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**Toward Vocational Training for Young People with Autism
Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia: Challenges,
Opportunities and Reasonable Hope**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

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ABSTRACT

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (2004) noted that people with learning difficulties including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), face challenges when attempting to get a job after completing their secondary schooling. The number of young people with ASD has placed pressure on the public education system to provide pathways to access vocational training and to enter the workforce. Given this pressure, it is timely to identify what opportunities are available and what challenges young people face in accessing these pathways. This study examined vocational training for young people with ASD in the Malaysian context. It sought multiple perspectives from young people with ASD, their parents, school teachers and their NASOM (the National Autism Society of Malaysia) teachers. This wider perspective showed the extent of the challenges, not only for young people but also for families, teachers, schools, non- governmental organisations (NGOs) and potential employers.

A narrative inquiry methodology based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of space, time and social interaction was chosen as the overarching theoretical orientation of the study. Research field texts were collected through semi-structured interviews. The field texts were analysed using a narrative case study approach. The analysis highlighted complexities for young people, families, teachers and potential employers, at this significant developmental time in young people's lives. In the midst of opportunities and challenges, the study notes the significance of an orientation to hope. Weingarten's (2010) construct and practice of reasonable hope has been critical in making sense of the research findings. Practices of care, persistence, courage, determination, commitment, carefully structured steps, scaffolding learning opportunities, consistent and small acts of reasonable hope were identified in each of the case studies.

The findings indicated that many factors need to be considered to implement vocational training programmes successfully. In particular, the community's involvement in working alongside parents to support young people with ASD into employment was important, as parents held hope that their children's future would involve successful transition into some kind of work or further education. Teachers and families emphasised a need for mainstream and NASOM teachers to be equipped with current knowledge and skills, so

they can help the students gain skills and knowledge offered in vocational training programmes and career transition programmes. The findings suggested that career transition programmes might be a vital prerequisite or bridging pathway for young people with ASD to find work or further their education in a vocational training programme. Financial resources emerged as a limitation to what schools could provide for students to help them bridge some of the challenges. However, despite the challenges and constraints identified in relation to vocational training, there was also evidence of opportunities available for young people with ASD to pursue future possibilities, including work. “Doing hope” by young people, families, teachers, community and policymakers provided the pathways for these opportunities to be materialised.

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DEDICATION

My loving father

Tan Soi Puat @ Tang Sne Puan

(10th February 1945 to 26th March 2018)

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, who was my biggest support, but who unfortunately is not able to witness the end of my PhD journey. You have always been there for me. Your presence ignited that passion in me to complete this thesis no matter how rough the journey was. Your love, care and hope have quietly sustained me. Rest in peace.

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GLOSSARY

3Ms	- Membaca, menulis dan mengira (reading, writing and counting)
ADHD	- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	- Autism Spectrum Disorder
EFA	- Education for All
EIP	- Educational Incentive Programme
ENT	- Ear, Nose and Throat Examination
HLP	- Hadiah Dalam Persekutuan (the name of the scholarship)
ICT	- Information and Communications Technology
IEP	- Inclusive Education Programme
ISEP	- Integrated Special Education Programme
KSSMPK	- Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah Pendidikan Khas (Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education)
LINUS	- Literacy and Numeracy Screening Programme
MBMMBI	- Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language)
MCE	- Malaysian Certificate of Education
NASOM	- National Autism Society of Malaysia
PECS	- Picture Exchange Communication System
PSAT	- Primary School Achievement Test
PPSMI	- Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English)
SKM	- Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia (Malaysian Skills Certificate)
STAR	- Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource
WHO	- World Health Organisation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This doctoral study began as an investigation into a particular developmental transition in the lives of young people diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), that is when the focus turns from general or special education to vocational training, and so towards potential employment for this particular group of young people. Through qualitative interviews, the study sought to inquire into the lived experiences of young people, their parents and their teachers and how they made sense of these lived experiences. These findings were developed into case studies using narrative analysis, shaped by research questions that structured the investigation in terms of opportunities and challenges.

I began this study with the hope that, as a mainstream class room teacher of accounting, I could learn more about the young people whose differences required me to further extend my range of understanding and educational practice. I also hoped that the study would contribute to the disability studies field, particularly in education. But I did not know as I began the study how significant hope itself would become, and that this study would come to illustrate that hope is both a “theoretical construct” and a professional practice (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7).

Each of the case studies I present in this thesis offers an account of the practices of hope that emerged from the narratives of young people, their families and their specialist or classroom teachers. These narratives highlight small steps taken at various times during schooling and vocational training in particular, or at home or in the community, that shows how, in Weingarten’s words, “With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future” (2010, p. 7). This study witnesses a past and a present filled with working and learning, step by step, towards possible futures, including employment, in the face of challenges of many kinds that were experienced by young people, their families, their teachers and their schools. This also resonates with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) time-critical dimension, which consists of past, present, and future aspects of narrative analysis.

The theory of reasonable hope has particular relevance for a study that focuses on young people whose employment possibilities are shaped by a diagnosis of disability because of the breadth of its application. This approach recognises: “Reasonable hope as a practice, doing reasonable hope, is oriented to the here and now, toward actions that will bring people together to work toward a preferred future” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9). This thesis highlights the potential of people brought together and taking small and humble steps toward a preferred future at the site of vocational training and transition education for young people with ASD.

As a study of vocational training for young people diagnosed with ASD, this study also rests on the theoretical position taken by disability theorists that there can be no impairment without society, nor disability without impairment. Shakespeare illustrated this position by claiming that “first, it is necessary to have impairment to experience disabling barriers ... Secondly, impairments are often caused by social arrangements ... Third, what counts as impairment is a social judgement” (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 35). This dynamic applies in relation to accessing employment. It is now some years since the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (2004) noted that people with learning difficulties face challenges when they attempt to get a job after completing their secondary schooling. Other authors have attributed the difficulty experienced in accessing mainstream employment to many factors such as individual intellectual or social characteristics (Yeo, 2007), ableist prejudice (Migliore et al., 2008) and gaps in the provision of appropriate inclusive education and training (Burge et al., 2007). Thus, this study investigates vocational training for young people in terms of their opportunities and challenges, recognising that these opportunities and challenges take place in the broader context of Malaysian society, employment, disability, education and family. Most significantly, it employs five characteristics of the construct of reasonable hope, which:

taken singly or together, illustrate the construct. ... They are that reasonable hope: is relational; consists of a practice; maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable; seeks goals and pathways to them; and accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair. (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8)

The case studies in this study illustrate these five characteristics at work and over time, as situated within relationships, and as possible futures in which reasonable hope could open doors to many possibilities and opportunities for young people with ASD in the employment setting.

Introduction

The Malaysian film, *Redha* (Beautiful Pain), directed by Tunku Mona Riza in 2016, is one of the very few cinema depictions to shine a spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Chaw, 2019). This compassionate drama explores one family's lived experience of ASD (Linden, 2016) including the parents' struggles (Aziz, 2016). For example, the father's love turned to anger when he discovered his son had been diagnosed with ASD (Aziz, 2016). Still, the film shows how he and his wife gradually accommodated to the reality of the parenting challenges they face raising their child together. This journey is reflected in the subtitle of the film: "*Hanya dalam kegelapan, seseorang itu dapat melihat cahaya*", "through the darkness, one can see the light." The movie was shot in the Malay language with Chinese and English subtitles and has helped family members and friends of individuals with ASD in Malaysia to feel supported, providing a starting point for conversations within the community (Chaw, 2019).

The film has gained recognition from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM) for its contribution to the ASD community (Chaw, 2019), through increasing awareness and education about ASD, thus reducing its stigma. The intention was that the Ministry of Education would encourage schools to screen the film for students from Form One to Form Six (Chaw, 2019), and that the film would be aired on Radio Televisyen Malaysia (Malaysian public broadcaster), in order to reach viewers from all walks of life, including people living in rural areas where ASD awareness may be low (Chaw, 2019).

A scene from the film, *Redha*, depicts a boy with ASD having what is colloquially referred to as 'a meltdown' in a supermarket in Malaysia (Riza, 2016). This film

demonstrates ableism’, a form of discrimination and social prejudice directed at people with disabilities or those who are perceived to have disabilities (Wolbring, 2011). The mother apologises for the misbehaviour of her son because the shoppers were shaking their heads in disapproval. This indicates that they did not understand this boy had ASD and instead blamed the mother for what they perceive as bad parenting practices (Riza, 2016). This assumption is often made because children with ASD are physically able, and their cognitive and social differences are invisible to others (Gill & Liamputtong, 2009) until they are expressed through atypical behaviour. In reality, these young people live with a pervasive development disorder (Gill & Liamputtong, 2009) and face daily challenges adapting to situations that other people find comfortable.

In Malaysian society, in particular, how children behave is perceived to reflect the way their parents have brought them up. The general public’s reaction to behaviour that is perceived to be inappropriate or deviant reflects the cultural norm of holding parents responsible for the conduct of their children. The unpredictable social behaviour of their children is often stressful, and emotionally and physically tiring for parents (Tsai et al., 2008), particularly when they are held entirely responsible and thus subject to social stigma (Gill & Liamputtong, 2009).

A Malay proverb illustrates the situation for parents of children with disabilities even when there is compassion and empathy. “*Berat mata memandang, berat lagi bahu yang memikul*” means that while one may see or feel the burden of sadness or unhappiness of someone who is facing difficulties, it is heavier on the shoulders of those who carry that burden (Md Yusup, 2019). This supports the relevance of hope being the responsibility and action of a community, and is reflected in the idiomatic Chinese expression: 同感深受, [tóng gǎn shēn shòu], which translates as when we sympathise with a difficult situation, we can begin to understand the challenges, hardships and experiences of a person in that situation. These proverbs also resonate with the Buddhist concept “无缘大慈, 同体大悲”, [wú yuán dà cí, tóng tǐ dà bēi]. The first four characters of this expression: 无缘大慈 [wú yuán dà cí] refer to sympathising and empathising with other people, regardless of their race, gender, age, wealth or position, and the second four characters: 同体大悲 [tóng tǐ dà bēi] refer to the idea that understanding people’s

situation requires compassion and mercy. These, I suggest, are small actions of reasonable hope.

This study seeks to draw together this cultural ethos of understanding, in the hope of providing active support for parents and their children through initiatives that enable people with ASD to contribute to society. In doing so, it aims to both ease some of parents' burden of supporting their children with ASD, and at the same time give people with ASD opportunities to participate in society and in employment.

In the next section of this chapter, I explain how my personal and professional interest shaped this research endeavour. I then provide background details about Malaysian society to locate the study in its historical and cultural context, including how values associated with filial piety, politeness and respect for authority shape parental relationships and educational engagement. This section is followed by a discussion about the identification and incidence of ASD. I conclude with the research questions that guided this study, and an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

The personal positioning as a researcher

Before beginning my doctoral study, I was a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of experience teaching young people aged 13-19 years old in Malaysia. I was concerned about a group of students who seemed to have unusual behaviours in the classroom. At that time, I perceived that these students did not seem willing to participate in class activities or socialise with their peers. This behaviour seemed to affect their participation in the learning activities. I was also concerned about these students' interactions in the classroom, as they seemed to prefer working in isolation.

In my teacher education, I had not been exposed to special or inclusive education. That is, I was only taught to teach mainstream students in my pre-service and in-service training. I talked to my teaching colleagues about my concerns and looked for reading material to learn more about my students' behaviour. I realised that the students whose behaviour I had thought was unusual might be considered to be on the autism spectrum. In medical terms, this is often referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013). I then sought a Malaysian government doctoral scholarship to extend my knowledge in this important aspect of special education, applying to study at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

When I arrived in New Zealand, I sought to extend my experience by visiting a specialised school where children with disabilities were given opportunities to learn with full support from teachers. I met with a person in charge of a non-governmental organisation, which caters to the needs of people with disabilities. In addition, for approximately a year, I volunteered for Autism New Zealand, a non-governmental organisation supporting people with ASD. I facilitated two groups of children (aged nine and ten years old, and six, ten and 14 years old) in playing with Lego. I observed that these particular children, who had been identified as having high functioning ASD, had sensory difficulties, and mild emotional and behavioural challenges. This voluntary experience provided me with a valuable opportunity to gain more understanding about the lived experiences of young people with ASD, and greater acceptance of their diversity and difference. I realised, among other things, that people with ASD often have the potential to perform tasks very precisely. I could also see that the ability to construct Lego objects with great accuracy revealed that these children had the potential to achieve in other areas, such as in technology, and was an indication of their potential for employment in the future.

Having completed this thesis, I am now more aware that my initial concerns as a classroom teacher reflected beliefs associated with ableism. However, had I not been concerned for my students and motivated by a genuine desire to improve their educational engagement, I would not have begun this research journey. My research has given me insights into the lived experiences of young people with ASD, and though these experiences, I have learned from them and become an advocate for these young people and their families and teachers.

While my experiences in New Zealand have extended my knowledge, my research has been based in Malaysia. As a Chinese Malaysian who lives in a multi-cultural and ethnically diverse country, culture has played a crucial role in shaping my research

journey. I now introduce Malaysian cultural beliefs to demonstrate some of the context that is relevant to my study.

Malaysian cultural diversity

Malaysia is a country in South East Asia surrounded by Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei (Embong, 2002). Malaysia is separated by the South China Sea into two regions, Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo: West and East Malaysia, with a federation of 13 states encompassing 11 states in the West and two states in the East (Embong, 2002).

Malaysia was colonised by Britain and gained its independence on August 31, 1957 (Embong, 2002; Kamarulzaman, 2005; Lim, 1994). In the early nineteenth century, under British rule, people from Southern China and Southern India were brought into Malaysia to work in mining companies and rubber plantations respectively. Malaysia's rubber industry began in 1878, supposedly on the back of seeds imported from Brazil, and the country has since become a dominant supplier of rubber (Kumar, 2020). The Chinese and Indian immigrants working in these industries became citizens of Malaysia when the nation gained its independence from Britain (Embong, 2002), leading Malaysia to become a country of great diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and language (Economic Planning Unit, 2016; Embong, 2002). In 2016, the population of 28.4 million people comprised Malay people of Muslim birth (68.6 %), Chinese who were mainly Buddhists, Taoists and Christians (23.4 %), Indians who were primarily Hindu (7.0 %) and other ethnicities, including some indigenous people who were animists (1.0 %) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). The population had increased to 32.6 million people in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Despite many years of living together, each ethnic group continues to adhere to its own religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Although the majority of the Malay people subscribe to the religion of Islam, the country's constitution allows other people to have freedom of worship.

Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) serves as the lingua franca or national language “raising a sense of national unity, but also reinforce[ing] and maintain[ing] a sense of cultural value and identity” (Ha et al., 2013, p. 62). The use of this common language “linguistically incorporate[es] members from other speech communities into a [common] community and enables bonding among the citizens” (How et al., 2015, p. 120). The Malay language is used alongside other languages, such as various Chinese, Indian and indigenous languages and dialects, as well as English, which is widely used in education and other fields (Smith, 2003), and as a tool for national development.

The Malaysian government implemented a new language policy in 2010, known as Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language (MBMMBI) after the implementation of the Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) policy in 2003 was unsuccessful. This reflected the belief that both the Malay and English languages were regarded as having significant and important roles in the nation’s future development (Ha et al., 2013; Yamat & Mahmood, 2014). The policy sought to reaffirm the position of the Malay language as the national language, and also as “the main language of communication, the language of knowledge, and the language for nation-building which is crucial towards achieving the objectives of 1 Malaysia” (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2010, p. 6). The MBMMBI policy also aimed to strengthen proficiency in the English language as an international language of communication and transmission of knowledge to enable Malaysian citizens to compete nationally and globally (Ha et al., 2013). The language policy in the *Malaysian Education Blueprint* also recognises that bilingual education in Malay and English languages would be continued through the MBMMBI policy (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

The Malaysian education system promotes bilingualism and multilingualism through three types of primary schools in Malaysia: the national schools and the national-type Chinese and Tamil primary schools (David et al., 2018; Hashim, 2009; How et al., 2015). In both primary and secondary schools, Malay language and English are used as languages of instruction and to communicate among the students, whereas for national-type Chinese and Tamil primary schools, Malay language and English are used as intermediate languages, with instruction and communication also utilising Mandarin and Tamil vernacular languages. In these schools “English is ranked second (before the

mother tongue and after the Malay language) in terms of the vitality” in Malaysia (How et al., 2015, p. 133).

While multilingualism is therefore very common amongst Malaysians, with the majority of Malaysian people being familiar with two languages, Malay language and English, in some families English is spoken predominantly, even though the Malay language is the main medium of instruction in government schools. Teachers, parents and students may not share common linguistic backgrounds to communicate about social, educational and vocational matters.

Understanding that “every culture is complex and every individual in each culture is different” (Liu, 2016, p. 45) helps to promote basic understanding and appreciation of diversity in different cultural contexts (Huntsinger et al., 2000). Culture provides a set of norms which regulate social approval and disapproval. For example, Malaysian people are expected to possess the values of helpfulness, politeness, courtesy and tact, dependence on others, and trust within everyday relationships, as these values are important to preserve harmonious relationships with others and to avoid confrontation (Abu Talib, 2010; Huntsinger et al., 2000; Zawawi, 2008).

In the context of education, culture can also influence beliefs about the “cultural relevance of the skills being taught, communication styles of the learner, and the manner in which the skills are presented” (Cartledge & Loe, 2011, p. 41). Culture therefore affects engagement, and can impact on the acquisition of pro-social skills that enable people to recognise and respect the differences that exist among teachers, students, schools, and the larger community (Adera & Manning, 2014). In multi-cultural societies like Malaysia, it is also important to understand how the primary culture impacts on attitudes, behaviours, and communication patterns (Adera & Manning, 2014). The beliefs and values of the dominant culture will influence societal attitudes towards minority cultures, as well as beliefs about people whose ability to adapt and conform to commonly accepted cultural norms may be affected by invisible disabilities, such as ASD.

Chinese culture, for instance, emphasises individuals’ intellectual development, acquisition of skills, and love for learning (Li, 2002, 2003), which plays a vital role in the learning process (Cagiltay & Bichelmeyer, 2000; Fitts & Gross, 2012; Akin & Neumann,

2013). Apart from their focus on the intellect, Chinese parents also consider holistic social, moral and personal dimensions when educating their children (Li, 2003). Chinese people therefore typically place a high value on learning (Chao, 1996; Li, 2001) and continue to engage in lifelong learning (Li, 2003). This disposition is expressed in the Chinese proverb: 学海无涯, 学无止境 [xué hǎi wú yá, xué wú zhǐ jìng], which communicates the cultural belief that knowledge has no limit, learning is an endless process, it is never too late, and there is always something new to study, live and learn. This lifelong commitment requires learners to foster a strong inner desire and love for learning (Li, 2001). For Malaysian Chinese, the value placed on education in their first culture becomes embedded in their daily life (Liu, 2016), and consequently education is valued very highly (Huntsinger et al., 2000).

In Chinese culture, a teacher is a respected figure (Li & Wang, 2014). This resonates with the Chinese proverb “a teacher for one day, a parent for life,” (Chinese: 一日为师, 终身为父 [yī rì wéi shī, zhōng shēn wéi fù]), which demonstrates the high status and respect that teachers hold in Chinese culture (Li & Wang, 2004, p. 430). Chinese learners are expected to obey authority figures and to demonstrate respect, as these are important values instilled through socialisation in the Confucian model (Li, 2003). Culturally held beliefs about the value of education, sense of hierarchy and respect for authority are thus influential in shaping children’s cognitive and social development through the parent-child interactions the experience outside of formal schooling (see Chao, 1995; Li et al., 2018; Rilling & Young, 2014; Schaub, 2010). In this study, the positioning of teachers as having higher status than parents, and mothers as having higher status than their children, creates a hierarchy that assumes adults possess expert knowledge and wisdom that enable them to support young people with ASD; however, in reality the experience and knowledge that individual teachers and parents have was found to vary significantly.

Malaysian culture also puts an emphasis on interpersonal relationships, such as having a strong sense of hierarchy and respect for authority (see Li, 2003; Li & Wang, 2004). According to Ling (2019), individuals with authority are perceived to possess expert knowledge and wisdom, and are positioned as role models. For example, Malaysian parents typically act as role models for their children, so that Malaysian children learn to respect and obey family rules at home (Bedford & Yeh, 2019; Ling, 2019; Miao, 2015),

and develop interdependent relationships with their parents (see Chao, 1995).

Family is important for Malaysian people, and parents and children have their own respective roles. Each member of the family is expected to uphold their family's good name and to maintain social relationships in daily life (Abu Talib, 2010; Meer & Vandecreek, 2002). Parents play important roles as authority figures, and children often experience fairly limited opportunities for self-expression, as they are expected to obey their parents' instruction (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009). Parents also monitor their children's activities, and are expected to show concern for their children's well-being (Van Schalkwyk, 2010).

The practice of respect for authority is related to the concept of filial piety, which is a value held by the majority of ethnic groups in Malaysia (see Rao et al., 2003; Zawawi, 2008). Filial piety is a deep-rooted cultural concept in Chinese society (Chen et al., 2016) which can also be seen reflected in other Confucian cultures (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). Filial piety has its foundations in the bonds of familial relationships, and represents a fundamental respect for the value of intergenerational relationships (Ho, 1996). Filial piety not only specifies norms and hierarchies of relationships within families, it also focuses on establishing the social and ethical foundations for maintaining social order. It embodies a sense of moral reasoning, as it reflects an ideal of respect, and the deep concern for mutual moral development among members of a family (Lin, 2007). The transmission of the socio-cultural values associated with filial piety are developed and shaped through family socialisation processes and passed on from parents to children (Urdu et al., 2007). Children are expected to show love and respect for their parents (Ho, 1996) and older family members (Ishii-Kuntz, 1997; Li et al., 2018), to obey their commands, and to provide emotional and material support to them when needed (Li et al., 2018). In Malaysia, where the influence of Confucian philosophy has spread among many cultural groups, the concept of filial piety has become a cornerstone of education, and an accepted guideline for moral conduct (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). This contributes to the creation of a stable society, as parent-child relations continue to enable Confucian values to be instilled through cultural socialisation for millennia (Bedford & Yeh, 2019).

