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Collaboration among teachers a key factor



WHEN the Education Ministry announced that the SPM results would be delayed by two weeks due to a technical glitch, it simply translated into an additional two weeks of anxiety for students, parents and teachers.

Given the importance of the exam and how the results determine and charter the future of students, the anxiety was understandable.

Schools were a hive of activity on March 16, the day the results were finally released. A close friend of mine remarked that waiting for the results outside the school hall was like waiting for the arrival of a newborn outside a maternity ward!

The performance of schools nationwide almost always shows the same outcomes. Year in, year out, almost the same schools come out tops at the district, state and national levels.

While acknowledging factors like feeder schools and quality of students, one important aspect that contributes significantly towards excellence among students is teachers working collectively and collaboratively as a professional team. In teaching cycles, this kind of collaborative network is known as Professional Learning Community (PLC).

I have had the opportunity to work closely with teachers to help them become more competent and effective. I observed that schools which produce excellent results are those in which the teachers share collective responsibility and work together as one cohesive unit. These teachers meet regularly, share expertise and experience, and work together to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students in a very healthy and interactive working environment. The school administrators are supportive and work closely with teachers to promote healthy interaction and collaboration.

PLC, which is relatively new to Malaysia, has been in place in developed nations most notably in Japan for a long time. It is a bottom-up approach which is continuous and warrants action research to identify and find solutions to problematic learning areas or learning difficulties of students. It promotes collaboration among teachers and focuses on student outcomes, depending on the specific needs of students in a particular school.

The subject matter and skills across the curriculum are all inter-linked and intertwined, and teachers face a herculean task in completing the syllabus requirements and helping students develop the desired skills.

With the advancements in the fields of education and technology, and the demands of the 21st century learners, teachers can no longer work effectively as individuals. They need to work collaboratively as a team to ensure continued intellectual growth of their students. The learning difficulties of students must be tackled at the earliest possible time, through timely and effective interventions. And, this is best done when teachers engage as a team in a professional learning community through collaborative tools like Lesson Study, Learning Walks, Teacher Sharing Sessions and Peer Coaching.

Simply put, no man is an island. In the best interests of students and to help schools achieve par excellence results, teachers have to work collaboratively as a cohesive professional community, which strives and thrives to ensure all students receive a quality education.

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