

Special situations require Special educators!

It has been almost a year since our lives have been transformed into a digital one. Family gatherings became video calls; reflective team meetings became Zoom and “Microsoft” team meetings. Everything has turned upside down that we forgot how to interact when we ‘accidentally’ run into people.

For educators, the dilemma becomes more complicated: throughout this exceptional phase, how are we going to create and build a bond with the learners, teach them, accompany them, and be there for them remotely?

I had the opportunity to accompany three student teachers - future special educators - as they go through their training in an inclusive school where I head the Upper Elementary and Intermediate divisions. Since the first meeting, I was reflecting on how challenging would it be for these young students to undergo this training remotely!

As time passed and their final appraisal arrived, I was astonished with the outcome! These student teachers, day after day, session after session, went above and beyond, paving the way to the learners’ hearts and minds. During these sessions, I witnessed the exceptional bond they were sharing with the learners: choosing the themes and activities, targeting their interests, taking into consideration their weaknesses and fears; interacting as if they were all sitting in one room.

Consequently, a question crossed my mind, during a time of social distancing, what is the importance of maintaining a sense of social connection?

Indeed, humans are a profoundly social species; their drive to connect with others is embedded in genes. Connecting with others is more important than one might think. Social connection can lower anxiety and depression and lead to higher self-esteem. It has a significant effect on the skills and competencies that students can learn, retain, and apply. The actual situation requires a daily adaption to a whole new system of learning, socialization, and interaction. And who is more able to plan and implement adaptations than a special educator?

Integrating kids with special needs in society and empowering them have never been that hard. As adaptation stands in the core of our practice, should it be lessons, approaches, tools, tests, framework... It is our duty, now more than ever, to adhere to our goals and mission as special educators to support children with special needs to overcome this difficult period and to motivate them to persevere, learn and excel despite these difficult circumstances and distance learning.

Watching these student teachers transforming a virtual call into a living classroom with all its components, made me realize that special situations require Special educators...

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