The culture and values instilled in children with ASD by their parents can influence educational expectations and career aspirations, both in terms of the possibilities young

people with ASD believe are open to them, and the potential their teachers believe that they have. Parents' high expectations of educational achievement could be seen as a cultural phenomenon and in Malaysia, reflect the essence of Confucian philosophy. Parental expectation and children's aspirations are seen to be driven by individual psychology, as well as to reflect the collective functioning of their families, communities, and society at large (Li, 2001). In Chinese culture, high expectations are held regarding maintaining the authority of tradition and hope for the future. Chinese parents view achievement as a reflection of family honour (Huntsinger et al., 2000; Li, 2001) and view success as a source of happiness and pride. There is the cultural respect for education. Behind these high parental expectations are parents who are passionate about supporting their children and demanding in terms of their expectations and parenting practices (Li, 2001). Parents who hold specific career aspirations for their children may experience mixed feelings, such as “determination and hesitation, expectations and apprehensions, and dreams and worries” (Li, 2001, p. 485), particularly when young people with ASD face social and educational barriers and limitations, which may affect such aspirations.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

More than 60 years ago, the term “autistic” was used in two very similar descriptions of children displaying severe social deficits and unusual behaviours. These were published in English by Leo Kanner (1943) and in German by Hans Asperger (1944) (Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2007). However, Chown (2012) states it does not really matter who was the first ASD pioneer, Leo Kanner or Hans Asperger, as both researchers made ground-breaking contributions in the field.

The term ASD is interpreted differently in various cultures. However, all these descriptions indicate a distance between people without ASD and people with ASD. In Malaysia, children with ASD are classified as “Orang Kurang Upaya” (meaning less abled people in the Malay language). ASD is translated as a disease of ‘loneliness’ in the Chinese language (Chinese: 自闭症, [zì bì zhèng]). In Taiwan, children with ASD are described as ‘Sons of Stars’ (Chinese: 星星的孩子, [xīng xīng de hái zi]), which means they are from other planets whose language and inner worlds are not known to us. These

descriptions “present a picture of an unbreakable barrier between our world and theirs” (Kok & Gan, 2012, p. 193).

In contemporary understanding, ASD describes a constellation of neurodevelopmental disorders characterised by impairments in communication, behaviour and social functioning which begin in childhood (Malaysia Health Technology Assessment Section, 2014). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) contains all the possible diagnostic categories used to diagnose people with ASD (Dew & Allan, 2007).

ASD is an umbrella term used in the updated Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to cover the diagnostic criteria of four previously considered separate disorders: autistic disorder (autism), Asperger’s disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. These disorders are now considered to be a single condition with different levels of symptom severity in two core domains: deficits in social communication and social interaction, and restricted repetitive behaviours, interests, and activities (RRBs). Both components are required for a diagnosis of ASD. The presence of a social communication disorder is diagnosed if no RRBs are present (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In this thesis, I will use the term "young people with ASD" when writing about young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) under the spectrum of disability.

Most people with ASD struggle due to complex interactions between genetic and non-genetic (environmental) risk factors (Amaral, 2017; Chaste & Leboyer, 2012; Cheroni et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2014), with autistic symptoms ranging from mild to severe (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ASD has high genetic heritability (Hallmayer et al., 2011; Piven et al., 1997; Rylaarsdam & Guemez-Gamboa, 2019; Tick et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2019). Non-genetic or environmental risk factors include pregnancy-related factors, post-natal factors, environmental toxicants (Kalkbrenner et al., 2014), medication (Gentile, 2015), nutritional factors (Czeizel et al., 2009), and parental stress (Jones et al., 2014).

ASD is a common developmental disorder, which can be diagnosed as young as 18 months of age. Although it persists throughout life, evidenced-based interventions may improve function. The additional needs of children with ASD are significant, requiring

substantial community resources (Hyman et al., 2020). A study conducted by Adera and Manning (2014) found that young people with ASD were at significant risk of lacking the social and cultural skills that help to facilitate connectedness. They also experienced greater challenges learning to behave appropriately in specific social contexts, and had more challenges learning and retaining social and vocational skills in a way that enabled them to practise these skills consistently across different settings, such as home, school, and community setting (see Adera & Manning, 2014).

The prevalence of ASD

ASD is believed to be a permanent developmental disorder that may continue into adulthood and bring lifelong challenges for the individual (Volkmar et al., 1985). Baxter et al. (2015) conducted studies in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Peru, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States using face-to-face questionnaires and surveys. Based on their studies' estimates, it is probable that nearly 52 million people are living with ASD globally. Their research also resonated with that of Idring et al. (2015) and Newschaffer et al. (2007), where ASD was found to be affecting at least 1% to 2% of the population worldwide. A study conducted by Mohammad Salleh et al. (2012) estimated that the prevalence rate of ASD was 3-4 cases per 10,000 children. However, the prevalence rates have increased with a study conducted in the United States found higher and escalating incidence, with 1 case per 110 children in 2000, 1 case per 68 children in 2010 (Lim, 2015), 1 case per 59 children in 2014 (Baio et al., 2018) and 1 case per 54 children in 2016 (Maenner et al., 2020).

Other research conducted in the United States indicated that ASD was more prevalent amongst boys than girls, at a ratio of 4:1 (Dew & Allan, 2007; Mohammad Salleh et al., 2012). According to the National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM), about 9,000 children are born with ASD every year in Malaysia. Recent statistics showed approximately 300,000 people were living with ASD in Malaysia (Rotary Club hosts workshop on autism, 2018). The increase in the diagnoses of adolescents and young adults with ASD has led to an increased demand for services (Gerhardt & Lainer, 2010) such as public education system and postsecondary services for those who have left

school (Hendrick, 2010). The focus of this Malaysian study is the provision of vocational training and career transition programmes for young people who have had ASD diagnoses, at the interface between the world of education and the world of work.

The research questions

As I have noted, there are significant and increasing numbers of young people with ASD in Malaysia and increased demand for services. Amongst the responsibilities of educating young people, this study focuses on vocational education because of its potential ongoing influence beyond schooling and into adult life.

1. What are the links between schooling and vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
2. What vocational education opportunities are available in school, family or community for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
3. What are the challenges in the provision of vocational education for young people with ASD in Malaysia?

The order of the three questions is not an indication of the relative importance of one over the other: all were equally important to the research. The research exploration included the broader context of family, workplace, policies and resources, as well as the role of the community in providing opportunities for young people with ASD to contribute to society.

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters including this introductory overview chapter.

Chapter Two is contextualising my study, beginning with medical approaches and social approaches to understanding disability. An overview of disability in Malaysia and the development of special education in Malaysia. This overview is followed by an explanation of inclusive education for students with disabilities including those with ASD. Then, I explain about employment, as well as vocational training and vocational training programme for young people with ASD. I also outline non-governmental organisation

especially the NASOM centre, that support people with ASD. Finally, I explain the construct of reasonable hope that is relevant to this study.

In **Chapter Three**, I outline the research methodology of narrative inquiry, drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of situation, interaction and continuity. The rationale for the use of the narrative case study approach that has shaped the research process is presented. I then discuss the research procedures involved in recruiting research participants, and show how ethical concerns were considered and managed. Finally, I introduce the approaches used to produce transcripts and analyse the research field texts into a series of narrative case studies. These approaches include discussing my further use of Weingarten's work on hope as a theoretical construct and a practice, using her typology of witnessing (Weingarten, 2000) as a methodological practice.

Chapters **Four to Seven** present the empirical findings based on the participants' interviews, which have been synthesised and analysed to share the participants' lived experiences as narrative stories. In **Chapters Four to Seven**, I present the narrative case studies of young people with ASD, their mothers or parents, their school teachers and their NASOM teachers talking about the lives of young people. In the analysis of the research field texts, I paid attention to hopes, opportunities and challenges for young people, families and teachers negotiating the developmental transition through vocational education towards possible employment.

Chapter Four focuses on Ming Fu and his mother Ai Fang. This chapter discusses several skills that Ai Fang attempted to help her son to develop in order to prepare him to enter employment settings. These skills complemented the career transition programme, involving glove packing, that was offered at his school. Ming Fu was also having social difficulties with a sexual behaviour issue, which required the involvement of several parties to overcome. Ai Fang, this chapter suggests, was a very active witness to the developmental and learning challenges Ming Fu faced, creating opportunities for him when she had the resources to do so.

Chapter Five highlights the importance of mainstream inclusive education for Mariam, a young woman with high functioning ASD, in order to support her to achieve her future education and employment aspirations. This discussion reveals the importance of learning

to control emotional and behavioural problems for people with high functioning ASD to enable them to study in the hope that they will secure work in post-school settings. Again, opportunities for Mariam very much depended upon the active witnessing of her mother, Siti, who acted strategically in structuring learning opportunities.

Chapter Six presents how a financially secure family was able to shape their son's life. The narrative begins with the parents' ability to afford to pay occupational and speech therapy fees for their son, Muthu, when he was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. Additionally, their financial contribution enabled him to continue to work with, and develop a successful learning relationship with, a single teacher at the National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM) centre. This continuity reduced the incidence of behavioural problems, supporting this young man to become a calm and polite person, which in turn could become an important aspect of his career potential. Muthu's parents were well positioned as witnesses, having the material resources to provide specialist learning opportunities.

Chapter Seven examines the challenges and limitations facing two schools implementing vocational and career transition programmes. The two students who feature in this chapter are Mahathir and Meng Nan. The limited resources and funding and lack of adequate space were crucial factors that could affect the successful implementation of these programmes. The teaching staff take an active role in seeking resources and opportunities within limitations.

The thesis concludes in **Chapter Eight** with a discussion in which I bring together the threads of analysis from the previous findings chapters, showing the contribution to be made by understanding hope as a theoretical construct and a practice (Weingarten, 2000, 2007) in the context of young people with ASD who are negotiating the transitions between school, vocational training and employment. The key contributions of this research are presented, followed by recommendations for future research, conclusions and a personal reflection.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALISING MY STUDY

Introduction

About 15 percent of the world's population live with some form of disability, and two to four percent experience significant difficulties in functioning (World Health Organization, 2011). The Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 in Malaysia, defined people with disabilities (PWD) as individuals who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments where interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society (Persons with Disabilities Act 2008).

ASD affects people of all ages and all levels of intellectual ability. It is not just a condition of childhood or those lower-functioning children for whom ASD has the most significant effect (Chown & Hughes, 2016). The social and lifelong nature of the disability underscores the importance of a supportive environment which accepts and respects the individual as different (Lai et al., 2013). Of particular relevance to this study, assistance from schools and vocational support agencies is required to effectively facilitate young people with ASD transitioning into appropriate work and community living settings (Westbrook et al., 2014).

This chapter provides an overview of the context in which vocational training for young people with ASD takes place. The chapter first locates the major theoretical influences on the disability field, including the medical and social models. The chapter then focuses on disability in Malaysia by providing an overview of the education system in Malaysia and the provision of inclusive education for young people with disabilities, including young people with ASD. The chapter also describes the employment situation for young people with disabilities and ASD, the place of vocational training in the education system, and vocational training programmes for young people with ASD. Next, the chapter explains the work of the NASOM centres that support young people with ASD. Finally, the chapter explores the relevance of reasonable hope for the aspirations of young people with ASD, in terms of vocational training, career transition and future employment

opportunities. I offer a discussion of reasonable hope, as introduced in Chapter One. While Weingarten (2003) is not a mainstream disability theorist, as a family therapist and former Harvard psychology professor, she has contributed a body of work that explores lived experiences of chronic illness, and the responsibilities for how professionals respond. I call on two particular constructs from Weingarten - reasonable hope and witnessing positions - that offer this thesis theory that this study suggests is relevant to the disability field.

Medical Approaches and Social Approaches to Understanding Disability

Disability is part of the human condition because almost everyone could, temporarily or permanently, be impaired at some point in life. Two models, in particular, have been influential in disability studies, and whether to take a medical or a social approach to disability has been a significant controversy within the disability field internationally (Oliver, 1990) and in Malaysia.

Historically the medical model largely determined disability discourse. According to Goodley (2011), the medical model views disability as “*a medical problem that resides in the individual* – a defect in or a failure of a bodily system that is inherently abnormal and pathological” (p. 7, emphasis in original). This model is based on the modernist notion of the ideal human circulated in the mid-1800s when modern Western views of the body and medicine gained recognition (Goodley, 2011). This notion assumes that disability occurs in a person's body, requiring medical treatment (Goering, 2015). The individual's bodily ‘abnormality’, ‘dysfunction’, or ‘illness’ seem problematic and a tragedy for the particular individual (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Howson, 2004; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Oliver, 1996). Disability, physical, intellectual or psychological, is thus seen as an abnormality, a failure to meet the expected norms of society (Goering, 2010; Loja et al., 2013). Practices based on this approach to disability had the effect of othering those that did not meet the “norm”. It thus produced an emphasis on trying to fix and solve an individual's problems rather than an emphasis on social, economic, health and educational policies and practices that integrate and include those with disabilities.

The medical approach brings some advantages for many people's lives (Goodley, 2011), following the medical pattern of assessment, diagnosis and treatment. For example, the medical model is the basis for the diagnosis of young people with ASD and identifying factors that may contribute to the development of relevant medical interventions. A medical approach also enables parents and professionals to use medical knowledge to respond to the needs of young people with ASD (Chez, 2008; Lai et al., 2014), and gives access to particular medical or educational resources.

However, many problems arise from relying solely on a medical view of disability, especially when this medical concept places the locus of the problem directly on the disabled *individual* (Goodley, 2011; Hickey, 2008), with a focus on abnormality. The strategies to deal with this "problem" also tend to focus on individuals (Naidoo, 2009; Sullivan, 2000). This view risks people with disabilities, including those with ASD, being "cast in the role of the other and cast out" (see Hughes & Paterson, 1997, p. 325). Further, Oliver (1990) criticises the medical model when the individuals are seen as "a particular kind of social problem" (p.78) who are unable to contribute to the expected levels of productive capitalism.

The second concept that has an impact on the disability community in Malaysia is the social model. This model is generally credited to a British Disabled Person Organisation, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), 1976. The social model places the locus of the "problem" onto barriers in society instead of individuals (Barnes, 1998; Oliver, 1990). Thus, "Disability was not an outcome of bodily pathology, but of social organisation: it was socially produced by systematic patterns of exclusion that were – quite literally – built into the social fabric" (Hughes & Paterson, 1997, p. 94). These barriers are built into how society is organised to exclude those who do not fit the social norms. For instance, in Malaysia, young people with ASD and their family members face social barriers, such as social stigma in public when others might not understand the reason for particular behaviours and think that a child needs discipline.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) embraced the social model while retaining reference to persons with impairments, suggesting that:

...[disability] results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (p. 1)

Thus, some argue that society should focus on the real cause of disability (for example, discrimination and prejudice) by breaking the linkage between our bodies and our social situations (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). By upholding the rights of people with disabilities (Islam & Cojocar, 2015) we ensure they are treated equally with people without disabilities (Mokhtar, 2019). Goodley and Tregaskis (2006) suggest that if society views all citizens' needs equally, disabled people will experience a better quality of life and more equality of opportunity. At the same time, others such as Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) point out that there are consequences of denying the biological and mental realities of those with disabilities, under the social approach.

This thesis acknowledges the position argued by writers such as Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013), Forsyth et al. (2007) and Shakespeare (2006) that what is needed is an approach that gives weight to the different aspects of disability. These researchers are calling on both medical and social models for the benefits that each offers. For example, educational and vocational opportunities for young people with ASD are enhanced when they have access to resources made possible by diagnosis, via the medical model, and when social barriers and stigma are seen as part of the problem and appropriate social conditions are made available to young people and their families.

However, policies and practices need to be in alignment as models of disability are relevant because of the policies and practices that emerge under the influence of particular models. Practices are of particular importance: McGregor et al. (2015) suggest that the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)*:

[C]learly anticipates that people with disabilities will be accommodated so that they can enjoy the same rights as others, requiring States to take appropriate steps to ensure that this occurs. *However, it is silent on how this will be achieved in practice.* (p. 122, emphasis added)

The chapter now turns to the broader discussion about disability in Malaysia and the wider policy context that affects people with disabilities in this country. This discussion will

identify to what extent the policy and practices enable those with disabilities, including young people with ASD, to access rights to education and employment.

Disability in Malaysia

People with disability face many challenges. According to World Health Organization (2011), throughout the world persons with disabilities have poorer health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than persons without disabilities partly because they experience barriers in accessing services such as health, education, employment, transport and information. The situation is more difficult for those who live in communities that are poorly resourced.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established in 2006, when an increased body of evidence showed that disability is a critical educational concern and 87 countries signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007).

According to Kamaruddin (2007), persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable minority groups in the Malaysian population. According to Islam and Cojocaru (2015), the concept of disability is one of the most neglected and forgotten development agendas by both state and non-state actors in Malaysia.

Malaysia signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 thus agreeing to guarantee certain rights for persons with disabilities in this country. For example, the Convention states:

Malaysia acknowledges that the principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity as provided in Articles 3 (b), 3 (e) and 5 (2) of the said Convention are vital in ensuring full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity, which shall be applied and interpreted on the basis of disability and on equal basis with others.

Malaysia recognizes the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation and leisure as provided in Article 30 of the said Convention and interprets that the recognition is a matter for national legislation.

Most directly relevant to my thesis are Article 24 (Education) and Article 27 (Work and employment). In Malaysia, states are required to ensure that persons with disabilities can access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on equal basis with others (Article 24). Malaysia also wants to promote work and employment. Article 27 stipulates that persons with disabilities should have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training (1c). Employment opportunities and career advancement should be made available for persons with disabilities in the labour market and assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining, and returning to employment (1d).

These two articles, 24 and 27, should guarantee the government of Malaysia's support for inclusive education, including vocational education. However, the classroom experience I brought to this study suggested that the vocational needs of young people with ASD may not be well understood, their needs not attended to, and in many cases, their education may not be well resourced, despite the United Nations Convention and government policies.

The National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 documents and operationalises the Malaysian government's commitment to recognising lifelong learning and providing learning opportunities for persons with disabilities, especially adults (Department of Social Welfare, 2006). The Malaysian National Policy for Persons with Disabilities sets out the national strategies to implement the provisions in the PWD Act, such as access to education and employment opportunities related to my thesis. Students with disabilities need support and help to achieve their potential. They represent an essential asset of a nation and enjoy rights as citizens.

Malaysia's Educational System

The next step in this chapter outlines the provision of education in Malaysia to provide the context for the settings that are the focus of this study. The government holds the responsibility to ensure the right of every child to receive an education is implemented

(UNESCO, 1994). The recommendations in two reports (the Razak Report 1956 and the Rahman Talib Report 1960) became fundamental components of Malaysia's Education Act 1961 and then Education Act 1996. The Education Act (1996) covered all education levels including preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education (UNESCO, 2011).

Children and young people with disabilities attend both mainstream and special schools. Mainstream schools are divided into kindergarten, primary and secondary, which is further detailed in my finding chapter, Chapter Five (see Table 3, p. 114-116) where I discuss the schooling level of the student. At the end of Form Five, the students will sit for a national examination: Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) to qualify them for further academic study. If the students choose the vocational stream, they will learn vocational training skills to get the Malaysian Skills Certificate Level 3, which provide evidence to their future employers of their capabilities in the selected disciplines.

Malaysia's special education system is based on a traditional special education framework and knowledge that emphasised the medical model (Skrtic, 1991). However, Malaysia's special education philosophy is influenced by the major global paradigm shift, from the medical model to the social model (Lee & Low, 2014, p. 47). The system provides academic and vocational training to students with disabilities in order for them to live independently, to fulfil the labour market and be treated as assets in the nation's development (Abdullah, 2012). Special education is introduced as early intervention programmes in preschool, primary schools, and secondary schools (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, & UNESCO Cluster Office in Jakarta, 2009) in Malaysia. Students with disabilities are eligible for intervention programmes from four years of age; in preschool (five to six years old), primary school (six + to 14 + years old), secondary school (13+ to 19+ years old), an additional two years either taken at the primary or secondary level, as well as the post-secondary level (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, & UNESCO Cluster Office in Jakarta, 2009).

In the Education Rules (Special Education) introduced in 1997, students with disabilities including those with ASD receive their education in three ways: via the Integrated Special Education Programme (ISEP), the Inclusive Education Programme (IEP) or the Special Education School for primary and secondary levels (Lee & Low, 2014, p. 47). Since 2006, all students who registered with special education programmes are eligible to receive a

monthly allowance (Lee & Low, 2014, p. 48) that contributes to their education. The Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health Malaysia are two agencies involved in registering children with disabilities, including those with ASD, to receive appropriate services. Registration for people with disabilities is voluntary, and only Malaysian residents are eligible for the registration (Persons with Disabilities Act 2008), limitations that may well lead to inequities.

The Special Education Department under the Malaysian Ministry of Education has the responsibility for providing educational services to students with disabilities and initiating efforts to improve the quality of life among the disabled community. These initiatives aim to provide students with disabilities with a quality education that includes both academic subjects and skills development.

Students with disabilities who are assessed as educable are eligible to attend the national educational programme. Educable students with disabilities are students who can manage themselves without help, as confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the Ministry of Education and an officer from the Welfare Department of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (Education Act 1996, 1998, p. 342).

In Malaysia, the placement for students with disabilities in governmental or private schools is classified into three categories: the visually impaired, the hearing impaired and the learning difficulties based on the diagnosis made by the medical practitioners (Baqtayan et al., 2016; UNESCO International Bureau of Education, & UNESCO Cluster Office in Jakarta, 2009). Students with ASD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Down Syndrome, mental disability and dyslexia are classified as students with learning difficulties (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, & UNESCO Cluster Office in Jakarta, 2009). The classification of students with ASD in a separate disability category needs specially designed education that draws on global public support to cater to their special needs (Quek, 2008; UNICEF Malaysia, 2008). Little if any attention in terms of ongoing education or vocational training is given to people in this group from my observation.

