

TEACHING CAN BE TOUGH

and so are you!

As educators, we encounter different types of students. We try our level best to prepare our lessons to fit our learners' needs. We may have to think out of the box, and painstakingly prepare our lessons, to ensure that our students are effectively engaged and achieve the goals set for them. However, at times, we cannot avoid the feeling that we have failed.



By Agaisteen Rebecca Shalinah
DAS Educational Therapist &
Associate Lecturer, DAS Academy



HOW DO WE MEASURE FAILURE?

Well, I personally feel that failure is subjective; and, perspectives can be changed if we look at the situation from a different angle. So the intention of my article is to encourage fellow educators and parents and to remind them that each and every single one of us is doing a wonderful job in supporting our learners. This article is meant to encourage those who feel that way and to remind them to see a success in every failure.

I felt that sharing my experience; specifically, an experience with one of my students, will encourage educators or even parents who encounter similar situations.

DAS INTENSIVE REMEDIATION PROGRAMME

I was assigned a student under Intensive Remediation (IR) recently. IR is a support and monitoring system undertaken by the Main Literacy Programme (MLP) Educational Advisors (EAs). This system provides extra support to Educational Therapists (EdTs) with challenging students. Students who face significant struggles with literacy at the foundation level, severe behavioural challenges which impede learning and the learning of other students and a combination of both where students' literacy and their behavioural challenges affect learning to a large extent, are recommended for this class. This class is usually smaller and has between 1-3 students. Educational Therapists are provided support from EAs and they will maintain action plans set for a semester in order to achieve goals.

I felt that sharing my experience; specifically, an experience with one of my students, will encourage educators or even parents who encounter similar situations.

MY STUDENT ON INTENSIVE REMEDIATION

Gilly* (*not her real name) became my student at the end of 2017 and I would teach her on a 1-1 basis. A week prior to my lessons with Gilly, I was informed about her profile. The following will define why she was on our Intensive Remediation Programme at DAS.

ABOUT GILLY

Gilly was placed into the Children's Home when she was 4 when her Father, a single parent, was diagnosed with cancer. As a result of this, Gilly had multiple caregivers and foster families. She was forced to adapt to changes at a very young age. With changing caregivers and case workers over time she had very little trust in anyone and did not attach to anyone easily. This caused her to have very little friends at the Home as well as in school.

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Marked difficulties in her learning were observed. She had poor reading, spelling and word recognition. She had a short attention span and was easily distracted from her tasks, therefore, she took a long time to complete tasks and had difficulty remaining engaged on academic tasks. She attended the DAS Preschool programme where it was highlighted by her DAS Preschool Educational Therapist that she was a challenging student with behavioural issues.

When she was in Primary 1, she was suspended from school as she had hurt another student. The teachers also found it very difficult to handle her temper. During her suspension the Home made alternative school arrangements and she was placed back into her old preschool. When she re-joined her school again she was also enrolled into the DAS Main Literacy Programme (MLP). Gilly attends DAS twice a week for 1 hour lessons. Trust me; these are the most challenging and emotional 2 hours of my week.

DAS MAIN LITERACY PROGRAMME

During Gilly's first lesson with me, she refused to enter the classroom. After much convincing, she managed to enter with her caregiver. She was very reluctant to speak or do any activity. Unfortunately, after 10 minutes she walked out and refused to continue.

This pattern repeated for weeks. I stepped into my classroom feeling hopeful each day, but she threw tantrums, shouted out nasty things and sometimes even hurt the people around her physically. However, I motivated myself to try harder and not to give up on her easily.

MAKING A HOME VISIT

I visited her at her home to get to know her better and hopefully to gain her trust. And yes, it did work. She was delighted to have me at her home. She showed me around and became more communicative. And finally, after about 6 weeks of trying, she finally decided to enter my classroom voluntarily, without much convincing or the struggle.

That was the first hurdle that we overcame together. Then it was time to face the second hurdle. She was inattentive and avoided tasks that involved reading and writing. That meant that I was unable to do much with her using our lesson plan. I came up with very simple activities, just to engage her. She was not able to remain focused and would frequently walk around the class or the centre.

