social and vocational rehabilitation. Since then the Ministry has been actively moving ahead with various policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of the disabled children. Thus, students with special educational needs in special integrated program in our regular schools who are not academically inclined are exposed to various types of pre-vocational activities. Through these activities, students are expected to be physically and emotionally developed towards the optimum level and will be able to lead meaningful lives after 10 to 12 years studying in schools. In other words, the activities provide them with vocational skills to make them marketable and employable in the “real world”. The following are examples of special activities and arrangement of classes carried in two regular schools which have special education integrated program.

A. SMK Panji, Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

Pre-vocational activities to be highlighted in this paper are such as the activities carried out in SMK Panji, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. SMK Panji is a regular secondary school located at the capital of the state of Kelantan comprising more than one thousand mainstream students and about fifty mainstream teachers. The special education class is opened in one of the school's block consisting of 42 special educational needs students of different category of disability such as Down Syndrome, Autisme, Cerebral Palsy, Dyslexia, ADHD, Noonan Syndrome and Fragile X Syndrome.

The efforts taken by special education teachers receive full support from the Ministry as it is proven that the students' behavior and development shows great improvement after the

implementation of various activities. For example, the Animal Therapy corner which is built at the end corner of the special education class is proven leaves positive impacts on the students through the therapeutic relationship established between the animals bred (chickens, rabbits and quails) and the students. Other special centres or stations set up for the class are given special names such as MC Hammer Centre (carpentry activities), Master of 'Cangkul' Centre (planting and landscape activities), Launderette Centre (laundry and self-managerial activities), Cut and Trim Station (hair care activities), Garden Spa Station (facial treatment, manicure and pedicure treatment), Art Attack Station (handicraft activities) and Style and Design Station (sewing and designing activities).

The outcomes from the activities are very encouraging where students actively participate in all activities carried out following the special timetable prepared by the teacher. Due to positive responses from the teachers and encouraging development in the students, they have become source of inspirations for many other special education teachers.

B. SMK Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya, Selangor

SMK Bandar Sunway is a regular secondary school located in an urban area namely Petaling Jaya, right next to the city of Kuala Lumpur. The special education integrated program in this school was initiated in 1998. The introduction of vocational subjects in this program began with the establishment of the training bakery cum café in 2003 which established craft and various functional skills. To date, the pre-vocational and life skills training program teach the students vocational subjects such as cooking, gardening, arts and crafts, home craft, bakery etc.

With the teachers' efforts and hard work, special rooms and arrangement have been set up to implement various vocational or life skills training. These include a cafeteria for cooking and serving training, well set up kitchen to learn house keeping skills, gardening area, arts and crafts centre and so forth. All the arrangements are made possible with good collaboration with parents and private agencies which portrays a good example of a cohesive society. Parents are involved in activities such as fund-raising projects, organizing local and oversea excursions and helping teachers in bakery and outdoor activities.

The most exciting arrangement made by the teachers and parents is the 3C Employment / Training Centre Program whereby students are exposed to real working environment and experiences. Through this program, students who have completed the extended education program and fulfill certain set criteria are attached to working places such as restaurants, hotel, pet shops and shopping malls located around Sunway. It is an effective program as students are able to work and at the same time being trained in real-life situation.

5. CONCLUSION

All the efforts taken by the MOE are to help achieve the National Mission towards achieving the developed nation status by the year 2020 - developing human capital with first class mentality using the people-centered capacity building approach. Thus, our commitment at improving the quality of life

among the disabled will continue beginning with children with special needs by providing them with quality education. Quality education involves not only academic subjects but also skills development that can help them survive in the challenging 'real world' in the future.

In realizing our vision, there are challenges that we have to face. Some issues arise in running the special rooms and activities need to be addressed meticulously. Budgets, expertise, teachers and school administrators' commitment and support services are some of the issues raised. However, it is worth acknowledged that the Ministry's and the teachers' endless commitment to collaborate with other related agencies or institutions has helped ease the challenges encountered. Continuous support from all parties or cohesive society will help realize the national Vision 2020 for the betterment of the children with special needs. Children with special needs have the right to quality education and lifestyle as they too, are an asset and part of the human capital of the country. Respect, tolerance and the spirit of working together despite of the differences are the key factors in attaining success in forming a cohesive society.

<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Comment:

Resource class sponsored by private sections is a positive aspect.

Q1: Malaysia is doing things in a different way. In the presentation, 3 categories of disabilities were mentioned. In the learning difficulty group, it is amazing there are so many varieties of disabilities. How do you manage all these as a group.

A1: 1) They all came under the category of learning difficulty. But, some modification is going to be happened by the Ministry. In inclusive education programs, there is provision of identifying the problems of particular students through a pull out system.

2) NGOs are also involved to serve the children.

3) We are trying our best on this regard.

4) Programs for multiple disabilities will be tried out within regular school.

Q2: Concept of total rehabilitation (to clarify).

A2: This is a very good concept. We try to develop individualized education plan.

Vocational and income -generating programs are also introduced. (ex. bakery)

These make people independent.

Q3: The role of NGOs, have you funded them?

A3: 1) Basically, registered NGO get funds from government.

2) They also do some fund - raising activities.

- 3) NGOs try to create awareness among public. Showing they are also part of society.
- 4) Early intervention
- 5) NGOs are run by professionals providing some specific programs with their own funds.
- 6) Government also works with NGOs.

Q4: What is the national strategy concerning special classes and resource rooms to promote special needs education in the future?

- A4:** 1) There is provision of inclusive classroom. We are usually eager to open up more special class in regular schools and getting support from professional NGOs. There is already an active plan for Down's syndrome, reading impaired children and others. This is time for Malaysia to go in detail.
- 2) We are looking forward to doing some challenges.