Specialised programmes

Specialised programmes are available in Malaysia to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities: ISEP, IEP, and Special Education School. In this study, I will only focus on ISEP and IEP as these were my study participants' programmes.

i. The Integrated Special Education Programme (ISEP)

The Integrated Special Education Programme (ISEP) is a specific class in the mainstream school dedicated to teaching students with disabilities after fulfilling necessary requirements (Farrell et al., 2004) to ensure that students with disabilities can learn in the least restrictive environment. In the Education Act of 1986, the ISEP was identified as a special education programme in Malaysia. The ISEP had the most integration programmes that offered special education for children with disabilities in Malaysia when the Malaysian government took the initiative to implement the ISEP actively. This integration programme became compulsory for all states in Malaysia in 1987 (Awang Mat, 2001).

Students who study in the ISEP spend more time learning vocational skills (vocational training programme) than academic subjects. A range of vocational training programmes is available in secondary schools. Students not eligible to participate in the vocational training programme are offered a career transition programme. I will describe these programmes in more detail later in this chapter. By learning the skills that the vocational and career transition programmes offer, students are expected to be physically and emotionally developed to enter the workforce. The students would then contribute to the national development.

In the vocational training programmes, students with disabilities, including those with ASD, learn core subjects, such as the Malay Language for Communication, English for Communication, Mathematics, Education for Science, Social and Environment, Education for Islamic or Moral Conduct, Education for Physical and Health, and Education of Art and Music. The students also attend assembly based on the Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). The teachers use the Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education,

introduced in 2017, as a guideline for teaching students in the ISEP. In contrast to the academic subjects, where they study for 10 hours per week, the students in this programme learn specific vocational training skills for 14 hours per week (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). The students learn only one set of specific vocational skills from the ten specified skills. These sets of skills include preparation and making of food (cooking), bread making, pastry making, food and beverage service, sewing women's clothes, agriculture, aquaculture, multimedia visual, reflexology for the legs, hands and ears, and furniture manufacturing (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). A school's skills to teach depends on their teachers' knowledge and skills and the school's infrastructure. This positions the student as subordinate to the teacher and the school's authority and does not recognise the agency and autonomy of the child and their family when determining a potential life path.

All teachers who teach at the ISEP schools have been or are being given the training to attain the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) Level 3 to teach the ten specific skills. Before they become qualified, accredited teachers will have been assessed on their safety and skills by an official who is in charge of this training programme. The teachers follow the Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education 2017 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017) as a guideline, and students have to prepare a written folio according to the specified requirements. Students learn theory and practical components at school, and after successful completion, receive the Malaysian Skills Certificate.

Students with disabilities, including those with ASD in the medium-functioning category, who enrol in a vocational skills class must have already mastered the 3M (reading, writing and counting) skills to complete the theoretical and written requirements of the ISEP. Students learn theory and practical components at school and follow a specific set of modules to prepare a written folio and go through a formal assessment to obtain the official Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) Level 3. This qualification is important for all students, as it provides a foundation to further their education to post-secondary level and to convince potential employers of their abilities and skills.

Unlike the vocational training programme, the career transition programme is “a programme for finding and moving into a new career or starting a career” (Mohd Nassir & Mohd Hashim, 2017, p. 1). This programme is a skills-based programme offered to

students with disabilities, including those with ASD, to move from school into the workplace. In Malaysia, this programme is run on the teachers' initiative to teach skills that support medium-functioning students in the ISEP. There is no one standard document for teachers to follow in this programme, and teachers prepare their checklist to evaluate their students' achievement. Teachers will regularly attend related courses to improve their knowledge and skills to support their students in class. The career transition programme recognises the individual needs of students and the skills they need to succeed (Daros et al., 2012). The career transition programme is more focused on life skills and social skills, than vocational programmes, and is more flexible, allowing learning and teaching to be adapted and tailored to students' interests, and according to local opportunities. For example, my findings chapters show that some teachers in my study found learning and employment possibilities for their students, by collaborating with a local glove supplier that packages gloves for use in hospitals. This was an opportunity to find the students meaningful work that contributed to their communities and fulfilled a global need for gloves based in Malaysia's rubber industry. There is no official skills certificate for the students, but they will receive a school-leaving certificate. The leaving certificate allows teachers to comment on their students' achievement and skills at the end of their secondary school education in a specific section on the certificate. The comments from teachers are important, as they provide a reference for future employers to understand the specific skills students have acquired. This is particularly important for students in the career transition programme as these students do not have any official certificate like the students in the vocational training programme.

Overall, there are two main differences between the vocational training programme and the career transition programme. The essential difference is that the vocational training programme focuses on attaining skills that are relevant to one of ten specific career areas, whereas the career transition programme focuses on gaining practical life skills and work skills that are more general. Additionally, the vocational training programme offers a formal standardised qualification, whereas this is not available in the career transition programme. A career transition programme is, therefore, more flexible and individualised and can be adapted to reflect and address the possibilities, limitations and difficulties of disabilities including ASD that manifest in a particular young person's life.

ii. The Inclusive Education Programme (IEP)

Students with disabilities receive their education in the Inclusive Education Programme (IEP) in the ISEP in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2016). In this programme, students with disabilities are placed with the mainstream students in the same class at the government or government-aided schools based on the provision of special education (Malaysia Special Education Department, 2013). The IEP is divided into two categories: partial inclusion and full inclusion. For the partial inclusion programme, students with disabilities will join the mainstream students for certain academic subjects such as the Malay Language and History, or they are involved in certain co-academic or co-curricular activities with their mainstream peers. Their involvement in these activities depends on the students' potential, ability and talent. For the full inclusion programme, students with disabilities will be placed alongside the mainstream students to learn all subjects either based on the national curriculum or its modified version and with or without service support for them. The setting up of IEP is to enable students with disabilities to interact with mainstream students and allow both students to gain benefits of IEP (Omar & Sulaiman, 2018).

Inclusive Education for young people with ASD

Inclusive education has gained increased interest in recent years (Operti & Brady, 2011), where it has become a development agenda for many countries (Abdul Nasir, 2016). The concept of inclusive education is related to special education and disability, and a continuous debate has resulted in the evolution of the concept of inclusion (Operti et al., 2009) and present challenges to existing educational practices. Denying the right of education for children and young people with disabilities, including those with ASD will deprive them of further opportunities such as their access to vocational training, employment, and preventing them from achieving economic and social independence in the future (see Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014).

Several international policies including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), the UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework (2002), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

and the United Nations INCHEON Strategy (2012) have affirmed the right of all children to equal education without discrimination within the mainstream educational system to educate every child. The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) support inclusive education by emphasising on the importance to develop national capacities for policy-making and systems management, and pay attention to equal education for all children. The Salamanca Statement assumes that human differences are normal, and the learning of children must be adapted according to their special needs. The 1994 Salamanca Statement has a clear relationship between inclusive education and inclusive society with the definition of inclusive institutions as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10). Subsequently, Malaysia has introduced the inclusive education in the Malaysian Education Act 1996 (1998) that describes the active development of policy and changes in practices during this period for the continuous services for children with disabilities with an extension of education provision for them (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014).

Inclusive education in Malaysia originated from the “special education” agenda as defined in the Education Act 1996 (1998). Special needs education was introduced as a subject and vocation in Malaysia. The influence of special education could be seen from the development of policy and practice towards inclusive education. Malaysia has shown progress in the policy development for local special education provision (Lee & Low, 2014, p. 54). The Malaysian government is currently moving towards educational system reform by improving education for disabled learners (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001) and is showing positive development in providing education for children and adolescents with disabilities. The reform to provide quality and inclusive education is emphasised in the 2013-2025 Malaysia Education Blueprint. An education system that ‘enables’ all learners contribute to a more democratic and just society, and a stronger, more stable nation that benefits all Malaysians, as suggested by Adnan and Hafiz (2001).

Education is seen as an influential factor in seeking employment apart from developing one’s intellectual and personal quality (Abdul Nasir, 2016) as Malaysia puts ongoing effort via holistic and integrated education into human capital development to become a knowledge economy in the twenty-first century (Nurul-Awanis et al., 2011). Therefore,

contemporary policies and strategies in Malaysia aim to expand life skills and skill training opportunities for young people with low academic achievement (Ministry of Education, 2008). The concept of “total rehabilitation” is a commitment of the Ministry of Education, including medical, social and vocational rehabilitation. Mohamad Taib (2013) gave an example of a major shift aiming at ‘total rehabilitation’ from the vocationalisation of special education in Malaysian secondary schools through the provision of special vocational training to children. Vocational education is intended to support young people to survive in the society (Chong, 2016), to become marketable and employable when they go out in the real world (Mohamad Taib, 2013).

The released Preliminary Report of the National Education Blueprint (2013–2025) (Ministry of Education, 2013) in 2012 has given prominence to special education in Malaysia to generate significant transformation and improvement in Malaysia’s education system (Ozel et al., 2017). This policy focuses on quality improvement and commitment to moving students with disabilities towards the inclusive education that will have a significant impact on special education in the coming years. The target of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is that 75 percent of children with special needs nationwide must be in inclusive education programmes with mainstream students by 2023 (Azmi, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2013; Mokhtar, 2019; Omar & Farzeeha, 2019) and “every teacher equipped with basic knowledge” (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Ministry of Education Malaysia implemented inclusive education as a continuous journey to improve education for children with special needs in all public schools. However, the translation from policies to practice still faces challenges (Abdul Nasir, 2016) even though Malaysia has shown progress in local special education provision, especially in policy development (Lee & Low, 2014). Although special education practices have changed in Malaysia, the grounding assumptions of human pathology and organisational rationality (Albrecht et al., 2001; Biklen, 2000; Oliver, 1996; Skrtic, 1991) such as the focus on diagnosis, prescription, and intervention which continue to be central to determining eligibility and making placement decisions for children with disabilities, still appear in special education policy. The ‘educability’ criteria also can be held up for question against the goals of providing equal education opportunities for students with disabilities as stipulated in the United Nation’s Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), The Salamanca Statement (1994) and

the Biwako Millenium Framework for Action (UNESCAP, 2002). In this context, special education is seemed characterised by competition and selection (Skrtic, 1995; Corbett, 1999; Slee, 2001; Kearney & Kane, 2006). Labelling the students as uneducable seems to deny their right to equal educational opportunities. Other factors have contributed to making inclusive education difficult in Malaysia, such as conflicting definitions of disability by different agencies, and the mistranslation of educational philosophy and discriminatory policies (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001). It could, therefore, be argued that Malaysia is trying to make inclusive education possible as a major step forward. However, a lot remains to be done to actualise policy and the execution of measurable outcomes.

The 2013-2025 Malaysia Education Blueprint, as part of a process to develop a new policy, has invited many queries about policy and its implementation. The 1980s integration model is seen in the inclusion of pupils with disabilities (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). Jelas and Mohd Ali (2014) argue that this practice reflected a sound concept of inclusive education. Subsequently the Zero Reject Policy, commended by the National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC), was implemented in 2019 (Omar & Farzeeha, 2019; Teng, 2019). The Zero Reject Policy resonated with the code of practice for students with special needs that was stipulated in the Education Act 1966 (see Chin, 2020). The objective of the Zero Reject Policy is to ensure no children with disabilities will be turned away from school, and access to education with inclusive education and facilities is available for every student with disabilities, in stages (Azmi, 2018) including rural areas (see Chin, 2020).

The Zero Reject Policy brings hope for parents of children with disabilities in providing their children with education opportunities (Omar & Farzeeha, 2019). However, the implementation of the Zero Reject Policy still brings many challenges to both mainstream and special education educators. For example, in relation to my thesis, this policy needs to address the special need designed education for enabling children with ASD to meet their individual needs, their potentials and well-being (Brandes, 2005; Cohen & Spenciner, 2007; UNICEF Malaysia, 2008). Several aspects require attention, such as smart partnership, managerial support, continuous professional development, provision of teacher aides and related facilities for special educators to engage in inclusive education programmes for children with ASD in the government school to transform

policy into practice successfully (Hussin et al., 2008). Qualified and well-skilled teachers are important (UNESCO, 2015) to teach and support the increasing diversity of students in classrooms (Siarova & Tudjman, 2018), including those with ASD.

The Situation in Relation to Employment for Young People with Disability and ASD

The study's focus on vocational education sits between education and employment, on education's responsibility to prepare young people for life beyond school. International research has found that employment is very important for young people with ASD for independent life. However, the literature shows that individuals with ASD have poor adult outcomes in terms of employment (Shattuck et al., 2012) and independent living (Anderson et al., 2014). Some reasons for these situations are discussed below.

A study by Taylor and Seltzer (2011) in the United Kingdom found 66 young adults with ASD had withdrawn from the secondary school system before completing their courses. Significantly their analysis showed that a majority of these young adults (56%) were spending time in sheltered workshops or day activity centres with low rates of employment. Mawhood and Howlin (1999) also highlighted that people with ASD have difficulty with employment compared to individuals without neurodevelopmental disorders. Nevertheless, Hillier et al. (2007) noted that people with ASD perform well on specific tasks. Unemployment rates within the disability community result from the complexity of finding effective employment support for young people with disabilities in transition between school and employment, particularly young people with ASD. Young people with ASD are facing more specific difficulties accessing services in the adult system in order to transit successfully into employment (McDonough & Revell, 2010).

A few international studies have looked at the lack of transition between school and working place. Howlin et al. (2004) found that just under one-third (23 individuals) in their study had some type of employment, eight were working independently and one man was a self-employed fabric printer without receiving a living wage. Fourteen individuals worked on a supported or sheltered or voluntary basis. One other man,

previously employed in a factory, had been unemployed for some years from a sample of 68 adults with ASD in the United Kingdom. In Gothenburg, Sweden, a study by Billstedt et al. (2005) found that approximately 80 people with ASD showed no indication of independence (work, education, independent living) in early adult life. From their follow-up study of 120 individuals with ASD diagnosed in childhood only one lived independently, and three were independent but isolated.

The findings of Blacher et al.'s (2010) study indicate that the parents of youth with ASD can be more worried about their children's transition to adulthood than the parents of children with other disabilities. Further evidence is in Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) work, where the parents become worried when they cannot find appropriate after school services to support their adolescent child's needs. According to Chen et al. (2019), such parents can exhibit multi-faceted experiences when posed questions about their children's future plans such as fear, uncertainty, realistic expectations, poor guidance and lack of support. Therefore, having a clear transition plan could be the small steps taken by youth with ASD to achieve their larger goals (Hatfield et al., 2017, 2018).

In Malaysia, employment for people with disabilities is historically seen as a charity act and viewed from a welfare perspective (Khor, 2002). Furthermore, vocational training centers for young people with learning disabilities are limited (Loh & Syed Yahya, 2013) and work skills-related training is advocated by non-government organisations. However, some recent research from Malaysia (Alias, 2014; Abdullah et al., 2015; Nor & Yasin, 2018), examining employment opportunities for young people with disabilities, show some improvement in the situation due to the advocacy brought about by the increasing numbers of students with disabilities accessing special education programmes. However, this research is general and not focused on young people with ASD who bring particular challenges in the workplace situation.

The Place of Vocational Training in the Education System

A variety of English terms are used in relation to Vocational Education and Training (VET) including vocational education, vocational education and training, technical and vocational education and training, skills development, workforce development and

human resources development. This makes it difficult to define vocational education and training. However, VET in the broadest sense is understood as encompassing the type of learning which aims mainly to support participation in the worlds-of-work. Wall (1968) proposed that “vocational education is a scheme of education in which the content is intentionally selected, wholly or largely, by what is needed to develop in the student some of the most important abilities on which professional competence depends” (p. 52).

Vocational education in general, provides basic knowledge and skills in order for students to become adaptable, flexible and trainable for the job market. The objectives of vocational education are to provide industrial and commercial sectors with technical person power, provide immediate and future needs and changes in industries by a flexible and broad-based curriculum and provide a skill and knowledge base to build subsequent education and training (UNESCO, 2011). VET is an education route into employment or re-employment. For example, VET may be offered for unemployed adults or women returning to the labour market after raising children, or for more highly skilled work and jobs for those already in employment (Fuller, 2015). VET has been shown to provide a crucial contribution to economic growth, innovation, sustainable employability and social cohesion (Ertl, 2006).

Since 1991, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been seen as a crucial component in Malaysia’s drive to achieve developed nation status by 2020 (Mahathir, 1991). TVET continued to play a critical role in supporting the country’s economic development with a focus on skilled workers in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) to ensure the TVET curriculum matched industry requirements (Malaysia, 2012). Malaysia Education Development Plan (Higher Education) 2013-2025 emphasises quality in education graduates and vocational and technical education. Unemployment is an issue not only in Malaysia but also worldwide, and in this situation TVET may be essential to producing skilled workers.

Despite the value of TVET, it is often given low standing and status (Billett, 2013). The TVET system is seen as less academically-oriented and does not represent careers of choice (Deissinger, 2004). In Malaysia, Pang (2011) pointed out that TVET is viewed as catering for school drop-outs rather than as training employable workers and providing sustainable livelihoods. Workplaces are still reluctant to recognise TVET-based

qualifications and careers. This is because of a lack of standardisation of training and qualifications as many ministries and agencies have issued TVET certifications due to many employers not recognising certifications. Therefore, the poor perception and recognition of TVET means that parents are reluctant to encourage their children to take up the TVET programmes. According to Billett (2013), this negative sentiment is deeply entrenched in many societies and has appeared throughout history in many countries.

However, TVET has a high status in many countries where it is valued and promoted as preparation for skilled work (Deissinger, 2004; Stevenson, 2005). For instance, TVET is valued more in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and some Scandinavian countries than in other countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia (Deissinger, 2004; Stevenson, 2005). Societal expectations can best be fulfilled and national community and personal investments can be directed towards vocational success by clearly informed conceptions of vocational training (Billett, 2013). Vocational training can be seen as providing a way for young people with ASD to develop their educational and vocational skills. This chapter now turns to focus on vocational training programmes for young people with ASD.

Vocational Training Programmes for Young People with ASD

Individuals with ASD have decade-long battles for recognition as citizens eligible for public support and to have access to vocational training or vocational rehabilitant services suitable to assist them. Services for individuals with ASD were rarely provided by vocational rehabilitation agencies until recently. Indeed, even now, only a few universities offer coursework to prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals for the significant challenges of preparing individuals for the contemporary workplace (Sullivan, 2007).

A review of vocational rehabilitation agencies in the United States that provided services to support the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities, including those with ASD, identified school-to-work transition services as effective in improving employment outcomes of students with ASD, among whom there were significant rates of unemployment (Westbrook et al., 2014). It was made clear that there is a need to develop,

evaluate and prepare special programmes and services for what are increasing levels of ASD in young people, especially to fulfil the demands for vocational services and supports for adults with ASD. Hillier et al. (2007) noted that very little is known about how best to support these individuals in achieving success in competitive employment.

One of the active agencies that contributes to the employability of young people in Malaysia and a particular focus on this study is the NASOM.

The National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM): The contribution to people with ASD

The Ministry of Education Malaysia actively works together with non-governmental organisations (NGO) in special education and seeks support from all stakeholders to support children with disabilities. The collaboration between schools, the government and NGOs has increased the quality of the educational provision and opportunities for vocational education. One of the examples of the NGOs that actively support students with ASD is NASOM.

NASOM is the oldest and largest non-profit and tax-exempted ASD focused non-governmental welfare organisation in Malaysia (NASOM, 2017). The NASOM centre was established on 3rd March 1987, by concerned parents and professionals (NASOM, 2017). To date, NASOM has 21 centres in 11 states (NASOM, 2017) that provide education, assistance, care and protection to people with ASD and their family members around the whole country (NASOM, 2017).

The NASOM centres offer eight programmes and services: assessment and diagnosis services, early intervention programmes, therapy programmes, transition programmes, mainstreaming programmes, pre-vocational programmes, vocational programmes, and residential programmes (NASOM, 2017). Most relevant to this study are the NASOM centres' pre-vocational training programmes which are offered to children with ASD who are over 14 years old. Young people are taught pre-vocational skills considered prerequisites and generic to any employment situation. Their ability to learn basic skills can be used to determine the students' interests and inform the identification of specific

goals in developmental programmes in the future (NASOM, 2017). The NASOM centres also provide vocational training programmes for young people with ASD to participate in society. NASOM has three vocational centres in Klang Valley where they offer programmes such as baking, food preparation, laundry, housekeeping services, data entry services, sewing, weaving, as well as art and craft (email correspondence).

Through their programmes and services, the NASOM centres aim to offer services that emphasise the acquisition of skills and positive changes in behaviour for people with ASD. The NASOM centres also assist in several other areas, such as organising events, fundraising, support groups, family counselling, training, collaboration with corporate partners, ASD research in collaboration with academic institutions, and creating films to raise awareness and support the cause of ASD (NASOM, 2017). NASOM has partnered with the Rotary Clubs in Malaysia alongside the support from the ministries of Education, Health and Women, Family and Community Development in training teachers, primary caregivers and parents in various ASD programmes to support ASD communities (Rotary Club hosts workshop on autism, 2018).

NASOM also helps the Ministry of Education Malaysia extend inclusive programmes in mainstream schools by providing shadow teachers services. The NASOM centres have also made special education and inclusive education accessible to children with ASD and advocated for their right to quality education since 1987 (NASOM, 2017). The government hospital and private medical practitioners have often referred individuals clinically diagnosed with ASD to the NASOM centres as a referral centre for treatment and therapy (NASOM, 2017). Parents could request to enrol their children at the NASOM centres after the diagnosis. Names are put on the waiting list as the diagnosed cases increase yearly, and available places are limited. The NASOM centres provide shadow teacher services for the children at the primary school level in the mainstreaming programmes. The shadow teacher follows the students to school in the morning and supports them in the mainstream classes. The students then will learn at the NASOM centre in the afternoon after school. Teachers at the NASOM centres teach young people skills that are required for employment, but more than that they teach academic and life skills. Their work is focused on hopeful futures for children and young people with ASD.