I found it difficult to engage her in academic work apart from the fact that she was getting closer to me. I decided to look at it in a positive way. A girl who did not even want to enter the classroom was now able to communicate quite openly with me. This was already an achievement to me. However, I still felt dissatisfied that I was not able to complete my planned lessons with her. I was not able to see any progress in her literacy skills; which is the main aim of the programme.

Over time things were starting to get better. She was able to complete at least 50% of the planned lesson. She even started writing and reading with some help. I felt very motivated looking at the little progress that she was making. During this period, I was also in close contact with her home.

SETBACKS AND BAD DAYS

Unfortunately things did not continue to improve, her father's health deteriorated and he was placed into palliative care. Gilly was worried about the uncertainty of her future and as she was not mature enough to understand her situation. This impacted on her behaviour.

She started to show disinterest in everything again. She refused to do anything, and she hardly spoke to anyone. Things got even harder as it was all back to square one again. She refused to enter the classroom and would only enter when she was assured that there will be no writing involved in the lesson.

During one of her lessons, she became very agitated and had a tantrum that was destructive to the classroom, the learning centre and also to DAS staff. Her caregiver was called but no one was able to console her. She eventually calmed herself down after about 2 hours and she safely left the centre with her caregiver.



AN EDUCATION PLAN FOR GILLY

After that particular incident, a discussion was set up between DAS and the caregivers to agree on an educational plan for Gilly. After a long discussion, the decision to retain her in MLP was made. Special arrangements were made to amend the lesson requirements. Her lessons were simplified to encourage her and to keep her focused on learning.

She is still in the programme with DAS. She has also shown slight improvements in her behaviour. However, it takes a lot of hard work and patience to help this little girl. But we are reminded that as teachers, what we do may have a far reaching impact and so, we keep at it.

YES! TEACHING CAN BE CHALLENGING

I wanted to take this opportunity to share my experience with the rest as I was quite discouraged by these incidents. It made me blame myself quite frequently. Every single time Gilly acted up, I blamed myself for failing as an educator. I had many ups and downs in my journey with her. Nothing was consistent, and every day seemed like it was not going anywhere. I blamed myself for not being able to help this student,

BUT, WE TRY OUR BEST!

But then, I realised that some things are beyond our control. As educators and parents, we try our level best to help our learners.

However, there are many other factors that may hinder their learning. One great influence is the family. Many students whom I have worked with tend to come from broken families. Though some are able to overcome that obstacle and perform well in school, many are not able to do so without help. As educators, we can support them as much as we can. But blaming ourselves for every single failure that we see is not going to help any one of us. We are doing a wonderful job and I feel that a slight improvement is a great encouragement for us. We should not give up easily and keep trying till we get somewhere. We don't have to aim high for the sky, but if our students feel safe and benefit from us even in the slightest way, then we may attain satisfaction as educators.

With that I would like to say thank you to every single teacher and parent out there for not giving up on your children. You are doing a great job and you will continue to do so.

*The most important element
in the failure equation is
your personal commitment to
keep trying.*

~ Catherine Pulsifer

**BE A PART OF THE
DAS PARENTS'
SUPPORT GROUP**

Benefits of DAS Parents' Support Group (PSG):

Be more engaged

As a PSG member, you are more likely to be an informed and involved parent. You will also be building rapport with educators and supporting DAS's initiatives.

Be part of a network

We understand that parenting a child with learning differences is challenging. The PSG provides a platform for you to share ideas, concerns and experiences with other parents.

Increase your knowledge

Gain valuable experiences and grasp new opportunities, to support your child more effectively.

Make a difference

Provide DAS with feedback to make positive recommendations for change in our organisation.

Be a role model

By becoming a PSG member, you will demonstrate the importance you place on education and enhance your bond with your child.

**If you would like to join the PSG,
please contact the Centre Managers.**



www.facebook.com/groups/dasparents