

8. Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

1. Pupils comments

From the pupils comments regarding the Caring School Programme it can be seen that weak and slow students respond well if they are provided with appropriate and satisfying school experiences. These weak students do not fit into the “average” or “normal” part of the school’s programme. Therefore a programme like the Caring School Programme which specially caters for the needs of these students enable them to relate meaningfully to school life.

2. Learning Materials

What type of learning material is best suited for slow learners? From the Caring School Programme it can be concluded that learning materials selected should be adjusted to suit the needs of these slow learners. Basic reading material from the lower primary school curriculum and other materials from the newspaper were taken and compiled to form the “teaching materials”, of the programme. The students felt comfortable with these as they were able to master the materials and were able to do the simple exercises set before them. They also responded well to the quizzes and tests that were given. It must be emphasised at this point that the aim of the reading materials was basic mastery of basic needs and concepts.

The teacher was hoping for participation rather than academic excellence. Thus the objective was achieved because as stated before the materials given were from the lowest level of competence. This gave the students a positive experience that enhanced their self esteem compared with all the negative experiences they had always encountered in connection with their studies. These reading materials is not a substitute for their curriculum. These slow learners will probably never master the school curriculum for their appropriate Form.

3. Curriculum

Next I would like to relate the Caring School Programme with certain points regarding curriculum in the section on "Literature Review". To be effective the school curriculum must reflect the characteristics of the students for whom it is designed and so the people responsible for the curriculum should be truly familiar with the students so as to be aware of their basic characteristics. Unfortunately it can be seen from the students of the Caring School Programme that the school curriculum does not reflect the characteristics of these students. In fact what the school curriculum has done is to effectively marginalize these students into a category of students who cannot be helped.

The school curriculum should also take into consideration the educational, vocational and social prognosis of the individuals. Here again a study of the students of the Caring School Programme shows that the future of these slow learners have not been taken into consideration. No provisions have been made in the school curriculum to ensure that they have the kinds of experiences that will enable them to meet the demands of the society in which they will be living in as adults. In this context it can be seen that programmes like the Caring School Programme provides them with positive experiences upon which they can continue to build. Examples of these kinds of positive experiences are when they helped to organise the distribution of food and drinks as part of the activities of the programme. In normal school situations attention was focused on them and they were "receivers" but in the Caring School Programme they were "givers". It can thus be said that where the experiences of the school curriculum has failed them, the experiences of the Caring School Programme has helped and encouraged them and made them effective contributors in the school situation.

Another part in connection with the school curriculum in that it should reflect the environment of the individual in order that he will learn to live as effective a life as possible within the environment. Curriculum should have elements of the life the student is living and from the culture of which he is a part. By relating the students to the Caring

School Programme with this aspect of the school curriculum, it can be seen that the school curriculum does reflect the environment of the individual to a certain extent. After all the curriculum is Malaysian based and draws from the historical and cultural aspects of Malaysian Society. However no society is homogenous. Within each society there exists pockets of sub-groups with their own cultural norms and values. The slow learners of the Caring School Programme constitute one such sub group. Therefore the school curriculum which is based on the concept of the culture of the majority does not apply to them. The following point should clarify the point that represents all sub groups.

From a study of the slow learners in the Caring School Programme it was found that some of them have adjusted problems because of the failures and frustrations they have encountered while growing up. There is nothing they can do to effectively change these situations because of their inability to meet the demands of their school and home environment have resulted in them having behaviour problems. The majority of the students in the Caring School Programme are from "squatter areas". The people of this areas subscribe to values which are not the normal values we find in "average" Malaysian homes. Though their home life can be described as "adequate" they find it difficult to adjust to the traditional school. They need appropriate educational programmes and experiences. The Caring School Programme is a good example of what can be done for them.

4. Home and Environment

It was found that the homes (with the exception of Ooi and Nagisthiran it can be said that the homes of the interviewees had insufficient physical space) of the other interviewers were crowded, inadequate and contained too few facilities to promote academic achievement and personal development in a wholesome manner. It was a simple question of too many people and too few resources to study and to indulge in creative activities. The center of the home was the television. The lives of the interviewees and

their family members revolved around the programmes in the television. So great was the hold of the television that it appeared to dictate their very lifestyle. Meals, for example, were eaten while watching television programmes. Social conversation and family discussion were cut short because family members were busy watching television. Another insidious effect of television watching was the change in tastes and cultural practices. Tamil movies aired over television became a means of escapism by which the interviewees and their families escaped from the harsh realities of their lives. Cultural and religious practices and values eroded under the onslaught of commercialism and “yellow” culture as displayed in the television sets. Romantic love was glorified and the sense of responsibility and commitment vital to maintain stability in family life in general and in marriage in particular, was entirely left out.

5. Cultural Capital

Another point to note was the lack of “cultural capital” in the form of books, magazines and educational materials in the homes of the interviewees. None of the homes had English or Malay newspapers. The students were ignorant of current events with the exception of those that appeared in the News broadcasts in the television which they viewed as “intermission” in between tamil/chinese movies. This means that informal means of education other than through text books was unavailable to the subjects. This is a great disadvantage.

6. Environment

Most of the subjects live in Kg. Baru. The environment in which the homes of the subjects are located, leaves much to be desired. Kg. Baru is a squatter area, marginally located in between development areas. Water and electricity supply is provided and basic amenities like garbage collection and sanitation is available in this area. However the whole area is wedged between high rise commercial buildings and exists in the shadow of

development all around. Nature with all its splendor and freshness has been totally wiped out. The whole area is also beset by a number of social ills. Illicit trade in liquor is widespread. according to the subjects deaths from consuming “samsu” was and occasional event. The students have learnt to survive in the midst of all these negative influences. This itself is a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit and the vitality of youth.