Reasonable Hope

My study began as an investigation of the opportunities and challenges of vocational education for young people with ASD in my home country of Malaysia. A narrative analysis of my field texts, from interviews with young people, their families and their teachers, demonstrated a range of challenges families, teachers and young people face. Stories of opportunities emerged alongside the accounts of challenges in the spaces between challenges and opportunities, young people, their families, and their teachers took actions, relevant to their particular contexts. These actions, I came to appreciate, were taken in the hope of possible futures. They were actions I came to understand that should be given focused research attention. As I explained in Chapter One, these actions could be conceptualised through Weingarten's (2010) theoretical construct of reasonable hope: "With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future" (2010, p.7).

Weingarten developed the construct of reasonable hope out of her professional and personal experience, including in the field of chronic illness and the field of trauma. The value to this study, of the construct of reasonable hope, is that it explores what occurs in the distance, noted above, between policy and practice, particularly between challenges and opportunities. Thus, while a complete discussion of the potential contribution to the disability field must await the presentation of findings and Chapter Eight's discussion, I briefly orient the reader to the facets of Weingarten's reasonable hope that I call on in theorising this study.

Weingarten employs five characteristics of the construct of reasonable hope, as I noted in Chapter One. Weingarten (2005) suggests that hope is a "verb" rather than a "noun" (p. 159), a distinction that helps make the shift from considering hope as a feeling to considering reasonable hope as a practice that leads to different activities (Weingarten, 2000). Weingarten (2007) contends that "feeling follows action. The practice of hope connects one to the webs of meaning and relationship that make life purposeful and meaningful. It gives one something to do" (p. 3). Thus, in this study, I have first focused on outlining the actions taken through government policy in providing students access to schooling that is meaningful in response to their particular needs. Then, in the case

studies in my findings chapters, I take particular note of the accounts of family members and teachers of their actions to support young people's development at a critical time of their lives. In these terms, as Weingarten (2009) claims, hope functions in a relational context and becomes the community's responsibility.

Hope is "something we do together" (Weingarten, 2009, p. 354). Doing hope aligns with the social model that draws attention to the politics of the theory through which disability is understood. It is a powerful counter to traditional understandings of individual pathology, abnormality, and tragedy to consider the possibility for stories of reasonable hope as in the interaction of two or more people, families, communities and policy makers working together to open opportunities.

"Reasonable hope functions in a grey zone, where doubt, contradictions and despair quite definitely co-exist," Weingarten suggests (2007, p. 6). In contemporary life, including in Malaysia, employment is a grey zone when people can no longer expect to have ongoing employment as the workforce is increasingly demanding highly skilled workers, making it more difficult for people with disabilities, including ASD, to get employment. Reasonable hope accepts that life can be messy (Weingarten, 2000, p. 10): people with disabilities, including ASD, struggle to find career opportunities in an ableist society. Reasonable hope does not imply that consideration should not be given to the despair experienced, for example, by teachers in vocational education who cannot gain access to transition education opportunities for young people when the employment market is very tight, or the despair of parents whose children do not meet the criteria for mainstream education. Of course, exclusion may produce despair. However, Weingarten's construct suggests, the grey zone is a complex place, and it is likely to be reasonable to practise hope alongside doubt or despair.

We aim toward a goal rather than accomplishing it when reasonable hope is practised (Weingarten, 2000). Weingarten (2010) suggests that hope needs to be reasonable to direct "our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable" (p. 7). Here, perhaps is where an alternative to despair opens up. For example, at the same time as parents take steps towards accept the limitations that ASD imposes on their children's lives, they may also explore how far collective commitments, of parents, schools and employers might open future possibilities for their children. There

may be accommodations that can be made at the developmental transition stages towards employment, where vocational education opens meaningful activities.

As I have shown in this chapter there are many challenges to achievement of goals. Having reasonable hope involves “making sense of what is happening to us, not a positive outcome” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8). In a situation of chronic illness or disability, the emphasis is on taking action to support young people towards achieving their goals, even though sometimes their goals may be impossible to achieve, for any one of a number of reasons.

Weingarten (2010) further argues that reasonable hope is “oriented to the here and now, towards actions that will bring people together to work towards a preferred future” (p. 8). Again, this perspective provides an opportunity for an approach that values the actions people are taking, which calls a researcher or a therapist to focus not only on some future point but also on what is currently possible to do to work towards what is hoped for. My study thus focused on the here and now of the developmental transition phase between school and work while considering the preferred future of potential employment.

Summary

This chapter has set out the context of this Malaysian study, placing vocational training in the context of both education and disability. It has considered existing vocational training programmes and career transition programmes which could offer potential employment opportunities for young people with ASD. That ASD is not a specific focus in the Malaysian disability legislation could have implications for funding and support for these students. The work of the NASOM centre has been highlighted in facilitating pathways to overcome the social challenges that prevent many students with ASD benefitting from the vocational based programmes offered through the public system. The review reveals a paucity of information about what vocational programmes are available for these students and the challenges they face in transitioning into the workplace. The concept of reasonable hope has been introduced as a way of making sense of the pathways offered to the students, and created for them by families, and communities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology

In this chapter, I give an account of my chosen research design and outline the research process undertaken. Firstly, I describe the research methodology of narrative inquiry that shaped the research process. Then, I explain the field text generation using interviews. I then describe the recruitment process and introduce the research participants. Ethical concerns in all these processes are identified and discussed. In the next section, I present the research text method of narrative analysis. In the last section, I discuss Weingarten's (2000, 2003) witness framework and its contribution to this research.

Describing the research design

Given the importance of understanding the experiences of people participating in the education of young people with ASD in Malaysia, as established in the literature review, an appropriate methodology would seem to be one that takes account of the students' own stories as well as the story of teachers and families. I applied a qualitative research design with a narrative emphasis so that I could invite research participants to tell stories about their experiences regarding ASD and vocational education. Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) idea of a three-step process of text creation, I will refer to field text creation as the first process (often referred to as data collection), interim research text creation as the second process, and research text creation as the third step. This third step is manifested as the thesis document.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodologies are used to uncover foundational problems or issues requiring further exploration (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative researcher also wants to "empower

individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimise the power relationships that may exist between the researcher and the participants in the study” (p.48). In qualitative research, researchers work to develop an in-depth understanding of the research topic from the materials they gain from their participants. This research study concerns the broader concepts of participants’ stories, and the contexts that shape and locate those stories. Creswell (2013) notes that “the final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change” (p.44). My research aims to capture a range of voices and the complexity of my participants’ situations as they navigate the space of vocational education for young people with ASD.

Researchers embrace the idea of multiple realities when conducting qualitative research. A qualitative researcher intends to report multiple realities when conducting research with human participants. In my case, these multiple stories include young people with ASD, their parents, the teachers at their schools and at the NASOM centres. Narrative inquiry values understanding what the participants are saying when conducting a study in a “field” where the participants live and work (Wolcott, 2008).

Most qualitative researchers have face-to-face interactions in natural settings, talking directly with people and seeing them behave and act within their context to gather up-close information (Creswell, 2013). In my research, I was a key instrument when using semi-structured questions in face-to-face interviews with school teachers, NASOM teachers, parents and young people with ASD to inquire about opportunities and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD. I used multiple perspectives on my topic and diverse views of the participants in the study to develop the case studies for this qualitative report.

Narrative Inquiry

My research used narrative inquiry, a paradigm that has a potential contribution to make in the field of disability studies (Smith & Sparker, 2008). Goodley and Tregaskis (2006) suggest narrative is useful especially for disability studies where the impairment is a

social phenomenon, as the social model of disability emphasises. I chose narrative inquiry because of its focus on the lived experiences and storying of people's lives, as I explain in the following paragraphs.

There are a number of different traditions within narrative inquiry. The term narrative carries many meanings; it always refers to story. Narrative inquiry crosses different disciplines, including education (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The term narrative inquiry was first used in the field of education by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). They suggested that the study of narrative is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p.2). "Narrative inquiry is a methodology that frequently appeals to teachers and teacher educators" as this methodology is "a kind of inquiry that requires particular kinds of wakefulness" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 21), that is a reflexivity on the part of the researcher. I position myself as a teacher-researcher (see Huber & Clandinin, 2002). As a teacher, I use narrative inquiry in my research to develop my own teaching understandings and practices.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use a metaphor of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to conceptualise narrative inquiry: the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along the second dimension; and place (situation) along the third dimension. They write:

Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters: they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry: and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54)

Thus, while my study was located at the particular time in adolescence when young people focus on the transition between schooling and work, the temporal dimension of my study extended over the breadth of educational experiences of children, or earlier diagnostic experiences, and forward to possible futures. Thus, a method with an emphasis on matters of time was of value in this study of ASD in adolescence.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1998) narrative inquiry depends on a dialogic relationship between researcher and participant. In their research, they were interested in

hearing the unheard voices from teachers; preferring to engage with teachers in shared inquiries of living and telling their stories. In this study, the perceptions and experiences of inclusion are explored and examined through school teachers' and the NASOM teachers' narratives on how to translate policy into practice. Alongside those advocating for the value of teachers' views on integration or inclusion in mainstream schools (see, for example, Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), others such as Norwich and Kelly (2004) emphasise the place for the perspectives of students. It can be inferred that the multiple perspectives and narratives of school teachers and the NASOM teachers in my research, as well as those of the young people and parents, contribute to rich case studies that tell stories that had not yet been told, and thus open up new possibilities for supporting young people and families in the transitions between education and potential future employment.

Describing the research process

In this research study, ethics plays an important role in shaping the methodology and methods of field text collection. Research should be beneficial to the participants, the researcher and the community. I considered potential ethical problems at every stage of the research process. I submitted an ethics application to conduct this research and I was granted approval by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. I was able to identify and clarify any problems that might arise in conducting my research and formulate ethical solutions if problems appeared after the ethics approval has been granted. I proceeded with the following processes to approach the relevant parties to conduct my research in Malaysia.

A Malaysian national domiciled overseas who intends to conduct research has to obtain prior permission from the Prime Minister's Department via an official coordinating body known as the Economic Planning Unit (EPU). I submitted an online application to the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) as a standard procedure to inform them of my intention to conduct a study in Malaysia. I presented the approval letter from EPU in person at the EPU office to collect a Research Pass after I received an approval email. The research pass is needed to show to my potential participants when seeking their consent to participate. The pass assures them that the study has the relevant approvals.

After the EPU had approved my application, I first wrote an email to the person in charge at the Ministry of Education Malaysia to ask permission to collect data – known as field texts in Clandinin and Connelly’s narrative typology - at schools. The Ministry granted me the permission with a letter. Then, I approached several relevant agencies to seek their permission to conduct research in their organisations. These agencies were chosen because they could allow me access to young people aged 16 to 19 years old who had had a diagnosis of ASD. This group of students was categorised as the transition group moving from schooling to employment. The agencies included five fully government funded public schools and one branch of The National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM), the largest ASD focused non-governmental organization (NGO) in Malaysia. Then, I wrote a letter to the Chief Executive of NASOM (Appendix A) and attached the approved proposal from the university, to seek permission to recruit participants drawing from their database of young people with ASD. After I gained permission from the NASOM headquarters (the Chief Executive of NASOM), I went to the NASOM centres to meet the co-ordinators to explain my participant criteria. The co-ordinators suggested six potential participants who would meet my research criteria (see below). Then, I sent an invitation letter (Appendix B), information sheet (Appendix C) and Participant Reply Form (Appendix D) to the suggested parents, NASOM teachers, and young people with ASD, asking them if they would agree to participate in my study. All the potential participants expressed interest in taking part in this study.

Research Participants and Recruitment Process

I carried out my research in Malaysia, where I am familiar with the cultural background and language of communication which helped me in the recruiting process. I employed a purposive approach (Knotters & Brus, 2013) to recruitment, which suggests a researcher can determine the selection of cases or participants through their own judgement (Sarantakos, 2013). To fulfil the recruitment criteria of the research, I invited five participant groups (these each later formed cases), made up of young people, parents and teachers, whose narratives might provide a picture of ASD and vocational education. This number of participants would also be manageable given the location and topic.

For each case (group), there was a young person with ASD at the centre of what became case studies. Participants included:

1. Parents of young people with ASD.
2. Young people with an ASD diagnosis who are verbal or at least can understand the meaning of pictures and, based on parental or teacher advice, can communicate in some way to constitute a form of interview or interaction.
3. School teachers to get their point of view about their experiences of teaching these particular young people with ASD in the classroom, and particularly in vocationally-oriented programmes.
4. NASOM teachers who have experience teaching these particular young people with ASD through pre-vocational training in classes at the NASOM centres.

I focussed on five young people with ASD (16 years old to 19 years old) to understand in-depth their experiences of educational and vocational education opportunities and challenges. I also interviewed their parents, one of their school teachers, and NASOM teachers who worked with them. I aimed to conduct interviews that would give me rich field texts that would provide insights into influences on transition processes. The purpose of interviews is to produce an opportunity to create rich field texts with depth and insights into the complexity of people's lives.

I considered aspects such as cultural sensitivity as my research intention was to include participants from a range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. I selected participants from different religious groups and cultural backgrounds because their worldviews and responses concerning ASD vocational education could show some of the multicultural Malaysian society with a variety of beliefs. As previously noted, I come from a similar background as the interview participants, which gives me advantages of being able to communicate with them in their preferred languages. I was able to undertake case studies for the dominant ethnic groups in Malaysia. The cases consisted of two Chinese participants, two Malay participants and one Indian participant. I also sought diversity in religious beliefs and I was able to secure participants who were Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian, almost all the religions in Malaysia. This diversity allowed some insight into the multicultural nature of disability in Malaysia.

I recruited participants from two sites, one case from Kedah, a suburban area where I live, and four more cases in the large urban area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city. I have particular knowledge and experience with this suburban area, allowing for deeper insight into the area. This recruitment strategy gave some insight into differences associated with resources and contexts while meeting the pragmatic criterion of ensuring that the costs and time in constructing field texts were within the capacity of my resources.



Figure 1: The geographical locations of the five case studies in West Malaysia. Reprinted with permission.

I had planned to interview my participants at *vocational* training centres. However, when I consulted with NASOM staff, I was advised that the young people who were potential participants might not have sufficient verbal skills to participate in my research study. On the advice of the NASOM co-ordinators and teachers at the vocational training centres, I drew on the *pre-vocational* training centres to recruit participants.

After I received the Participant Reply Form (Appendix D) from the parents, I phoned the parents and explained the aim of the study and, as all expressed interest, discussed any issues that might need to be considered in terms of their and their child's participation in this study, and arranged the time and place to meet in their home. At this point, one young person was excluded as not meeting the selection criteria. I also asked each parent if they

would provide me with the names and contact numbers of the young people's school teachers, particularly teachers who were involved in the vocational aspect of the young person's education. Over the phone, I then phoned the five teachers suggested, to ask them if they would be willing to participate in the study. Although three teachers were not specifically involved in vocational subjects, they taught English, Malay Language and Mathematics respectively, these subjects that supported the young men in the vocational and career transition programmes in the ISEP. All five school teachers agreed to be interviewed in this study at their respective schools. I then sent an invitation letter (Appendix B), information sheet (Appendix C) and Participant Reply Form (Appendix D) to them. The NASOM teachers had already agreed to be interviewed at the NASOM centres as they had been contacted earlier. I then contacted the parent whose son did not meet the selection criteria to thank her for expressing interest (Appendix F).

When I met the participants before the interview, I explained the purpose of the consent form (Appendix E) for participants' agreement to be involved in individual research interviews. In the consent form I inserted some related questions for the teacher participants: participants' specialisation, experience and awareness dealing with or teaching young people with ASD, and the ways of handling problems dealing young people with ASD. For parents willing to consent to their young person's involvement, I used the interview meeting with the parents to establish the communication needs of the young person, and also gained the young person's consent via the consent form, countersigned by their parents. The young people were asked about their willingness to participate in my research.

I gave particular attention to informed consent as it involved a number of serious ethical considerations in this research. I invited participants to tell the story about their own experience of being, or engaging with young people with ASD. It was not expected that there were any risks of harm to any of the participants, including school teachers, NASOM teachers, parents and young people with ASD. I explained to my participants the potential for distress in the interview. This is because Clandinin and Murphy (2009) remind us ethics are, and should remain, paramount in narrative research. Coulter (2009) states research should always be conducted under "do no harm" as narrative researchers are deeply obligated to their participants to recognise the emotional impact of telling, writing, and reading stories.

Before I began the interview, I explained the informed consent form in simple language to the young people and gave them time to ask questions if they had not understood. It was important for me to observe their reactions because two had limited language and used the gesture of nodding to indicate their agreement. As described below, they would have had an opportunity to see the form beforehand. The interviews were also conducted in each young person's home, a place where they would feel safe. When conducting interviews with the young people with ASD, it is important to choose a setting where they will feel comfortable and relaxed (see Harrington et al., 2013). The home was also a private setting which means that if they reacted emotionally to the questions, there would not be exposure to anyone outside the family.

Before I started the interview, I discussed issues of anonymity and confidentiality with my participants relating to their involvement in this research. I took action to safeguard participants' anonymity by using a pseudonym as I later produced field texts from recordings of interviews. I was aware that my participants spoke about their experiences about ASD vocational education, which might include the names of locations, people and workplaces and they had not given permission to have themselves included in the study. I amended the names of locations, people and workplaces when transcribing the interview session. Thus, the field texts in this thesis are anonymous. I discussed with my participants that even though all measures will be taken to safeguard the identity of participants, their anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Research participants might experience a range of emotional reactions when they talk about their experiences in a sensitive area of personal life or professional practice. For instance, as well as the young people, parents might experience emotion, stress and anxiety when talking about their experience or their fear for their young person's future (Ferrely et al., 2015). Carpenter and Emerald (2009) found, however, that while mothers were often upset talking about their experiences, most of the women in their study also expressed feelings of relief and empowerment through telling their story and having their voice heard and published. In my interviews, I monitored my participants' emotional responses. I asked about their feelings in the hope that they felt safe and wanted to continue with the interviews. If I had noticed any strong emotional responses, I would have paused the interview and discussed a preferred way to solve the difficulty. Prior to

the research interviews, I provided them with appropriate counselling information. However, the interviews went well and none of the participants took up this offer.

Participants' involvement in the research was voluntary. I emphasised that they had the right, without any reason, to either withdraw completely, or remove part of their contribution up to two weeks after receiving the final transcripts. I reminded my participants of this right through an email and/or phone call a week after their transcript had been sent out to them. I informed them again that I would honour the request of my participants if they wanted me to exclude any particular section in the field texts. I stressed that my participants would be free to decline to answer any interview questions. I would turn off the audio recording if my participants did not want me to record any particular part of the conversation.

Introducing my research participants

I interviewed five young people with ASD, their parents and their teachers. However, I found the way of presenting the field texts of multiple perspectives to be a challenging task (see Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2007). I now briefly present in Table 1 the young people's background information concerning their gender, age, geography, ethnicity and religious belief. Table 2 includes the background of all the participants and sets out the findings chapter in which they feature. I provide more detailed accounts in the case studies in particular findings chapters.

Table 1: *Information about young people with ASD*

Young People with ASD	Gender	Age	Geography	Ethnicity	Religion
Ming Fu	Male	16	Urban	Chinese	Christian
Mariam	Female	17	Sub-urban	Malay	Islamic
Muthu	Male	16	Urban	Indian	Hindu
Meng Nan	Male	18	Urban	Chinese	Buddhist
Mahathir	Male	18	Urban	Malay	Islamic

Table 2: *All participants' background*

	Chapter Four	Chapter Five	Chapter Six	Chapter Seven	Chapter Seven
Young People with ASD	Ming Fu (Christian)	Mariam (Islamic)	Muthu (Hindu)	Meng Nan (Buddhist)	Mahathir (Islamic)
Parents	Ai Fang - mother (Christian)	Siti - mother (Islamic)	Yuges - father (Hindu) Valli - mother (Hindu)	Li Ping - mother (Buddhist)	Satijah - mother (Islamic)
School Teachers	Faiza (Islamic)	Aisyah (Islamic)	Hui Xin (Buddhist)	Bao Ting (Buddhist)	Faridah (Islamic)
NASOM Teachers	Suhaila (Islamic)	-	Santhi (Hindu)	Yun Xiang (Buddhist)	-

I sought answers to questions that emphasised how ASD vocational education may be woven around religious, ethnic and cultural practice.

Practice interviews

Before travelling to Malaysia for fieldwork, I did five practice interviews in order to trial and refine my proposed questions so that they were relevant to the research aims and clear and concise. These interviews also helped me polish my interview techniques and practise my interviewing process (see Dikko, 2016). This was an invaluable experience since I was new to semi-structured ways of doing interviewing, which might be additionally challenging for me in the Malaysian setting. The participants included four senior PhD candidates at the university who played the roles of school teacher, NASOM teacher and mother or parents. All interviews were in English.

I chose the four people very carefully for my practice interviews. The first participant was Malaysian who played the roles of mother, school teacher and NASOM teacher to get the Malaysian insight. The second and third participants played the roles of father and mother. The fourth person had broad experiences working with people with disabilities. Some adjustments were made after the practice interviews mainly in regards to language and sentence structure used in this interview guide, questions' order, and the addition of probes suitable for the actual interviews.

However, some changes were made in the field. As I did not have the opportunity to practise interviewing young people with ASD in the practice interviews, I had to accommodate the difficulty in getting responses from some of the young participants who had limited language skills. I had to be creative and reformulate questions and provide other ways of responding apart from using photo-elicitation for example through drawing.

Research interviews

I interviewed participants for field texts collection. Schwandt (1997) defines interviews as “a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (p.79). Taylor et al. (2016) explain that using interviews as a data collection method is particularly useful as the researcher is able to understand the participants’ experiences.

The field texts were gathered in approximately four months of periodic fieldwork in 2017 which included interviews with parents, young people with ASD, school teachers and NASOM teachers. I describe in detail the skills and strategies in interviewing as the interview process is important to ensure quality field texts are generated (see Cohen et al., 2011). The individual interviews were undertaken in a face-to-face situation. I sought permission from the participants to record the interviews and all participants agreed. I audio-recorded the interview sessions using digital devices.

