

Voice behind the mask

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All it took was some coaxing to make an eight-year-old come out of her shell.

NO ONE in class had ever heard Nur Qashidah Nosli's voice for she hardly spoke. The eight-year-old never engaged in any conversation with her classmates, a worrying trait that her teacher Hazlina Abdul Hamid had observed.

The SK Tok Pelita, Kampung Gajah, Perak, pupil's lack of verbal contact during lessons with the others in class, was also noticed by Carmen Reynecke, a native speaker programme mentor, who was assigned to the school by SMR HR Group.

The native speaker programme was initiated by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to improve English in primary schools as part of the Upholding Bahasa Malaysia, Strengthening English policy.



Inspiring mentor: Reynecke posing with Hazlina and the pupils at SK TokPelita

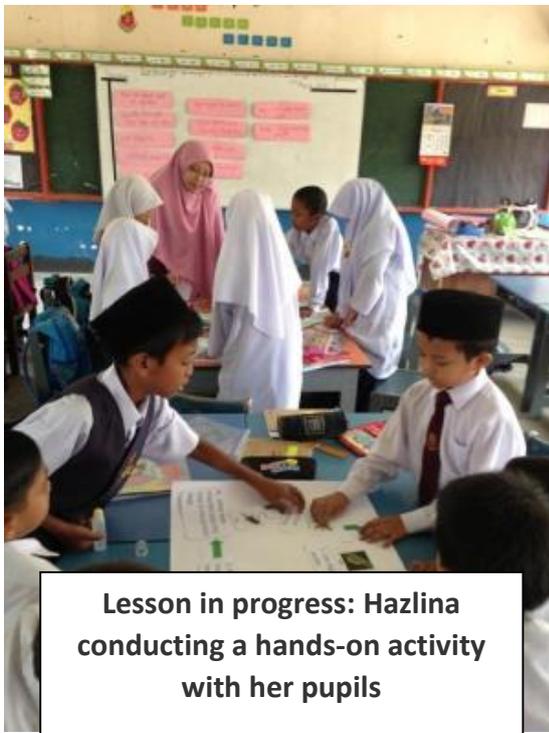
One of the exercises that Reynecke conducted, as part of a lesson on speaking English, was for pupils to role play as lion and mouse. For the task, they were given masks.

"Since this happened quite early in the year, I didn't really know the class dynamics, but I was able to pick up that there was a girl

in the class with really strong verbal skills and an active personality, as well as another girl who was extremely quiet and reserved. I decided to pair them up.

"All the students practiced their dialogue and I stayed with this pair of girls, as the quiet one was not speaking at all," said Reynecke.

The dialogue was well presented by the teams but Reynecke said that she had to help out Nur Qashidah with most of the lines except for the last two which she presented on her own without any flaws.



Lesson in progress: Hazlina conducting a hands-on activity with her pupils

It may have been a small step, yet a big leap forward for the girl as she spoke up loud enough for the rest of the class to hear.

Hazlina said it was the first time she had heard the girl speak in class.

That was the turning point for Nur Qashidah, for she had now come out of her shell.

“There are times when she still keeps her eyes closed when she speaks, but I see improvements in the way she speaks and delivers,” said Hazlina. While praises have been heaped on Reynecke, the teacher mentor was modest saying that she attributed it to the tools used during the lesson — in this case, the masks.

“Her willingness to speak did not have anything to do with me. It was more a situation where she was given the right educational tools to encourage her to speak.”

Reynecke said that some children were able to speak confidently if they were not visible to the crowd, which was the case with Nur Qashidah who “hid” behind the mask she was wearing.

“They have the courage to speak up when people don’t see their faces. It’s a psychological trick that works,” she said.

SMR HR Group was awarded the contract to supply 120 trainers to cover the six states on the west side of the peninsula.

English Language Teaching project manager Michael J. Hughes from SMR HR Group said that this story showed that this programme is “so much more than just achieving KPI’s”