7. Family Life

Except for Murali whose father died of a heart attack, all the interviewees have complete families. The fathers are in their forties and the mothers are in their late thirties or early forties. For almost all of them education stopped at primary level and only Ooi Wei's mother had studied till Form III. In real terms this means that these parents are unable to guide and inspire their children into achieving academic excellence. They are vaguely aware of the importance of education and they know that educated people live better lives than them. They want their children to be educated so that they can live a more comfortable and easy life than their parents. However they are unable to guide their children in concrete ways. They try to push their children towards academic excellence by “scolding” or even beating. They are good providers and take the responsibility of parenthood seriously. All the children interviewed say that their parents provide for their needs though they do not have enough money for luxuries. They are basically loving and caring parents without skills and talents. It is recommended in situations like these that the school authorities take the initiative to call the parents and meet them to discuss how they can work together for the mutual benefit of both school and students. This is one area of partnership that is overlooked in most school situations. In fact it is one of the weakness of the Caring School Programme that the influence and power of parents was not adequately harnessed and properly utilized. A very effective partnership could have been formed.

8. Hobbies and Interests

All the interviewees had hobbies and interests ranging from reading, playing football, jogging and just being with friends. None of the hobbies led to the development of a skill or talent. The hobby was an end in itself and did not lead to much improvement in the academic field and here again parents involvement in the Caring School Programme could have made a difference. Murali for example, is passionate about football as a game but does not even own a football of his own. Very little is done by school authorities to monitor activities of students during after school hours. Though constraints of time and other factors may not enable the school authorities to do much, a little could have been achieved to develop the non-academic aspects of the students of the school and the respective families had worked together. This would have enhanced the self-esteem of the students and would have moved them forward to become better functioning individuals.

9. Daily Routine

The daily routine of three of the students was traced and it was found that all of them are early risers. In fact it is interesting to note that none of the interviewees have been caught comming late to school. They are invariably punctual. Murali rises at 5 am. to prepare himself for school. Saraswati is also an early riser who gets up at 5 am. They appear to be able to cope with their lives but in a very structural way. Their lives are so very predictable. Even a cursory glance at their daily routine shows how fixed, how structured their lives are.

There are two dangers in a situation like this. The first is that they may be lulled into a false sence of security because their lives are structured. They may think that they are effective. They are so busy moving from one activity to another that they may think that being busy is being effective.

The second danger which actually follows the first is that there is hardly any room for the sudents to be proactive, creative and independent. Their lives are too fixed, even

their play-time is scheduled and they follow this routine without a break. Any departure from the said pattern is interpreted as disobedience and they are soundly punished. So it can be seen that these student live in a set framework in which there is not much room for creativity and for being their normal independent teenage selves.

In these circumstances it is recommended that the school should communicate with parents regarding the actual needs of teenagers especially their emotional and social requirements.

10. Monthly Test Marks

The Monthly Test Marks for March shows that the selected students are all weak in their studies. The Caring School Programme has made no improvement in their academic standing. But then again it must be remembered that the objectives of the programme was not academic excellence but rather participation in activities that may be termed “academic” but at a very simple level. This participation left the students with a sense of achievement that at least there was something they could do academically and be praised for it rather than be condemned and ridiculed as was their previous experience.

11. The teacher

The teacher is the key element that made this programme work. The teacher who was almost solely responsible for this programme was Pn. Margaret James. She is endowed with the gift of bringing out the best in people. She is dynamic and cheerful and yet gentle and firm in her approach to the students. As an experienced teacher and especially as a counsellor she has studied the students thoroughly. The students in the Caring School Programme are “rejects” in school. Yet the teacher saw them as essentially human with a potential for growth and fulfillment.

During interview sessions with the teacher it was found that she had a solid philosophy of education and firm beliefs in the role of the teacher as an educator and

friend. As a language teacher she was able to verbalise the unspoken needs and aspirations of the students. Being skilled in music and singing (she is also the choir mistress of the school) she was able to relate to the students in a "fun filled" way to which they responded joyfully and without their usual reserve. In this context it must be said that she was truly non-judgemental and accepted the students as they were without demanding conditions which they could not meet. It is recommended that teachers of this calibre be put in charge of programmes of this nature. However this is more easily said than done because these teachers are rare.

12. A last word on the students

The most useful findings about the students was that their ideas about themselves were quite different from the ideas their peers and teachers had about them. From the Bledsoe Self Concept Scale which was administered to them it was found that they had a very positive picture of themselves. For example they considered themselves friendly, obedient, honest and brave most of the time. Though they were practically 'outcasts' in the school situation they did not see themselves as such. They led wholesome lives with complete families that looked after them and provided for them as best as they could. They were useful members of these families and contributed their labour to fulfill household chores and to make themselves useful, accepted and wanted. They had friends and their own social circle. They participated in games and hobbies and had the television to entertain them. Thus these students emerge as wholesome and unfazed by the rejection of those who categorize students by their academic achievements alone. In addition it may be said that their participation and involvement with the Caring School Programme further enhanced their self worth and had the added bonus of implanting an element of love, care and kindness in their lives.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be reiterated that the Caring School Programme was one of the most successful school programme carried out by S.M.K. Subang Jaya I in 1997. The different aspects of the programme has been presented in the Research Report and it is hoped that it will be emulated by others for their own benefit.