I used a semi-structured interview approach (Neuman, 2011) to invite my participants to talk about their experiences. I used my interview schedule (Appendix G) to generate introductory questions that served as a base to begin the interview (Kvale, 1996). Probes, follow-ups and prompts were used for further exploration and clarification. According to Silverman (2006), “qualitative interviewers do not attempt to monopolise the conversation, neither do they fade into the background” (p. 112). This approach also supplies rich data, as there is dependence between interviewers’ questions and interviewees’ responses (Neuman, 2011).

I prepared the interview questions in three languages, which were English, Chinese and Malay language. The participants chose a language based on their preference. There were two cases where participants from Malay ethnicity chose to speak in Malay language during the interviews. My intention was to elicit rich information from the participants in their most comfortable language.

In conducting the interviews and in my interactions with participants, I would like to think that the relationship I established as a researcher was where I was genuinely interested in my participants' experiences. It was important to me that participants felt respected and that they could trust me to be honest about my aims for the research and their roles in it. I consulted with parents prior to the interview about their child's particular social and communication needs and how to support these needs (see Harrington et al., 2013). As I explained above, parents also acted as intermediaries between the children and me because they explained what I was doing the research and what I wanted from their children in order to help their children to understand my questions before the interview. Before I started the interview with the young people at their house, I introduced myself to them in order to let them understand what I was doing. This introduction was designed to build rapport with my participants and for them to feel comfortable about talking to me.

I recognised that the relationship I would develop with each young person would depend on the degree of their social skills, as well as my interviewing skills. For instance, I developed a positive relationship with young person with high functioning ASD. She interacted with me in a relaxed way at her house. She treated me like a guest and offered me refreshments. She was engaged in our interview. I developed a good rapport with another young man. He seemed friendly in our interaction during the interview, although he spoke in one- to two-word sentences. He asked his NASOM teacher to open the gate for me when I went to interview his NASOM teacher at the centre. I developed a good relationship with one young man by giving him the opportunity to write and draw his responses to my questions. He seemed to enjoy doing this and the next day, he approached me at the booth in front of the ISEP. His teacher told me that this man recognised me and clearly felt comfortable with me.

I invited my participants to be actively involved in the interview whereby I gave them time to pause, think, and reflect during the interview processes. This was because the responses given by the participants involved personal feelings, opinions, or ideas about a subject. The school teachers', NASOM teachers' and parents' interviews reflected their awareness, experiences, problems, opportunities, choices and challenges engaging with vocational training programmes related to ASD. The questions for young people with ASD included discussing their friends, schools, types of jobs they might want to consider for, and what kind of help they needed to achieve their goals (see Appendix G).

During interviews, I listened attentively to the stories shared by my participants. Active listening is an important skill in which it may enable a researcher to encourage participants to explore their ideas further (Huerta-Wong & Schoech, 2010). An active listening approach enables a researcher to be sensitive to participants' involvement during the interview. The sensitivities refer to the body language, maintaining nonverbal conversational involvement, and asking follow-up questions to participants (Louw et al., 2011; McCrory & O'Donnell, 2016; Weger et al., 2014). However, it is challenging for researchers to acquire this skill because O'Hanlon (2003) argues that an interviewer needs to "control their own personal bias" and maintain "as neutral a manner as possible" (p. 79). The position of not knowing (Ling, 2019) that I took up avoided the tendency to limit participants' stories to my own frame by directly listening to them. As a researcher, I held myself ethically accountable when engaging with the participants. I privileged their contributions, valuing the practice of doing reasonable hope offered by these contributions. I formulated respectful curious questioning to the participants' answers to "extend [my] not understanding as long as possible" (Weingarten, 2003, p. 198). I hoped to provide the participants with more opportunity to share their successes, struggles and challenges.

In each young person's interests I negotiated with the parents to be present during the young person's interview (see Harrington et al., 2013; Malaysia Child Act 2001). Only Muthu (see chapter Seven) wanted his parents to be there when I interviewed him. As Danke et al. (2016) suggest, it was necessary to understand the individual young people's communication capabilities and use strategies to facilitate communication. According to Harrington et al. (2013), the characteristics associated with ASD have hindered the ability of these children to engage in research interviews. This statement aligns with Poole et

al.'s (2021) and Preece and Jordan's (2010) suggestion that children with ASD have difficulties understanding abstract concepts, and possess limited personal insights about the future. They consider it as a challenging task to obtain the views of these children about their daily life experiences and aspirations. Beresford et al. (2004) consider children with ASD as a "hard to reach group" when working with them (p. 180). Researchers face many difficulties to draw data from students with ASD, and so often they consult the views of adults, such as parents and teachers, who play a significant role in their lives (Mandleco, 2013). Eliminating the views of students with ASD could provide only a partial picture about matters concerning these students, even though adults' views are important (see Dyches et al., 2004; see Ashby, 2011). Hence my efforts to include young people.

For the young people with ASD, I also used semi-structured interview schedules (see Harrington et al., 2013), which focuses in stimulating their thinking on daily life activities. In an effort to overcome difficulties in communicating effectively with these young people, I used photo-elicitation (Danker et al., 2016; Ganz et al., 2012; Harrington et al., 2013) to support the interaction in our interview, as there has been increasing recognition of the need to include the views of children and young people with ASD concerning their lives (Fayette & Bond, 2018; United Nations, 1989). Harper (2002) states that photo-elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview. In my study, the photographs gave a focus for the discussion relating to vocational opportunities (see Appendix H). Danker et al. (2016) note photo-elicitation, a visual research technique, is commonly used with marginalised and vulnerable groups of individuals. They used this technique to interview students with ASD, apart from parents and teachers in their research. Ganz et al. (2012) use photo-elicitation as a research tool in their research as students with ASD typically engage most successfully with visual resources or aids. Danker et al. (2016) suggest that a photo-elicitation technique "empowers and engages students with ASD, helps develop social, communication, and self-awareness skills, enables the collection of rich data, and enables the voices of these students to be heard" (p. 35).

In using photo-elicitation with the five young people, I used six pictures that showed possible jobs: washing vegetables, operating factory, arranging books, baking, cooking and gardening (Appendix H). The job pictures were shown one by one in sequence and I

gave explanations to the young people during our research conversation. This technique could be an opening for discussion of potential jobs that they wanted to work in after they finished their schooling.

I prepared four sets of interview questions (Appendix G), one for each group: young people with ASD, parents, school teachers and NASOM teachers. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that a qualitative researcher could use the different sets of questions employed to gather data from the different participants because the questions used to gather data were prepared on the basis of the research questions.

I positioned myself as a hopeful person working very hard to “*do hope*” (Weingarten, 2000, p. 402, original emphasis) by valuing the young participants’ contribution. I therefore gave more time to the interviews and waited patiently for my participants to answer. I also watched their faces to see whether they had understood. If they looked puzzled, I reformulated the questions more simply in some cases, so that they were able to respond. I recognised that one young man had a problem with articulation so I encouraged him to write and draw the answers for me. I kept to the set time for the interview that the mothers or parents suggested. This was important as young people with ASD get tired easily and needed to rest before the interview to be able to engage during the interview. Each interview for parents, school teachers and NASOM teachers took approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews with young people took approximately 30 to 35 minutes.

After each interview, I manually uploaded the electronic files to my personal computer using a certain password for each file. Then, I labelled each interview with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript accordingly, with de-identified transcripts using pseudonyms. I shared the materials with my supervisors but only I knew the identities of participants. I kept a list of participant names and pseudonyms in a different file and location on the computer.

Organisation of the research materials: Producing transcripts

I transcribed all audio-recordings of the research conversations into written form to facilitate the process of analysis. I transcribed the interviews which were fully conducted in English. I transcribed the Malay language interviews and then I translated the Malay transcripts into English for analysis. I used meaning-based translation rather than word-by-word translation (Esposito, 2001) to reflect my interpretation of the participants' stories in their own words. Both transcripts were sent to these participants, who were given two weeks to make revisions if necessary to ensure that these transcripts captured their stories in my records of their interviews. I made it clear that this was just be an invitation, as a form of member check (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Shoveller et al., 2007) that they were satisfied with the transcription, and to enable them to give feedback if they wanted to. Participants were reminded of the closing date by email and phone message a week after the transcripts had been forwarded to them. None of the participants provided additional feedback after they had read the transcripts.

I replayed the conversation and listened carefully to get closer to the field texts. I also employed cultural knowledge to look at the materials, as I outlined in Chapter One, to offer more possibilities of understanding and making sense of the research participants' behaviours and experiences.

Methods of Inquiry: Becoming A Reflexive Inquirer

A researcher is a central figure who influences the collection, selection, and interpretation of field texts in qualitative research. Participants' responses and the direction of findings will always be affected by the researcher. I worked hard to adopt a reflexive practice in my inquiry process to increase the integrity and trustworthiness of my research (Finlay, 2002).

Reflexive refers to how/where researchers position themselves in a qualitative research study which means that researchers convey (i.e., in a method section,

in an introduction, or in other places in a study) their background (e.g., work experiences, cultural experiences, history), how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study. (Creswell, 2013, p. 47)

According to Wolcott (2010), readers have a right to know about researchers regarding “what prompts our interest in the topics we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study” (p. 36). I used a research diary to record, reflect upon and plan to act. This informed a related section of my thesis that explored my positioning, learning and changes in practices (see Chapter Eight).

Generally, reflexivity is understood as self-awareness by the researcher of how they influence their study, as well as how the researcher is affected by the research process (Abdulla et al., 2010; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; D’Cruz et al., 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Horsburgh, 2003; Pillow, 2003; Probst & Berenson, 2013; Stronach et al., 2007). A crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge in qualitative research is to acknowledge reflexivity. England (1994) suggested:

Reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions. A more reflexive and flexible approach to fieldwork allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork almost inevitably raises. (p. 82)

During the interview I took it as my responsibility to support my participants to be comfortable to communicate with me in order to keep the conversation flowing in an open and pleasant way. During these processes, I became aware of the power/knowledge relations as a researcher from an overseas university and my position as a school teacher particularly in relation to authority, and how it has positioned me in the research interview situations. There was a risk that research participants would think that I possessed more power to speak or act during the interviews. Thus, I sought feedback and guidance from my research supervisors after the first participant interviews. This step seemed important for me to re-position myself with a new way of inquiry as a storyteller of the participants’ views or a way that opens up possibilities to share their stories.

Field Text Analysis

Reflexivity is important for all phases of the research process including the formulation of a research question, the collection and analysis of field texts, and the drawing of conclusions (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Thus, I familiarised myself with the field texts by repeatedly reading all the five cases aloud (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; see Creswell, 2007). As I read the field texts many times, I developed a better understanding of, and insight into the narratives of people's lives. I gained diverse educational journeys towards vocational options for young people with ASD.

I analysed field texts to integrate different elements that go into the story using a three-dimensional approach which included considering for three elements: interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller's places), as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

In this analysis, I looked at the interconnection of the participants' language use, stories and ideas. I faced the challenge of breaking up long chunks of talk into specific stories when analysing the transcripts (see Fraser, 2004). As Creswell (2007) suggested, the process of data interpretation has to be established from a belief that participants interpreted them from their personal experiences of a phenomenon through a consistent interaction with other social, cultural and historical factors close to them. In practice, the transcribed field text was interpreted primarily using narrative analysis.

I made a decision to present material from three of the research groups as case studies. According to Riessman:

...[case studies] produce context-dependent knowledge - essential to the development of a field or discipline and can "close in" on everyday situations and test how something occurs in social life. Case studies also focus attention on narrative detail (the little things) when cases can uncover social practices that are taken for granted". (2008, p. 194)

Case studies are a commonly used in research to study to gain insight into real life experiences in context. They are flexible and not bounded by any specific methods of data collection or data analysis (Yin, 2014). Stake (1995) suggested that accessibility, context, uniqueness, environment and participants are some important considerations in selecting a case study. Case studies can be single or multiple. This study uses a multiple case study approach (Cohen et al., 2011) as it can present uniqueness and commonality respectively. Each case is treated as an individual unit of analysis rather than one case being used as a sample to shed light on the other (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). In this study, multiple case presents the complexity of each story and the range of participants' stories shared with me. In particular, as Riessman (2008) suggested, there was value in the focus on detail: it was out of the detail of the lived experience reported in the case studies that the social practice of doing hope (Weingarten, 2010) emerged as a significant.

Each of these three cases produced a narrative account demonstrating the proposition that “narrative case studies are concerned with making sense of the stories people tell about aspects of their experience” (McLeod, 2003, p. 101).

The fourth results chapter takes a somewhat different form, presenting two of the cases together. Hennick et al. (2017) discuss various forms of “saturation” that might occur during qualitative research. They begin with “*theoretical saturation*” from Glaser and Strauss (1967), “the point when no additional issues or insights emerge from data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified, explored, and exhausted” (p. 592). Taking into my study this discussion of different forms of saturation in qualitative research, I determined that after three case studies a form of saturation had been reached. The research materials had reached a limit where new insights were not emerging from a case study approach. The case stories had reached a point of narrative saturation. This fourth chapter therefore, shifts from a case study approach to an account of the wider context of vocational education, family, workplace, policies and resources, as well as community, using the field texts from two young people, their families and the teachers.

Witnessing positions

As I explained in Chapter One, I began this project with limited knowledge of inclusive education, including ASD knowledge. Thus, the development and application of reflexivity was important if I was to undertake this research in ways that did not reproduce ableism. Just as Weingarten's construct and practice of reasonable hope enhanced my use of Clandinin and Connelly's narrative orientation, so her witnessing framework gave me a construct to apply to the development of my own reflexivity as a researcher.

Weingarten (2000) introduces a spectrum of witnessing experience using a two-by-two grid by the intersections of awareness and empowerment. These witnessing experiences are divided into four quadrants shaped by one's awareness and the empowerment to respond to what one witnessed. These quadrants range from being (1) aware and empowered, (2) unaware and empowered, (3) unaware and disempowered or (4) aware and disempowered witness. Each witness position can have effects on the individual, family, community and society. The positions vary depending on the situations we are witnessing (Weingarten et al., 2020).

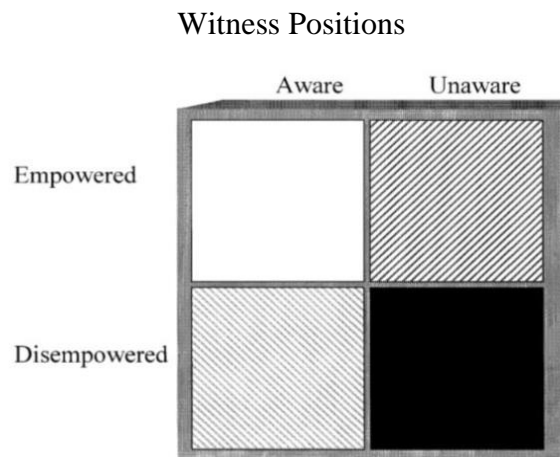


Figure 2: Witness Positions

Reprinted with permission Kaethe Weingarten (2000, p.396).

Weingarten (2000, 2003) argues that witnessing experiences can shift from one position to another. Using her typology, I suggest that I began this study **in Quadrant 2** (unaware and empowered). As a teacher, I was empowered to act in my relationships with young

people but I did not have adequate knowledge of the lived realities of ASD. Weingarten suggests that in this position misguided actions “will be ineffective at best and harmful at worst” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 11). On the terms of witnessing positions, the whole project for me has been shifting me out of an unaware position, while maintaining the power of being positioned as researcher and teacher. As I made meaning of the participants’ stories, I became increasingly aware of my own positioning. This is the development of the capacity for self-witnessing in the interests of witnessing others (Weingarten), that is reflexivity in action.

Weingarten (2003) regards **Witness Quadrant 1** (aware and empowered) as both desirable for the person themselves and constructive for others as a person is likely to feel competent and effective. This position implies recognition that one is aware, cognizant and mindful of the implications, a very active witness who has the knowledge and skills to help oneself and others by taking effective action concerning what she observes. By being empowered, we are able to create conversational spaces for the emergence of reasonable hope (Weingarten, 2010). The whole project thus takes me into the aware position in which I am empowered to act when I have young people with ASD in my mainstream classrooms, or encounter them in other situations in my professional life.

In the same way, I might understand the positioning of parents or teachers in my study on the terms of Weingarten’s witnessing quadrants. For example, parents who have knowledge of ASD and have been aware of what was happening to their child may take the child to the paediatrician for early diagnosis. Being aware and empowered (Quadrant 1) and seeking appropriate services enables the doing of hope together, as Weingarten suggests.

Summary

This chapter has explained the methodology and research methods used to conduct this study. The methodology used in this study is narrative inquiry conceptualised alongside Weingarten’s work on hope, a theoretical construct and a practice (2010). It also employs her typology of witnessing (Weingarten, 2000) as a methodological practice. Five young people, their mothers and parents, school teachers and NASOM teachers (narrative case

studies) were selected, using purposive sampling, and interviewed. The field texts were analysed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) schema. A case study approach (Cohen et al., 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) was adopted because of its flexibility in expressing the stories. Integrity and trustworthiness were centred on ethical considerations, and adopting reflexive practice in the inquiry process. The four findings chapters follow.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MING FU: PARENTAL GUIDANCE AND COACHING IN THE HOPE THAT EMPLOYMENT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE

Introduction

This case study reports on the perspectives of three participants whose relationship revolves around providing support to Ming Fu, a 16-year-old young man diagnosed with ASD, as well as Ming Fu himself. Ming Fu has a Christian Chinese Malaysian background and lives with his family in a major city. He was assessed by a pediatrician as having medium ASD symptoms at the age of four. Other participants I interviewed included his mother (Ai Fang), school teacher (Faiza) and NASOM teacher (Suhaila). This case study brings together their valuable perspectives on their respective and collective contributions toward improving Ming Fu's life experiences, in particular paying attention to his potential future employment. Coming from a variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise, each participant brings dissimilar perspectives on allocating resources and providing assistance to Ming Fu.

In this section, I synthesis the interviews into a narrative that highlights aspects of Ming Fu's life, including his abilities and challenges, when learning basic skills (at home), a career training programme (at school) and pre-vocational training (at the NASOM centre) with the goal of improving his future potential employment.

Young person's narrative: Ming Fu

At the time of the research Ming Fu was an enrolled student in the ISEP in the morning. He also participated in the NASOM programme after school in the afternoon. I interviewed Ai Fang and Ming Fu one afternoon after school in their house.

After I interviewed his mother, Ai Fang, I turned to interview Ming Fu at the living room in his house. Ai Fang brought Ming Fu to the living room to join our interview. I greeted

him with “Hi Ming Fu” when he approached me, and he answered “Hi”, with limited eye contact. I asked for and gained Ming Fu’s consent to participate in the research by reading out the content on the consent form. This form was later signed by Ai Fang in agreement for me to begin the interview.

I interpreted Ming Fu’s communication through taking note of his linguistic aspects, and the use of his voice, gestures and actions. I noticed that Ming Fu kept a focus during the 30 minutes interview as he sat on the chair, paid attention and behaved appropriately for the setting. He seemed very calm when he was talking with me, and appeared to feel comfortable and engaged in our conversation. However, during this time there was no eye contact at all with me. Sometimes, Ming Fu hesitated when replying, often taking quite some time to think before speaking. He typically responded in incomplete sentences of one or two words, and rarely whole sentences. On one occasion he answered me with a sentence. When I asked Ming Fu what he liked to play, he answered with full sentences, unlike his brief responses to other questions.

I like to play football.
I like to play puzzle.

Ming Fu’s interest in playing puzzles was recognised by Ai Fang. In her interview, she affirmed this:

Ming Fu is good at puzzles. Since young, he has loved to do puzzles. I would always give him cards or pictures, and ask him to put them together. For example, I would cut a cat’s picture into two pieces and ask him to arrange. He would try to put the cat’s tail at the front and back until the picture turns out nicely. I also tried to cut the same cat’s picture into four pieces, and asked him to arrange it again. Ming Fu has learned slowly since then, and recently he can match up to 100 pieces out of a 500-piece puzzle. He could achieve that without having much problem.

I followed an interview schedule, and supplemented this with visual images to aid communication through photo-elicitation (see Chapter Three Methodology and Research Methods Chapter). I showed six pictures of washing vegetables, operating factory, arranging books, baking, cooking and gardening with details of a job in each one, and

asked Ming Fu to choose a job that he liked the most. The job pictures were shown one by one in sequence, and I gave explanations to Ming Fu and asked him more questions.

Ming Fu expressed that he liked washing vegetables. This was perhaps because he had vegetable-cutting experiences two years ago at an assorted dishes stall, where Ai Fang had sent him to learn cutting vegetables. He said:

Washing vegetables.

He also expressed that he liked cooking and baking, which was evident to me by observing his enthusiastic reaction and the increase in voice volume during this part of our conversation.

I like to do cooking.

Poh Thin: Do you like to bake bread?

Ming Fu: Yes.

His interests also aligned with Ai Fang's hopes. She said:

I want him [Ming Fu] to involve in cooking and baking.

Ming Fu told me that he liked gardening and watering plants. He showed some excitement by giggling when he saw the gardening picture. He calmed down and replied:

Gardening.

Watering plants.

When I showed him pictures about a factory or arranging books, Ming Fu gave a clear indication that he didn't like these two activities by shaking his head rigorously. This showed his comprehension and ability to communicate his thoughts through body gestures.

Poh Thin: Do you like factory operator?

Ming Fu: No.

Poh Thin: Do you like arranging books?
Ming Fu: No.

I finished our interview by saying thank you to Ming Fu.

Poh Thin: Thank you, Ming Fu.
Ming Fu: Thank you.

After we finished the interview session, Ming Fu's expression of thanks demonstrated an important social skill, which is sometimes absent in young people with ASD. This ability to understand the importance of conversational conventions, politeness and courtesy could be beneficial in the work environment in the future, as these skills are consistent with filial piety and respect for authority, which are attitudes that are prevalent and valued in Malaysian culture and employment settings.

Mother's narrative: Ai Fang

Ai Fang is a mother of two children with ASD. She works as a financial consultant in a bank. She began the interview by sharing with me the basic information about her sons, Ming Wei and Ming Fu, as both were formally diagnosed with autistic syndromes at two years and four years of age respectively. The focus of our conversation was primarily on her youngest son, Ming Fu.

