



Homemade storytelling aids with mechanisms that incorporate science principles spark children's interest in STEAM areas

IN RAP-TURES

CHILDREN LEARN BETTER WHEN THEY ARE EMOTIONALLY CONNECTED TO THE CONTENT.

“Fix the lesson, not the child” is the dictum that Dr Muhammad Nazir Bin Amir would like educators to embrace. This belief was born out of the 13 years that he spent teaching secondary school students, many of whom were not academically motivated.

During this time, Dr Nazir carried out classroom research that led to the development of a pedagogical guideline to make learning more “Relevant, Appealing and Personal” to students, or “RAP” for short.

“The RAP pedagogical guideline can be used for any topic and by educators across all levels, including preschool,” notes Dr Nazir, a Master Teacher with the Ministry of Education, and a Fulbright Scholar. Unconducive home environments and disruptive behaviours may not necessarily be the reasons why children are academically unmotivated and disengaged in the classroom. “It could simply be that the lessons are not interesting. More specifically, the way content is taught,” says Dr Nazir.

EXCITED TO LEARN

When educators adopt the RAP guideline, they start to embrace a mindset that places children’s joyful learning experiences at the heart of what they do. It can help educators

think of ways to draw children to the learning material.

Dr Nazir highlights that one way to evoke a positive emotional response among children is to create a joyful emotional connection to the content. For this to happen, educators need to consider contexts that appeal to children.

For example, in exploring the use of media to teach content, educators can identify videos that excite children, and think of ways to weave in content through such appealing videos. Educators can capitalise on popular animated movies such as *Frozen* to present ideas related to ‘melting’, and *The Jungle Book* to highlight ‘man’s impact on the environment’.

Educators can also make toys as storytelling aids. Using materials such as a kitchen towel, bamboo sticks, magnets and string, they can construct a mechanism that brings Rapunzel’s hair down



Dr Nazir uses RAP to get children to connect positively to the content

a tower and helps the prince climb up. This in turn can spark children’s interest in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics) areas.

MOTIVATION FROM WITHIN

Instead of using incentives such as stickers, RAP-infused lessons nurture an intrinsic motivation to learn and stimulate children’s natural curiosity and knowledge retention.

For instance, educators utilised scenes from the movie *Raya and the Last Dragon* to highlight concepts related to Asian cultures such as *wayang kulit*, as well as science concepts related to ‘float and sink’. Children actively participated in the lesson when these video clips were used.

Dr Nazir observes that teachers too are motivated to carry out RAP-infused lessons. “This could be related to the creative leaps that teachers go through in designing such enjoyable lessons,” he adds. “They feel a deep sense of satisfaction when they see the spark in children’s eyes as a result of their creative teaching ideas.”

RAP IN 3 STEPS

How educators can incorporate the RAP pedagogical guideline into their teaching practices.



1 Explore and identify children’s interests, prioritising their enjoyment. What activities and environments appeal to children? Are they novel and age-appropriate? Do they offer multi-sensory stimuli?

2 Develop a teaching idea that emotionally connects children to the content. What would make children want to learn instead of have to learn? What other support is needed?

3 Reflect on the teaching idea. Are children enthusiastic? Observe their facial and verbal expressions as well as behavioural reactions to affirm and enhance teaching practices.