Car-Washing

Ai Fang told a story of car-washing that demonstrates her attunement as a mother to Ming Fu's learning, and her skills in scaffolding new developments in his life. In this story, we recognise the value of an "aware and empowered" (**Witness Quadrant 1**) witnessing position (Weingarten, 2010, p.11) and the value of "humble hope" (Weingarten, 2010, p.10) in practice.

The story took place when Ming Fu was 16 years old. One day he pointed towards Ai Fang's car, in a way that suggested to her that he wanted to wash the car. Attuned to read

his request, Ai Fang interpreted that gesture as his initiative to wash her car. This was the first time he had shown this interest.

For the first time, I just gave him a brush because he wanted to wash my car. At the beginning, Ming Fu found it difficult to do even a simple brushing task [brushing car]. Then, I gave him a very simple instruction. I said, ‘Ming Fu put the water slowly and brush the car gently’. He completed the simple job [brushing car].

In this event, Ai Fang took up a position as a mother who observed her son, listened attentively to him, and responded carefully to every cue he gave. Prior to allocating more difficult tasks to Ming Fu, Ai Fang gave him a small, clear instruction to pour some water *slowly* and brush the car *gently*. These small and clear instructions helped to structure Ming Fu’s learning. Ai Fang found that he was able to perform and complete the small brushing steps. I suggest that these small steps demonstrated Weingarten’s practice of reasonable hope as a “humble hope” (Weingarten, 2010, p.10). Ai Fang said:

I appreciated that he could understand minimal instruction...

Then, he said, ‘thank you very much’, to me, for allowing him to wash my car.

There are two steps here. First, Ai Fang speaks of her appreciation of Ming Fu learning successfully, and then she tells of Ming Fu speaking his gratitude to her for being allowed to wash the car. This kind of act of speaking gratitude within family relationships has been described by Ling (2019). Most Malaysians practise the cultural values and norms which can be viewed as “good” behaviours for both parents and their children. In a Malaysian context, suggested Ling (2019), “good parents” are supportive, monitor and are involved in their children’s activities. For the children’s part, “good” behaviours include filial piety and loyalty to parents. Confucius, an influential Chinese philosopher, still influences how children are brought up in today’s Malaysian society. The reason is that parenting is aligned with the development of children’s moral character and self-discipline (Li & Wang, 2014; Lin, 2007). A successful child or adult child enhances family pride. The Confucian worldview shapes social values in two key ways, namely the collectivist tradition, and the ethics of filial piety. This belief that “children achieve for their family” (Huntsinger et al., 2000, p. 8) is also emphasised here in Ming Fu’s story.

Bringing together Ai Fang and Ming Fu's speaking of mutual appreciation, with Ling's (2019) commentary on filial piety, above, it becomes possible to capture the spirit of the mother-son relationship as one of reciprocal respect. When Ming Fu said, "thank you very much", that demonstrated a form of social relationship in the Chinese culture, respecting an elder and thanking a mother, showing courtesy. This resonates with the notable East Asian tradition of elder respect, rooted in Confucian teachings of filial piety. Filial piety is important in directing a child to recognise the care and aid received from their parents and, in return, to pay respect and care for their parents (Elliott & Campbell, 1993; Lew, 1995). The values of elder respect are derived from rituals, propriety, and manners of daily living (Sung, 2001). This cultural tradition is also seen as a value that governs the family relationships of the majority ethnic groups in Malaysia (see Rao et al., 2003; Zawawi, 2008).

Ming Fu and Ai Fang built on those first steps in car-washing. Calling on the relationship between mother and son, Ai Fang produced reasonable hope by providing further tasks her son could complete with the car-washing.

Then, I slowly increased the verbal instructions and he learned more tasks in washing the car. After a few attempts, I taught him how to squeeze and spray with the hose.

This story is significant for the slowly scaffolded steps by which Ming Fu learned the practice of car-washing. Ai Fang reflected on the effects of her closely scaffolded teaching, holding humble hope:

Now, I feel very happy because Ming Fu can wash the whole car with only little instructions from me.

Children with ASD may experience difficulty in shifting attention from one task to another (see Flannery & Horner, 1994). Here, Ai Fang supported Ming Fu in the shifting of his attention to the next step of the process. Ai Fang tried to prepare Ming Fu by letting him experience car-washing skills at home which, she hoped, could later opening up any employment opportunities in the future. Ai Fang witnessed the success in every step in her son's learning as she had cultivated "a practice of identifying realistic goals and pathways" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) for her son.

The call for Ai Fang to accept parental responsibility positioned her as taking care of, responsible for and to become thoughtful about her son's learning. She carefully used a scaffolded approach to teach her son, and in doing so positioned him as teachable. Ai Fang seems to view the parent-child relationship as embedded in interdependent social relationships rather than achieving independence for Ming Fu (see Chao, 1995). Ai Fang's childrearing values and beliefs reflect Confucian maternal discourse strategies, which reflect the notion of "guan" (Chinese: 管, [guǎn]). This is a complex idea that means to "govern" or "discipline", but also involves "caring for" and "loving" her son (see Chao, 1995).

Ai Fang employed teaching skills. Ai Fang's scaffolded approach emphasises intellectual development, skill acquisition and love for learning (Li, 2002; Li, 2003). The education-first culture can go a long way to explaining Chinese parents' commitment to their children's education. The formation of the education-first culture in China is reflected in such household sayings as: "Everything else is inferior, education is the only lofty pursuit" (Liu, 2016). This saying also becomes an everyday expression when Chinese people use the phrase "even if [we are] poor, we cannot stop funding education" (Chinese: 再穷也不能穷教育, [zài qióng yě bù néng qióng jiào yù]) to describe the importance of education for future opportunities such as getting a good job, having a good career, or being successful in general (see Chao, 1995, p. 342).

In the Malaysian context, Chinese parents regard achievement as a family honour, and view success as a source of happiness (Li, 2001, p. 489). Therefore, Ai Fang taught her son how to wash the car like an adult in order to assist in creating the possibility of a successful life for him. Ai Fang may have believed "the demanding nature of Chinese parenting could ultimately produce positive outcomes" (Li, 2001, p. 484) for Ming Fu. Parental expectations are also derived from and shaped by personal lived experience. In Ai Fang's situation, she spoke her hopes when she said:

...because his [Ming Fu] eldest brother has severe autism...I think Ming Fu has mild autism and he could become independent. Maybe he could help out his brother in the future.

Ai Fang was a mother who gave full commitment and care for Ming Fu's development. She could be seen as a mother who carefully scaffolded her child's learning, and recognised her son's confidence and capabilities rather than see him as an unruly child. This is consistent with previous research literature (Chao, 1996; Schneider & Lee, 1990) on the power of Chinese cultural expectations which, Li (2001) has affirmed, embodies both the authority of tradition and hope for the future.

Vegetable-Cutting

The car-washing narrative showed Ai Fang's approach of using a home-based opportunity to teach Ming Fu skills that would be potentially useful in an employment setting. Ai Fang also told a story of supporting Ming Fu to learn employment-related skills in a commercial setting. The learning of the car-washing story was with a familiar person, his mother. This next narrative of vegetable-cutting takes Ming Fu into an unfamiliar place, with unfamiliar people – a significant transition step for a young person diagnosed with ASD.

I sent Ming Fu to an assorted dishes stall two years ago. I wanted him to help them to cut vegetables every Saturday morning. There were more than 10kg of different vegetables to cut such as kangkung [water spinach], spinach and long beans. During the first attempt everything went fine.

In the provision of work experience, the stall owner could be seen to be in **Witness Quadrant 2** (unaware and empowered). Although he was able to give an opportunity to Ming Fu learn vegetable cutting, he was perhaps not so aware of the potential consequences if something were to go wrong. Weingarten (2010) warns that the person in this witness position is most likely to do harm, perhaps unintentionally as was the case here.

This first step in the transition was successful. It is possible to imagine Ming Fu arriving and beginning to learn the tasks, following instructions, and completing the cutting and chopping of his share of the available vegetables. He met the expectations of the stall owner who had given Ming Fu the opportunity that his mother had requested. By cutting

vegetables, Ming Fu experienced himself taking the first steps as a trainee in a setting where he had no prior work experience. Ai Fang explained:

During the first attempt, everything went fine, but on the second visit Ming Fu accidentally hurt his finger and it was bleeding heavily. Ming Fu started to scream in pain and made a lot of noise. The owner and his workers became panicky and worried, not knowing what to do next.

When things went according to plan, Ming Fu could perform as a good worker, following instructions. But the accidental cutting and bleeding created a crisis that he could not handle. Such a distressed response is not unusual for a young person who is experiencing the limitations challenges of ASD. Usually, a set routine provides a sense of security and predictability for young people with ASD. When there was an interruption in the pattern of routine activities, Ming Fu was unable to cope with the changes.

When Ming Fu encountered the problem at the working place, it was a problem he could not solve. There was no one, trained or experienced, to support Ming Fu. He lost the capacity to behave in an expected orderly way. Ming Fu's panicked response shocked the owner and the other workers, who got worried and did not know what to do. The other people around Ming Fu lost the capacity to respond to him and they called his mother.

The owner rang me and I had to rush to the restaurant to calm him [Ming Fu] down. I immediately put a plaster on Ming Fu's finger and made him to relax. I also had to calm the owner who looked confused with the situation.

In contrast to his original positioning, the stall owner is now positioned in **Witness Quadrant 3** (unaware and disempowered). He did not know how to respond to Ming Fu's situation as he did not have the skills. This situation highlights the complexity of the connection between opportunities and challenges in the provision of vocational learning for students with ASD.

Ai Fang had handed over the responsibility, for supporting Ming Fu into this work experience, to the stall owner. However, when something went wrong, once again Ai Fang became responsible for Ming Fu, the blood, the owner and the chaos. Ai Fang commented:

Such a panicky situation can happen when dealing with children with ASD and in Malaysia the public still do not know how to handle it, sadly. We, parents, must always be there to support our children. Sometimes that can be very tiring.

Ai Fang claims that low levels of awareness, poor acceptance by society, and low levels of social support contribute to stressful situations for her. While she noted her particular experience of this stress in Malaysia, the problem is much wider, as similar stressors have been reported by the parents of children with ASD in other countries, including the United States (see Ekas et al., 2010; Twoy et al., 2007). Ai Fang expressed worries, concerns, and difficulties handling her son's symptoms of ASD in such a *panicky situation* when all the responsibility becomes hers.

Even though many parents of ASD children have reported difficulty dealing with their child's behavioural and emotional problems themselves (see for example Firth & Dryer, 2013; Herring et al., 2006; McStay et al., 2013), mothers of people with ASD, in particular, have often been found to act in the role of primary caregiver (Braunstein et al., 2013; Gray, 2003) - a position which by Ai Fang takes up, in the home and beyond.

People with disabilities face many challenges to participate actively in the labour market (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017; European Commission, 1998; International Labour Organization, 2018; IZA Research Report, 2010; Ramachandra et al., 2017; Sainsbury, 2017). They encounter problems such as inadequate skills and qualifications, inaccessible employment infrastructure, as well as widespread doubts by others about the capacities of people with disabilities to cope with paid work. All these things reduce employment opportunities (Jayasooria et al., 1997; Jones, 2008). In Malaysia, The Persons with Disabilities Act (2008) is intended to promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, including independent living and employment.

The existing policies and practices in Malaysia are intended to support persons with disabilities, but in reality, not all employers are willing or able to accommodate diversity. Ai Fang expressed her hope:

I as a parent, I sent my son willingly, hoping to get full support from the shop owner.

Ai Fang expected more support from the shop owner in providing Ming Fu with a platform to practise and learn the skills of cutting vegetables at the stall. But while learning the vegetable-cutting skills, Ming Fu accidentally cut himself. Then Ming Fu did not have the skills of responding in a way that was fitting for the workplace. The stall-owner also did not have the skills to support him to teach these social aspects of employment. This meant that the “full support” that Ai Fang sought and Ming Fu was entitled to receive, was not available. Ming Fu’s situation shows the importance of the relational in providing reasonable hope. The acceptance that “life can be messy” (Weingarten, 2000, p.10) is helpful when people with disabilities, including ASD, struggle to find career opportunities in an ableist society. But more than this those involved in vocational education in this setting need more than kindness and concern: they need knowledge and skills relevant to the responsibilities they are taking on.

Mat-Making

A third area of potential employment that Ai Fang discussed was mat-making. She said that she learned about sewing from a tailor. The tailor advised Ming Fu to learn threading and knotting skills before performing more complex sewing activities. The tailor’s concern suggested that children with ASD would usually have motor control difficulties with their hands (Vanvuchelen et al., 2007; Whyatt & Craig, 2013). Ai Fang began to teach Ming Fu some basic skills in tailoring which became a platform for Ming Fu to develop his practical experiences. In taking these steps based on reasonable hope, Ai Fang “can cultivate a practice of identifying realistic goals and pathways (Weingarten, 2010, p.9) for her son. She said:

I heard about sewing skills from a 60-year-old lady who was a tailor that always helps me to repair Ming Fu’s torn pants. This lady gave me big size needle with big hole, and rough thread. I started to teach Ming Fu to do the threading. Ming Fu then made the knot.

Ai Fang taught Ming Fu very patiently how to sew and stitch at home. This is an example of Ai Fang teaching Ming Fu and his willingness to learn and work alongside his mother. She explained:

I cut the pieces of clothes same size, one piece by one piece. I did four pieces for the clothes fold. I arranged the pieces by putting the cloth together with a flower in the middle and it became a very nice pattern. I then slowly cut the cloth into nine pieces and combined them to make a very beautiful quilt.

Ai Fang took up the position as a mother to teach Ming Fu mat-making. Ai Fang would cut the piece of cloth one by one, and then arrange them to form a pattern. Next, Ai Fang combined the patterns to become a beautiful quilt before teaching Ming Fu to sew and stitch. These small steps supported Ming Fu's learning in sewing and stitching quilts and floor mats.

Ai Fang found that Ming Fu was able to sew a quilt and floor mat with her structured teaching:

He can slowly sew a quilt and floor mat.

Ai Fang attempted to educate Ming Fu on the coordination skills in sewing because sewing requires hand-eye-coordination between needle and thread. Ai Fang knew that individuals with ASD could learn sewing and helped Ming Fu to learn the skill. Sewing could foster the basic work attitudes and discipline. Ai Fang hoped Ming Fu could develop these skills and be creative, as sewing quilt requires some creativity when it comes to arranging different patterns. Ai Fang believed in Ming Fu as she could see that Ming Fu slowly developed the ability to arrange the pattern by himself and learned from her coaching. For her, "the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8).

Ai Fang perceived sewing could enhance Ming Fu's self-esteem and self-confidence. She commented:

When Ming Fu saw a beautiful quilt pattern came out, he was very happy. He clapped his hands and jumped around in front of me. Ming Fu and I then started to invest more time in sewing since then.

Ming Fu valued the beauty of the quilt when the patterns turned into a quilt through Ai Fang's teaching. He also enjoyed the successful mastery of the skills in arranging the pattern, a positive reinforcement of his learning and work. Ai Fang's teaching enhanced her "ability to offer accompaniment and to bear witness" (Weingarten, 2003). The language of cocreation (Weingarten, 1991, 1992) can also be seen in Ming Fu's successful mastery of the skills.

These mat-making skills that Ming Fu possessed were also acknowledged by the NASOM teacher, Suhaila, when she said:

Ming Fu is very good at sewing or stitching as well. His stitching is also good, maybe because he makes comforters using unused clothes at home.

Suhaila believed that Ming Fu benefited from some initial sewing and stitching experiences at home as he appeared to have potential in this work for the future. Ming Fu's mat-making skills eventually translated into income. Ai Fang commented:

I sold the first quilt for RM 100. I also sold the floor mats for RM 10 each. Some people buy the floor mats to decorate their office. They put the floor mat on the sofa and on the table with a vase of flowers.

Ai Fang attempted to persuade Ming Fu to consider mat-making as a career to generate his own income. Ai Fang also provided Ming Fu an opportunity to think about his future vocation with sewing as a possibility if he could make and sell more mats in the future.

Below are examples of the kind of quilts (Figure 3) and floor mats (Figure 4) Ai Fang and Ming Fu likely had in mind.



Figure 3: These kinds of quilts can sell up to RM 100 each.



Figure 4: These kinds of floor mats can sell for RM 10 each.

It is common in Malaysia to see people engage in mat-making. However, Ai Fang was looking for better career prospects for Ming Fu. She thought of vocations that could enable Ming Fu to live independently in the future.

I took about three months to sew a first quilt for RM 100. I think this project took time with little money...I am still searching a job for Ming Fu because he couldn't live with selling RM 10 floor mats each.

Ai Fang believed that Ming Fu ought to be making mats that are of higher quality to achieve a higher return. And beyond mat-making, sewing skills can translate to a much broader base and possible occupations such as becoming involved in the sewing industry, fashion industry, and textile industry.

Bilingual Efficiency

Ai Fang chose to speak English with Ming Fu at home. She said:

I want him [Ming Fu] to learn both Malay and English languages. He speaks English at home, and learns Malay Language and English at school.

Ai Fang could have chosen to speak English because she came from a high socio-economic background, and is a highly-educated woman. She is likely to have received “more education and exposure to English than those of a lower socio-economic class” (see Hudry et al., 2017; Lund et al., 2017, p. 122).

Ai Fang believed Ming Fu could be bilingual in Malaysia. For example:

Malaysia is a multicultural and multilingual country. I believe he [Ming Fu] will be able to pick up both Malay and English languages.

This situation demonstrated Ai Fang’s belief that the current social structure in the Malaysian society favours bilingual (sometimes multilingual) education and she wanted this for Ming Fu. Her perspective was also supported by the research which shows that children with ASD can become bilingual or multilingual users (Drysdale et al., 2015; Jegatheesan, 2011; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2012; Lund et al., 2017; Yu, 2016).

Ai Fang further explained:

I could see him [Ming Fu] benefit from being bilingual in his life.

Ai Fang perceived that bilingual education could provide more life and employment opportunities (How et al., 2015) for Ming Fu. This perception is consistent with Kay-Raining Bird et al.’s (2012) support of bilingualism for children with ASD, as employment often requires individuals to be bilingual and many incentives are available. By becoming bilingual, perhaps Ming Fu could benefit from cognitive, academic, and social advantages (see Kohnert, 2010; see Soto & Yu, 2014).

Ai Fang’s decision to speak English with Ming Fu probably resonates with the fact that English can be seen as “a passport at school, workplace, [and to achieving] better quality of life and for informal interactions with the mainstream community” (Jegatheesan, 2011,

p. 191 & 192). Ai Fang's narrative illustrates the importance of bilingual efficiency that could increase the numbers of opportunities in Ming Fu's life.

Ai Fang attempted to teach vocational skills to support Ming Fu in his learning. These skills included car-washing, vegetable-cutting and mat-making. Ai Fang provided many opportunities for Ming Fu to develop maturity as a preparation for his potential employment. However, raising a child like Ming Fu is a challenging task that always needs a higher level of awareness and support from Malaysian society.

School teacher's narrative: Faiza (morning teacher)

Developing Vocational Skills

To explore the ways in which students with ASD are supported to engage in vocational education, I interviewed Faiza, an experienced special education teacher, who taught Ming Fu. Faiza has a Muslim Malay background and lives in a major city. She has three years' experience teaching young people with ASD and has a broad special education background, including being a well-trained special education teacher from an overseas university. Faiza taught in the ISEP. She offered an overview of Ming Fu's learning context. She spent some time in our interview explaining how she and her colleagues placed students into the class.

The most important things are we gained consent and permission from their parents. We then discuss with their parents what area they want their child to be focus on. For example, Ai Fang didn't want Ming Fu to go to the agriculture class because she said it is dirty and hot. Some parents want their child to be put in cooking class.

Faiza explained that each student has an Individualised Education Programme to cater to their own individual needs. This programme is important to inform parents regarding their children's progress on specific activities at school.

We have Individualised Education Programme. We send the progress and photos of their child's activities to the parents. The parents can see their

child's progress. Some parents want to change their child to another class after looking at the progress that we written.

Faiza said teachers would observe whether their students could follow the lesson and adapt to that class.

We observe the students. If they can do, they can proceed in the class. Otherwise, we will discuss again with the parents about their child's interest. We then sort it and change again the timetable.

Faiza then shared the different options in the vocational training programmes, and the choices the teachers at her school made:

First, we taught cooking skills. Then we tried agricultural skills with them. Only these two; cooking and agriculture looked suitable for the students.

Faiza then mentioned about how the Special Education Career Transition Programme was introduced at her school. They started with the glove-packing transition programme and burger transition programme. However, the school offered the latter only to students with other forms of disabilities and not ASD.

We have also started burger transition class where the students learn to start a burger stall. They learn from the stall itself until they can make burgers and sell them to anyone in school.

Faiza commented that the students learned the whole process during the burger transition programme, from preparing and cooking burgers to serving and selling the end product. Faiza thought it was useful that students were able to learn this as a step-by-step process as they were taught every small skill in each process sequentially. By explicitly instructing students how to open the burger meat from the plastic, fry it on a wok, assemble the cooked meat in between the bread, add sliced cucumber and tomato above the cooked meat, then pack and sell the burger to the people in the school, students were able to develop a skill and that could be transferred to employment after completing school. This positioned the students as both capable learners, and as having the potential to hold positions of employment after leaving school.

Faiza said her school also implemented a glove-packing transition programme for students with ASD. She and her colleagues thought these skills suit students with ASD because they respond well to step-by-step instructions. They found opportunities for these students in the glove-packing transition programme by collaborating with a local glove supplier, that packaged gloves for use in hospitals.

When we started the transition class, we focused on the autistic class students. Teacher Helen started the transition class with her students by teaching them the glove sorting techniques that she later collaborated with the suppliers to support the students. Students would sort and pack gloves and the suppliers collected these.

Faiza saw opportunities for students with ASD such as Ming Fu in gaining employment based on their “special characteristics”. These students are perceived to be capable of performing tasks that required a focus on details, and of being successful when step-by-step guidelines are provided for them.

In fact, these students are very detailed in performing tasks taking it step by step. We call this standard operating procedure (SOP). Autistic students are very detailed, clean, good and creative if compared to other LD [learning disabilities] students. That is why we put autistic students in the glove packing transition class.

Faiza thus demonstrated a belief that students with ASD have potential to engage in paid work. She referred to students’ art work as a potential occupation after school.

We can commercialise their artwork and products. In fact, they can work outside [of school].

This point was developed further in my interview with Suhaila, the NASOM teacher, who commented:

There are some students from the B branch of the NASOM centre, if I am not mistaken, who can draw beautifully. If there are any events organised by the NASOM centres, the paintings are usually taken from the students at B branch.

In my interviews with the two teachers Faiza and Suhaila, I heard about the significant role that art could play in opening up possibilities for students with ASD. The teachers’

comments above intrigued me. I wanted to know about what and how creativity may be developed for students, and I briefly investigated art as a career for students with ASD. In the following section I discuss what I discovered about art therapy and how the development of the artistic skills of an ASD student could result in drawings and paintings that receive national and international recognition. I have selected Hanzen's art work as an example to demonstrate what students with ASD can achieve when they are encouraged to pursue careers in the creative arts.

In Malaysia, many individuals with ASD and other disabilities possess the ability to draw well. As a way to support and appreciate them, many exhibitions have been initiated to exhibit their art work by individuals and private organisations. There is already an established market for the art work of people with disabilities in Malaysia. Hazrita Mohd Hatta (2017) started the Art Market Malaysia out of her love for paintings produced by the artists with disabilities and ASD in 2015. She noted that such artists have not been previously given a proper platform to display and sell their works, which include paintings, sculptures and handicrafts (Dzul, 2018). Mohd Hatta (2017) works with the NASOM centres. She collects, exhibits and sells the artwork produced by the students with ASD. For each sale, the NASOM centres receives 10 per cent which is being used to fund and support its programmes; the remaining 90 per cent will be given to the student artists with ASD. Art Market Malaysia also helps other artists with disabilities (Dzul, 2018). The NASOM centres establish a strong connection with individuals such as Mohd Hatta to help the students with ASD to develop their art work that has a therapeutic effect.

Art therapy has been used to help students with ASD to develop their social skills, foster cooperation among peers and enhance self-confidence. In 2017, 68 children with ASD, aged 3-18, came together with their parents and teachers from the NASOM centre to participate in Malaysia National Day celebrations on the theme *Negaraku Sehati Sejiwa*, which means *My country, one heart, one soul*. They created colourful graffiti art, measuring 1.75m wide and 11.75m long that “features the *Jalur Gemilang*” (*Stripes of Glory: the flag of Malaysia*) and “iconic buildings such as Kuala Lumpur Tower, Putrajaya International Convention Centre and Petronas Twin Towers. This mural [was] set against a backdrop of vivid hues of yellow, blue and red” (Chandran, 2017), which represented the Malaysian flag. The children were given the opportunity to demonstrate their artistic talents at the *Grafiti Negaraku* (My country's graffiti) art session supported

by the Information Department and the local and national media services (Chandran, 2017). If students are taught to develop and refine their talents, it is contributing to develop stronger self-confidence and social skills.

Painting is another form of art work that students with ASD can engage with. The following is an example from Hanzhen, a 16-year-old young man with ASD. He was not a participant in my study, but his lived experience demonstrates that students with ASD can refine and develop their interests and skills when they are supported by their families and teachers. He has completed several national and international exhibits. One of his works was commissioned by Shell Malaysia and Figure 5 is an example of what he produced (Shell Malaysia's 125th anniversary mural project, the title "Endanger Animals"), at the Doubletree Hilton Hotel in Johor Bahru, and the Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. "Endanger Animals" (Figure 5) and "Thian Hock Keng" (Figure 6) were two of his popular paintings that received national and international recognitions.



Figure 5: Hanzhen's drawing of Endangered Animals: "There's Room on The Earth For All of Us".
Reprinted with permission.

In 2014, Hanzhen drew the Tian Hock Keng (Chinese: 天福官, [tiān fú guān]) painting, a temple called "Palace of Heavenly Happiness". It is the oldest temple in Singapore. This is significant place of worships for the community who speaks Hokkien as a dialect. They worship Mazu ("Ma Cho Po"), a Chinese sea goddess in this temple. Hanzhen donated the drawing of Tian Hock Keng to the Kiwanis Club of Singapore to raise fund through a silent auction (see Figure 6).

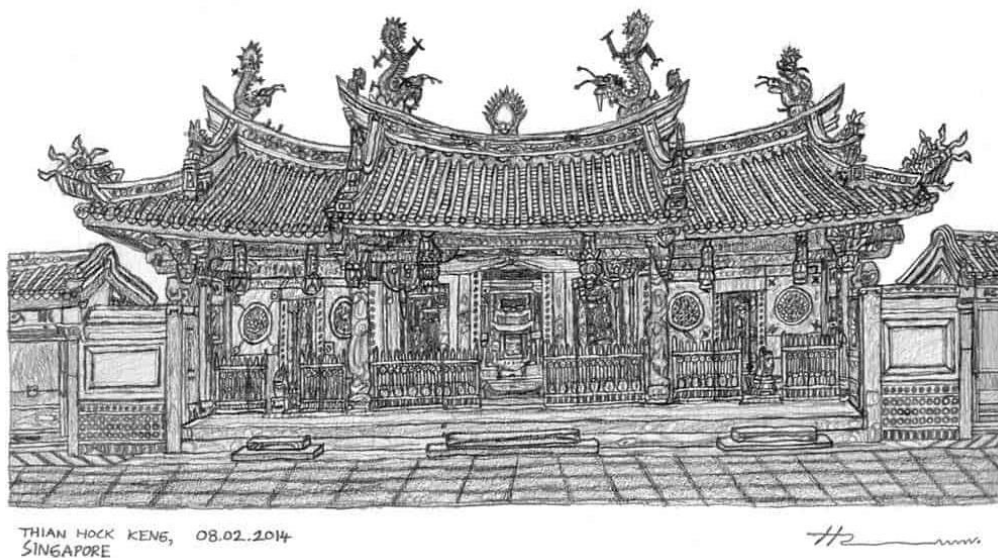


Figure 6: Hanzhen's drawing of Tian Hock Keng.
Reprinted with permission.

The above painting shows one of Hanzhen's art works. The skills involved in producing a painting demonstrates Hanzhen's artistic skill to earn a living. This example highlights a potential of students with ASD to be recognised and can give family hope possibilities.

In addition to art, in our interview Faiza stressed that there are many other opportunities available for students with ASD, if they undergo vocational training programmes. According to her belief an advantage on learning hands-on activities and practical tasks may prepare the students to cope with their working life more readily.

I think autistic children can do hands-on activities very well as they are very detailed in doing work. I also think that autistic children can do better in vocational training compared to LD [learning disabilities], dyslexia students and other students. These students have no problem with practical aspects.

At Faiza's school, students with ASD were all placed into one class, so that the teachers could focus and expose the students mostly to practical tasks.

Our intention is to create opportunities for students to do hands-on activities more than theory. We will try to always manage their timetables wisely. During the free time, we do more practical activities. The students can follow the KSSMPK [Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education] syllabus, but they really love to do the practical part.

Faiza believed the vocational training programmes offered at her school could provide students such as Ming Fu with a broad overview of industry-relevant experiences, leading to real opportunities upon completing school.

First, they would get the experiences. They would also get a brief overview about what their real life will be once completing school. Most of them can get a job because they can do good work after training. I think, at least, they can earn some money, pocket money if they can do the work they learned here.

Faiza affirmed that she envisaged that with these learning experiences these students would be capable of attaining a place in society.

I think the society would accept them well after they have finished their school here because they can really do the work suitable for autistic children. So, I think vocational training is needed for the autistic students to make sure they can cope with the real life. So, they don't feel awkward, confused and not treated with bias.

Faiza commented that Ming Fu was academically capable. However, it seemed his academic abilities were not really recognised; this may be because he was put in the skills class where he had fewer opportunities to study academic subjects than mainstream students. Faiza referred to him as "very intelligent", and recognised him as capable of performing well academically.

In fact, Ming Fu is a very intelligent and good boy. Most of the subjects, he managed to get As or Bs. For academic, I think Ming Fu doesn't have any problem. He just has problem with the behaviour.

According to Faiza, her school also uses different teaching strategies to teach academic aspects to students with ASD.

We give the students some activities and then we observe which students can follow instruction and need guidance. We then prepare different academic modules for them such as Malay Language, English and Mathematics.

Faiza and her colleagues put effort into supporting their students by preparing different levels of modules to teach them, and to ensure students were given opportunities to learn based on their abilities.

We do different modules for them based on their IQ level. We teach 30 minutes in one period by explaining general concepts. During the activities, we will separate them based on their modules. For the high function students, we will use high level modules to teach them. For students who need support, we will guide them.

Faiza reported that Ming Fu could perform very capably in the Malay Language which is a compulsory subject for every child in Malaysian schools as this language is Malaysian people's national language.

Faiza observed that many of her ASD students performed better than mainstream students in English.

Because autistic students are quite good and very fluent speaking English compared with other languages. That is why, it is easy to group autistic students into one class. Teachers who are good in English are allocated to teach these students. We compare directly the education achievement for our autistic students with the mainstream students from the last class, our students did better.

This scenario shows students with ASD have academic potential and the potential to become bilingual or multilingual, if they are given proper coaching and teaching. Fostering this ability could enable these students go further academically and succeed in the future. Faiza noted that Ming Fu was very good at speaking English, which suggests he also performs well in his English paper. However, she stated that:

Ming Fu only communicates in English [and not in Bahasa Melayu]. This is likely to be because his mother speaks English to him at home.

Ming Fu's academic abilities may have been overlooked since he was put in the skills

class or because his behaviour was inappropriate. Faiza also commented on the importance of making sure Ming Fu remained on task and had enough work to keep him occupied.

Ming Fu can do very good in Malay Language. However, I can't give him gap time even five to ten minutes. Faiza's concern with Ming Fu's sexual curiosity. For example, Ming Fu took off his pant and approached me, roughed his penis, put it back until wet then...During the examination, after he finished answer the questions, he will start to scribble his worksheet because he wants the new questions coming fast because Ming Fu can't have a gap time. Otherwise, he will do that action [masturbation]...Sometimes, teachers come late into class, Ming Fu will start to misbehave.

Masturbation: Educational responses

The matter of masturbation was a particular focus in my research interview with Faiza. Before introducing further field texts, I give some background relevant to Malaysia, and so to the context of Ming Fu's schooling.

Introduction: Sex education for disabled students

Sexuality education is essential to meet adolescents' right to access adequate information to protect their health, development, and participation in society – including sexual and reproductive information – as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2009). Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) stipulates the rights of people with disabilities to receive accessible sexual and reproductive education without discrimination (United Nations, 2008).

Malaysian people tend to perceive sex and sexuality as taboo subjects (Khalaf et al., 2014; Mohd Mutalip & Mohamed, 2012; Zulkifli & Low, 2000) and typically believe it should be discussed privately, and it is considered a negative subject (Khalaf et al., 2014). The cultural norms, values and religious views surrounding sexual education (Kirby et al., 2007) are conservative, reflecting attitudes about sexuality that are prevalent in Eastern societies (Khalaf et al., 2014; Razali et al., 2017).

In Malaysia, a multi-racial country with Islam as the main religion, mothers do not typically talk about sex or sexuality with their children. These factors may cause sexual activities, that are considered misbehaviour, among Malaysian teenagers to increase (Zulkifli & Low, 2000) because of a lack of channels to seek sexual advice, and because young people have not received formal or even non-formal sexual education (Mohd Mutalip & Mohamed, 2012).

In Malaysia, sexual education for students in mainstream education was introduced in 1989 (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011; Jaafar & Chan, 2009; Mohamad Mokhtar et al., 2013). However, the intention to implement the teaching of sexual education for students with learning disabilities remains unclear, and there continues to be a lack of progress towards formally establishing sexuality education for these students (Ang & Lee, 2016). Further, Rowe and Wright's (2017) literature review suggests that sexuality education for adolescents with intellectual disabilities remains an under-researched field in developed, Westernised countries, and is likely to be a widespread concern internationally. There is still lack of research focus on creating and evaluating approaches to providing sexuality education for adolescents with ASD (Corona et al., 2016). While sexual education is needed for adolescents with ASD (Chan & John, 2012; Gabriels & Van Bourgondien, 2007; Sullivan & Caterino, 2008; Travers & Tincani, 2010), they often do not receive sufficient guidance in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, not all teachers in special education have diplomas or degrees in special education. Some of them may have received short-term in-service training, or attended in-service courses related to sexual education, because this area is not typically taught in teacher preparation courses. Ang and Lee (2016) state that sexual education, including topics such as abortion, sexual intercourse, masturbation, intimate relationships, and sexual orientation, are considered sensitive subjects within Malaysian culture. Consequently, many special education teachers lack knowledge and expertise in this sphere and sexuality education may not be effectively delivered to students.

In general, Malaysian society has suggested that students with disabilities should not be exposed to education related to sexuality due to their lack of maturity and intellectual understanding of the subject (Yunus, 2008). Blanchett and Wolfe (2002) wrote that sexual

education curricula are still shaped by medical model of disabilities focusing on illness, treatment and intervention (Florian et al., 2006). Sobsey and Mansell (1994) and Rashikj (2009) showed that special education teachers and parents (Garbutt, 2008) often lack confidence or knowledge to deliver sexuality education to students.

According to Ang and Lee (2016), the sexual education curricula for students with disabilities in Malaysia is still unclear, reflecting an Asian-influenced socio-cultural model of disability. This may be due to discourses about disability drawing heavily from the major religions of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, and also from the culture of the regions in Eastern contexts (Miles, 2002).

Malaysian people have limited knowledge and awareness about the sexual behaviour among young people with ASD. After a young man with ASD accidentally touched a lady inappropriately, he was apprehended and put under investigation of sexual harassment. After the incident, the police developed policy Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for policemen in situations related to people with disabilities. It was concluded that policemen will have special SOP to handle cases related to people with ASD and other disabilities (TV9 Malaysia, personal communication, August 26, 2019), that would take account of people's limitations. This background provides the context for the classroom experiences that Faiza spoke about.

The problem of masturbation in the classroom

Faiza spoke about Ming Fu and sexual behaviour. She first described sexual behaviour on developmental terms.

Ming Fu likes to hold his penis...This has been a constant behaviour since last year, which may be due to the hormonal changes during the pubertal period.

A developmental perspective normalises sexual interest and the presence of sexualised behaviours among adolescents and adults with ASD. It affirms that touching oneself, touching others, and talking about sexual topics (Hellemans et al., 2007; Ruble & Dalrymple, 1993) and masturbation (Hellemans et al., 2010) are considered acceptable.

However, satisfying sexual needs by masturbating in class was considered inappropriate.

I have found his act of grasping his genitals disturbing.

That Ming Fu's explorations also included other students was also of concern to Faiza:

Ming Fu would continue this problem [sexual curiosity] with his friends who were from low function classes because these students did not know how to express their emotion. He would touch their hands and kiss them.

Here Faiza called on a disability discourse, suggesting that emotional deficits were part of the problem in sexualised behaviours. From a sex education perspective, however, Ming Fu's actions might have signalled the need for a conversation about puberty, sexuality and relationships, and engaging in sexual touching.

Discourse about disabilities might suggest that people with disabilities should not go through "normal sexual life". Young people with ASD may be infantilised, understood as remaining the early developmental stages mentally, but quite developed physically. The sexuality of young disabled people is generally portrayed as problematic (Rowe & Wright, 2017). Faiza may have found it difficult to accept masturbation as normal during the adolescent stage of development and to offer Ming Fu appropriate guidance about sexual practices and privacy. The problem here was that the sexual touching and masturbation was in a social setting at school.

Parenting and sexuality

Faiza perceived Ming Fu's sexual behaviour was affected by his mother's parenting style. Faiza said Ai Fang was unable to acknowledge Ming Fu's sexual misbehaviour at school. This denial might have contributed increased public masturbation, in her view. Again, calling on developmental ideas, she suggested Ai Fang seemed unwilling to accept her son's puberty as a transition stage from a child to an adolescent.

Ming Fu's mother can't accept about this issue. She put all her trust and responsibilities on us. She can't accept it [Ming Fu's masturbation in class]

and she is in the denial stage. “No, no, my son didn’t do this”. “I can’t accept”. She used the word of “geli” means disgusted...

Ai Fang was aware of her son’s misbehaviour “but uncertain what to do or lacking the internal or external resources to act exactly as he or she knows to do” as in Weingarten’s (2010, p. 12) typology of witnessing position in **Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered). Ai Fang “can feel despair and reasonable hope simultaneously” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10) when “reasonable hope accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10).

When Faiza advised Ming Fu’s mother to teach him about puberty and discuss sexual education with him, she refused to do so – perhaps unsurprising in the light of the cultural context I described earlier. The challenges of teaching sexual education to children may occur when parents themselves have little knowledge and are reluctant to offer sexual advice to their children (Aspy et al., 2007; Khalaf et al., 2014; Razali et al., 2017). The task of helping adolescents with ASD to understand puberty, sexuality, and relationships often depends on their parents and caregivers as much as on schools (Corona et al., 2016).

When I talked to his mother, she didn’t feel comfortable to teach Ming Fu sexual education. His mother replied “no, I won’t teach him sexual education. Now he is in secondary school, why I need to show my love to him [parental love]. He has grown up already”.

Faiza was located in an “aware and empowered” (**Witness Quadrant 1**) witnessing position (Weingarten, 2010, p. 11). While Faiza would prefer Ai Fang to take appropriate action to teach Ming Fu so that he does not masturbate in class, Ai Fang’s response distances her from having responsibility at present. She uses another version of developmental theory – that a young person in secondary school no longer needs their mother’s care, for they are already grown up. There is an impasse here: no-one is taking responsibility for Ming Fu learning about appropriate contexts for sexual experiences.

Again, Faiza expresses concern, suggesting that the problem here lies with Ai Fang’s approach to parenting attention. At first the problem was a somewhat “normal” one, explained by developmental discourse, and the responsibility of a mother to provide education. Ai Fang is held responsible again.

He shows us his misbehaviour at school because he wants attention and love from his mother. I know his mother would be busy with her business...

In a further move to show that Ai Fang was responsible for the problem, explained that Ming Fu learned the sexual behaviour from watching YouTube videos and feeling relief after practising masturbation.

Ming Fu is allowed to go online and watch YouTube videos as rewards of completing a task such as craft and sewing at home.

Again, Ai Fang's parenting is perceived as fault. Faiza's concern was quite genuine: she felt the public masturbation could become a serious issue if not monitored and addressed and it may have been overlooked by his mother. And she added to her explanation of the difficulty of working with Ai Fang to respond to the masturbation problem, noting the different language they each spoke as a possible barrier.

She tries to avoid talking with me because of language barrier.

Seeking support

The communication with Ai Fang did not produce any changes and Faiza explored a next avenue. Faiza sought support from her colleagues as she tried to find a solution to support Ming Fu. Here, Faiza and her colleagues were at first "aware but uncertain what to do" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 12) in **Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered) as they initially did not seem to know how to solve it. As Buston et al. (2002) said, it is important for a skilled teacher to deliver sex education as he or she could help those who do not know much about it or feel uncomfortable. However, teachers often do not feel comfortable to teach this subject in classroom. For instance, Faiza referred to the senior teacher assistant who laughed when talking about masturbation solution for Ming Fu. Buston et al. (2002) also noted laughter is one signal of discomfort in sex education.

The senior assistant teacher just laughed because he didn't know how to deal with this.

But Faiza was not deterred, and continued with her colleagues to find a way to respond appropriately.

We never encountered this problem before [with other students]. My colleagues and I tried to find a solution to reduce incidences of inappropriate sexual behaviour. For instance, we prohibit Ming Fu to put his hands below the table. Otherwise, he would try to hold his penis again. We always need to pay attention on him.

Thus, the first attempt to manage the problem of self-touching was a behavioural strategy, that Ming Fu was to keep his hands above the table. The next action had a social orientation. Faiza said her school took action to support Ming Fu's sexual curiosity by grouping all boy students into one class. This decision seemed based on the view that sexual misbehaviour in class would be reduced by separating boy and girl students.

We segregated all boys into one class.

A third focus of Faiza's response was to involve Ai Fang. Faiza put considerable effort into supporting Ming Fu, even though she had a language barrier when talking with his mother. It also seemed that she did not give up on Ming Fu's situation, but persisted in trying to support him. She used her teaching colleague as a translator to translate her suggestions for practice.

I didn't have a rapport with his mother because we didn't share a similar language. She misunderstood what I was saying. I tried to find a solution by talking to Teacher C who is a Chinese teacher at my school. Teacher C was able to translate my suggestion into Mandarin language to communicate with his mother.

Faiza and her colleagues believed they should support Ming Fu's mother in this situation, as parents should navigate their children's sexual development (Ballan, 2012; Nichols & Blakeley-Smith, 2009) although at first it was difficult. She tried repeatedly to invite Ming Fu's mother to discuss the sexual issue with her so that they could support Ming Fu together. The discussions subsequently increased, in frequency and depth eventually leading to fruitful outcomes.

I persuaded his mother come to school for 15 minutes at the first time for discussion. The discussion time increased by the next day.

Faiza managed to convince Ming Fu's mother to give her consent for the teachers to consult with a therapist at a hospital. This meeting finally helped Ming Fu to reduce the problem of masturbating in the classroom.

Ya, we have the meeting with the therapist and his mom three times to discuss this issue. Finally, Ming Fu's mother managed to sit down with us for three sessions and discussed her son's issue, and with our senior assistant teacher. Thanks God. Ming Fu's mother accepted the issue. After I had verbal consent from Ming Fu's mother, we tried to work together with the Occupational therapist from Hospital A who knew Ming Fu very well. We then referred this issue to the chief therapist.

Faiza believed Ming Fu's sexual curiosity would be able to be managed by collaborating with many services. The pooling of ideas from different perspectives seemed important in providing a more holistic solution to this issue (see Khalaf et al., 2014; see Razali et al., 2017; Travers & Tincani, 2010). This fourth strategy took the problem beyond Ming Fu, and beyond Ai Fang, and included education opportunities.

We worked together with the counsellors at the mainstream, the Permata Kurnia's therapists, and the teachers.

Faiza and her colleagues subsequently organised several sexual education workshops for all parents to acquire knowledge and strategies.

We also organised some sessions such as the Sexual Education Management Therapy Workshop, the Students' Behavioural Management Workshop and the Students' Self-Management Workshop in Special Education around October last year for all parents who had children with special needs. We worked together with the Permata Kurnia's therapists and the Unit of Student Affairs.

Parents were exposed to the knowledge about their children's potential behavioural changes during their puberty transition period. This aspect of sexuality knowledge is to help the parents to handle their children's puberty transition. The collaboration between school and the Permata Kurnia (state-of-the-art centre for ASD) therapists provided a platform for parents to raise their concerns regarding their children's sexual curiosity.

Other challenges for teaching and learning

Vocational education as specialist teaching

Faiza suggested vocational training was critical for students like Ming Fu and believed schools should have well-trained vocational teachers, vocational staff and officers to support students with ASD. She believed that a well-trained vocational teacher could guide the students appropriately.

We need well trained vocational teachers and vocational staff and officers to show students with correct path from this programme.

Faiza identified the importance of vocational education as a “stage” or “phase” to prepare students for “real life”. She noted students can benefit from vocational education as they can learn skills required for jobs.

They [the students] will cope very well after undergoing a vocational training programme as they will face real life after completing their study. They learn stages and phases from this programme to transfer the skills to the real world afterwards.

Family

Faiza also said there were many challenges in implementing vocational training for students with ASD. According to Faiza, the parents do not always allow their children to register under vocational training programmes. Some parents preferred their children to be placed in academic classes and sit public examinations, as these have higher status.

Many parents disagreed to put their children in vocational training class. Some parents said “I want my children to sit for the examination such as PT3 [Form Three Assessment] and SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examination order to get the certificate from the Malaysian Ministry of Education to enter to university”.

These parents protested against the reluctance of the school teachers to teach their children academic subjects, as the parents have knowledge about children with ASD entering and sometimes performing well at overseas universities. Faiza suggested that parents seem to ignore the limitations, that students with ASD have many challenges to deal with, and that sometimes these difficulties should be highlighted. Faiza thought some parents have unrealistic expectations and was concerned that parents compared their children to those in overseas.

Some parents also questioned why special needs children overseas can enter university. These parents [Malaysian] therefore force their children to sit for examination ... their children [experienced] trauma and phobia to come to school because their children thought school was like a prison and they lack freedom at school.

Faiza highlighted the inconsistencies in teachers' and parents' aspirations for the children. She said the challenges come from the socio-demographic characteristics of families because some families do not agree with the school offering vocational skills. She appears to be suggesting that many families place more value on academic skills rather than vocational skills, as they see academic knowledge as superior.

Some parents feel that their children need to learn academic skills in order to survive in this real world instead of vocational skills. However, we [teachers] think the students need to learn both academic and vocational skills to cope better in real world. Only a few students could cope academically, but most of them were good with hands on activities.

Again, the emphasis for teachers is on the value of "hands on" activities for students with ASD.

Faiza reported on the parental consultation and procedures she had to undertake before starting to work with a student.

We had a discussion with parents before we started our plan. We did paper works as well. We conducted workshops to give an overview of our plan to parents before we implemented it.

She also appeared concerned that the success and achievements of the students she worked with were not given sufficient recognition.

The discussion and workshops were important to reduce the parents' negative prejudice to send their children to vocational training class. It didn't mean if their children were not sent to the tertiary academic education, they were not successful.

Faiza said the school teachers also needed to collaborate with many services to overcome what she believed were unrealistic expectations from parents.

We need to collaborate with the counsellor at the mainstream class, therapists, staff from the Permata Kurnia, and our school teachers to solve this problem [of high academic expectations].

Faiza stated some students did not really understand why they need to develop particular vocational skills.

Sometimes, we had to tell the students why they needed to learn vocational training skills.

This situation is may be not surprising when parents may also not understand, and vocational education is not valued for what it can offer young people.

NASOM teacher's narrative - Suhaila (afternoon teacher)

Pre-vocational training centre: Opportunities

As outlined in Chapter two, NASOM centres provide a range of services, including pre-vocational training programmes for children with ASD who are above 14 years old. I interviewed a NASOM teacher, Suhaila, who was teaching at a pre-vocational training, centre in order to gain an understanding of Ming Fu's participation in the activities available at this centre. Suhaila is Ming Fu's teacher. She has a Muslim Malay background. She reported that she has three years' experience teaching young people with ASD at the NASOM centre. Suhaila's teaching is focused on the development of life skills, especially pre-vocational training. Suhaila has been assigned to look after Ming Fu as well as three other students, which is in line with the policy of the NASOM centre to assign each student to a specific teacher. The implementation of this policy allows

teachers to recognise the behaviour of particular students and determine strategies for handling any behavioural problems.

Suhaila shared that the pre-vocational training centre where she works provides several programmes for students with ASD. She said the centre was focused more on living skills for students to enable them to acquire the self-management skills they need before being assigned to more complicated tasks associated with pre vocational or vocational education. Suhaila claimed that some students may face difficulties in coping and understanding skills if they were sent directly to vocational training, without first attending a pre-vocational training programme. Suhaila believed that pre-vocational training could provide a platform for students with ASD to prepare themselves for learning preliminary skills before going on to vocational training.

I fully support pre-vocational training programmes because these students do not have basics and may come from the mainstream or they can't undergo mainstream transition. I think pre-vocational training is good. If you send them for vocational trainings straight, then it would be a bit difficult for them to get used to it and learn. Therefore, it is better to teach them in a pre-vocational programme to learn the basic skills first. Some low function students will find it difficult to cope with their learning if you send them straight to vocational trainings.

She believed students that should have to be able to manage themselves before they can be taught to perform pre-vocational tasks.

There are several beginner programmes for those who have newly enrolled at the pre-vocational programme especially students whose living skills are not very good. For a start, we would teach them living skills. There are students who cannot even take bath on their own and wear their own clothes.

Suhaila said she and her colleagues taught the students basic and small life skills. This strategy was intended to prepare the students with a foundation of living skills to manage themselves in daily life.

Usually, we would start with basic skills such as ironing and folding clothes, doing laundry, cooking and baking, watering plants, sweeping, mopping, and gardening.

As well, Suhaila then gave several examples of pre-vocational training programmes being offered at the NASOM centre which could prepare the students with ASD skills for job opportunities in the future. They included a range of crafts and practical activities.

Last year we made rugs and curtains with these students. They are always good at gardening and we are going to start the classes after the Eid [Festival of Breaking the Fast] celebration. These students are only the beginners for sewing skills and not all can master the skills. We also teach our students to keep their place clean. They learn simple cooking techniques during cooking lessons. We are also providing basic computer classes for these students.

However, she noted the students were only at the initial stages of developing those skills.

Since it is only a pre-vocational training programme, we would not make many products. The students are still new.

Suhaila then commented on the pre-vocational initiative that would follow life skills training.

Once they are able to take care of themselves, we would then introduce them to the KFC packaging.

She told me that Ming Fu has learnt to pack sets of cutlery for KFC at the NASOM centre, and over time has become able to concentrate more on doing his job.

Initially, Ming Fu could only pack approximately 13 sets of cutlery for KFC. However, this year, his concentration of packing much more better even his teacher walked away. He could still continue packing until the whole packaging is finished.

Ming Fu at the NASOM centre: Practical skills

Suhaila said she could see the potential for Ming Fu to have a job if he were trained in developing self-management and other skills. She suggested that Ming Fu could perform very well in several activities, such as cooking or stitching because Ming Fu tended to keep everything neat.

Ming Fu has talents. He can do the jobs neatly and very systematically if he knows how to do it...Usually, the jobs that he likes very much, he can do very

neatly. On the other hand, if you ask him to do something that he does not like then he would not do them at all.

This special characteristic that Ming Fu possesses could open spaces for him to work in several different fields.

Suhaila said Ming Fu was good at cooking.

I have conducted many cooking lessons before this. Ming Fu is good at cooking. But Ming Fu does not like making sandwiches. He prefers to cook instant noodles, fried rice and fried noodles.

Again, Ming Fu had clear preferences, refusing to undertake activities he did not like.

In contrast, Ming Fu's mother thought her son was not good at cooking. Ai Fang also listed out Ming Fu's favourite food. Ai Fang had reported.

Ming Fu is not so good in cooking-wise because he is very afraid of fire...He likes to eat nasi lemak [a Malay fragrant rice dish cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaf], chicken rice and fried rice.

According to Suhaila, Ming Fu was able to work well in the kitchen. This point resonates with Ai Fang's effort sending Ming Fu to learn vegetable-cutting two years ago, which was a significant transition step for him. Ming Fu may demonstrate his vegetable-cutting skills that he learned at the assorted dishes stall at the NASOM centre.

He can also do meticulous preparation such as cutting vegetables. Anyhow, you have to monitor him. You cannot just let him play with a knife. But certain work that he does is very neat and clean. I feel that Ming Fu should be placed at the kitchen department.

These skills positioned Ming Fu as both a capable learner and a potential employee.

He is very good at preparing drinks. You only need to give him a few instructions and he can follow them.

In certain conditions, Ming Fu could perform as a good worker, following instructions, perhaps aligned with characteristic of people with ASD who obey instructions according

to a plan. However, Suhaila felt she still needed to supervise Ming Fu when he was doing these activities.

Ming Fu: Masturbation

Suhaila also spoke about masturbation, linking it as part of the process of development.

Now, I feel that Ming Fu has begun to show signs of hormonal changes which has some effects on his behaviour because he is already 16. Nowadays, Ming Fu likes to fondle his private parts. Sometimes he fondles his friend's private parts without consent. He has friends who respond positively to him because all of them have grown up.

Suhaila took an educational approach to the problem.

At the beginning, I did not allow Ming Fu to fondle his private parts. Ming Fu does not know how else to express his feelings. If he does it outside, people might watch. I would use social stories to stop his behaviour [masturbation].

Suhaila took action to discuss Ming Fu's masturbation issue with her colleague to support him during this period.

When I discussed with Teacher A, she said that we can't discard this behaviour completely. We can't stop him from fondling either because he also has feelings. They [students with disabilities] have the same bodily function as any other normal person. So, we had no choice but to teach him that if he wants to fondle his private parts, he has to go to the toilet. That's the only solution we can come up with.

Suhaila suggested that letting Ming Fu go to toilet to masturbate in private could release his need and reduce his action of masturbation in class. It was also an educative approach, teaching Ming Fu when and where it was socially appropriate to masturbate.

I noticed that if Ming Fu says that he wants to go to the toilet means he wants to do it. For now, he has stopped fondling his private parts in class. Before this, I prevented him from doing it in class, but after a few minutes, when I'm not watching, he would start back. So, I told him to go to the toilet if has the urge. So, once he uses the toilet, he seldom does it in the class. There is some effect when you let him use the toilet, he doesn't do it in the class anymore.

This plan of teaching Ming Fu to go to the privacy of the toilets seemed to work to manage Ming Fu's sexual behaviour, helping him to learn personal behaviours for life beyond the vocational programmes.

Challenges in the context of the NASOM centres

Suhaila emphasised two main challenges in implementing pre-vocational training at a NASOM centre: finance and age. Students paid a minimal fee, approximately RM 300 per month, even though the actual cost was RM 900 to take care of each student (NASOM, 2017). Due to a shortage of financial resources, the centre cannot run its pre-vocational training programmes smoothly.

The main problem is finance because the NASOM centres do not get sufficient financial support to implement vocational skills. Our facilities are also in inadequate conditions. For example, if we want to train students with laundry skills, we face problems because we do not have enough washing machines and irons. We do have ovens for baking classes but we also need money to buy ingredients. We also need other appliances to develop students' vocational skills.

Ai Fang, Ming Fu's mother, also mentioned her concern that the NASOM centres face financial challenges and direct their services to younger students. She said:

Ming Fu is only 16 years old now. He might face a problem after completing his school at 19 years old. The NASOM centre may ask Ming Fu to leave and find another centre because of his age. The NASOM centre prefers to give an opportunity and support to younger children.

The financial constraints of the NASOM centre are becoming a worry for Ai Fang. She understands that the centre's age restriction is because of the limited resource but this will affect Ming Fu's learning. Thus, when Ming Fu reaches 19, she has to look for a new place to support her son.

Suhaila commented that the age of students was another serious issue that affected their abilities to learn pre-vocational training skills. A learning process was often interrupted

by unwanted behaviour. If students were younger, it would be easier for teachers to manage their behaviour, she suggested:

The other challenge was age. When the students were still young, it was easier to teach and reduce their misbehaviour. If they had grown up, their misbehaviour would turn violent if you wanted to correct it.

The challenges NASOM centres face may disrupt the vocational learning possibilities of many children with ASD.

Summary

Ai Fang, Faiza, and Suhaila employed different approaches to supporting Ming Fu in learning skills that might contribute to the potential for independent life and eventually for future employment. These approaches were used to shape Ming Fu to stand in a more advantageous social position in the future.

Ai Fang prepared Ming Fu with car-washing, vegetable-cutting, mat-making skills and English language (bilingualism) which she thought could present employment opportunities for him after completing school. Ai Fang managed to scaffold Ming Fu to learn car-washing at home, as she saw him as having the potential to work if proper support was given. She attempted to extend Ming Fu's skills by introducing vegetable-cutting skills in a commercial setting. However, this unfortunately turned out to be too challenging when the workplace setting did not have the resources to support Ming Fu's special needs. Ai Fang attempted to develop Ming Fu's mat-making skills and English language skills to increase his chances to be employed in the future. Given the importance of English in the today's world, Ai Fang believed that with an ability to communicate in this language, Ming Fu would be more attractive as an employee for potential employers. This story showed that "With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future" (2010, p. 7). However, Ai Fang's experiences in doing hope showed the need for support from the community to overcome challenges that arose.

Faiza used her teaching discourse to provide vocational training skills to support Ming Fu at school. In the meantime, she attempted to overcome Ming Fu's masturbation issue by working together with many services, ultimately leading to a successful outcome. She saw social conformity with expected standards of behaviour as essential for Ming Fu to achieve a place in the workforce.

Suhaila used her experiences and knowledge as a NASOM teacher to coach Ming Fu in learning pre-vocational training skills. These skills act as precursory skills before moving to learning formal vocational skills at the NASOM centre.

It became evident that even though Ai Fang, Faiza and Suhaila employed dissimilar approaches to supporting Ming Fu, their combined efforts contributed towards a shared goal, which involved setting plans to support Ming Fu's development and employment opportunities in the future. Ai Fang, Faiza and Suhaila created a community of care. Their actions clearly reflect Weingarten's concept of reasonable hope as Weingarten (2009) claims, hope functions in a relational context and becomes the community's responsibility as explained in Chapter Two and Chapter Eight. However, resources are needed in order for reasonable hope to be an option.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MARIAM: ACTIVELY IDENTIFYING APPROPRIATE LEARNING SETTINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports on the perspectives of three participants whose relationship revolves around providing support to Mariam. Mariam was a 17-year-old young woman with ASD who has a Muslim Malay background and lives with her family in a suburban area. Between the ages of two and three, Mariam was assessed by a pediatrician as having high functioning ASD. Other participants who were interviewed in this case included her mother (Siti) and current secondary school teacher (Aisyah).

Mariam's mother, Siti, tried her best in supporting Mariam at home, along with Mariam's father and her elder brother. Siti also endeavoured to collaborate with Aisyah and her other colleagues at school to provide a learning opportunity for Mariam in a mainstream inclusive class. Siti also taught at the school where Mariam was studying at the time of the interview.

The school teacher, Aisyah, put considerable effort into assisting Mariam at school, as I show in what follows. She also worked together with Siti to provide as many learning opportunities as possible for Mariam at school. This collaboration was important to aid Mariam towards a possible career path by learning Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at school.

Young person's narrative: Mariam

At the research interview, Mariam attended mainstream inclusive classes at the same secondary school where Siti taught in the mornings. I follow the detail of her schooling when I focus on Siti's contributions to Mariam's story (see Table 3, p. 114-116).

When I first arrived at Mariam's house, I interviewed her mother, Siti. When the interview was completed, Siti brought Mariam into the living room to introduce her. Mariam initially refused to talk to me. She appeared to express discomfort by turning away and shaking her head. Then, I introduced myself. I said hello. I asked her how she was and gradually she turned her body and looked at me. She was calm and responded in our conversation. I then moved to introduce the research focus for our conversation. I obtained Mariam's consent by reading out the content of the consent form. This form was then countersigned by Siti giving me the permission to begin the interview.

Siti told me that as a child Mariam could not make eye contact, but she is now able to do so. Through our interview, I noticed that Mariam attempted to make eye contact when talking to me, and the frequency of this was high. Siti said she had received instructions on how to make eye contact with Mariam from a session with the speech therapist. The session was funded by the Malaysian government hospital, and Mariam had visited there two to three times over two years when she was three years old. During our conversation, there were times when Mariam took her time before she replied to my questions. It became clearer that Mariam experienced fewer social limitations than other young people I interviewed. It may be that she had benefitted from this early intervention after being diagnosed with ASD as a toddler.

Mariam told me that she enjoyed attending school because she had many friends and a supportive learning environment at school. Mariam told me that she needed to take compulsory papers, such as Malay Language, English, Sciences and Mathematics. She also had to take elective papers, which are chosen according to students' capabilities/cognitive levels and interests. Mariam said she chose ICT as one of the elective papers which was her favourite subject.

Mariam provided several reasons for why she liked to study in her Science class, and then emphasised that she could concentrate in the more quiet learning environment of the class.

Poh Thin: Why do you like the Science class?

Mariam: Calm.

Poh Thin: Why calm?

Mariam: Because there aren't many children. I feel I study more easily and stay focused on listening and learning.

Poh Thin: What else is good about studying in that class?

Mariam: My heart is peaceful.

Unlike the Science class, Mariam disliked the noisy environment in the ICT elective class, a dislike related to the environment rather than the content. The class had many students who made noise and this affected her concentration. When I asked what she disliked, this is what she said:

Noisy.

Many children.

Some children with ASD are sensitive to sound, and this can therefore be considered an obstacle to learning, as noisy situations disturb these children's ability to concentrate (Ashburner et al., 2008; Wood, 2018). Mariam is probably sensitive to sound as children with high functioning ASD frequently seem to be inattentive and are easily distracted during activities in class, such as noise and over stimulation of the senses (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2019).

Later, I questioned Mariam further regarding the subjects she was learning at school. Mariam first wrote a list of all the subjects that she was studying. After that, she read the list to me, as follows:

History, Malay language, English, Mathematics, Science, ICT, Tasawwur Islam (the concept of Islamic Studies) and Islamic Education.

I then asked what subjects Mariam liked best and her answer was in a one-word sentence:

ICT.

I asked her more:

Poh Thin: Why do you like ICT?

Mariam: Because it is best.

Poh Thin: Why do you say it is best?

Mariam: Because I can study about computers.

Poh Thin: Apart from studying about computers, what else do you study in ICT?

Mariam: [No reply].

Step by step our conversation went on about what Mariam had learned at ICT class.

There's programming.

Multimedia.

Mariam said that she preferred programming rather than multimedia. She also demonstrated her comprehension of learning programming by saying:

I like programming.

I can do application.

I have to do course work.

I then asked Mariam's thoughts about job possibilities that she would like to do after completing her secondary school. "I want to enter university. Computers. Business."

Mariam's expressions of interest in ICT or business were supported by Siti and Aisyah, as both her mother and teacher said Mariam would be able to set up an online business because an online business involves fewer interactions with people. This seems to suit Mariam's disposition, as she is not comfortable interacting with people. Siti and Aisyah suggested Mariam could go further with an online business than with her computing abilities, and could improve her knowledge in this area through university studies.

However, when I sought confirmation from Mariam, about whether or not she would like to set up an online business after finishing school, she said she would prefer to further her studies up to PhD level. Tertiary education is Mariam's preferred option.

Not yet. I want to study up to PhD if possible.

I showed Mariam six pictures of various occupations as I did with each young person. When I asked Mariam about possible careers, Mariam chose the picture of a computer, saying “programmer”.

When I asked Mariam about what kind of resources and assistance she would need if she wished to become a programmer, initially, Mariam’s responses were very brief. She communicated in one-or three-word sentences.

Computer, table and chair, room, and people.

I confirmed with Mariam what she meant by people. She replied:

I need a teacher to teach me.

I then asked about her understanding of why order is necessary for coding and programmes. She responded with a well-formulated explanation of coding.

I learn how to arrange and place codes. For example, we have to arrange the codes correctly and to make the codes work smoothly. Otherwise, the application will spoil.

Mariam’s interaction with me at the time of the interview did not produce strong confidence for me that she is capable and well prepared for the rigour that programming studies require. At that stage, I held reservations about such a step for her future. It was only during the interview with her mother and teacher that I learned about her ability and skills to successfully engage with programming studies at secondary school. Her success supported the possible decision to take up tertiary studies in programming.

Mother’s narrative: Siti

Siti is Mariam’s mother. She has two children, Mariam and Mariam’s elder brother. She works as a history teacher in the secondary school where Mariam studies. Mariam was

Siti's student when she was in Form Four and Form Five. Siti began the interview by sharing with me Mariam's diagnosis process.

Diagnosis process

Siti reported that Mariam underwent several diagnostic processes before being identified as having high functioning ASD. She described the process of finding the diagnosis.

There were no apparent ASD symptoms with Mariam when she was two years old except that she sometimes struggled to speak. At that age, I took her to the hospital to consult a paediatrician. Mariam was recommended to undergo the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Examination that would evaluate her hearing ability, before a decision was made to meet a speech therapist. A child's progress can be observed with some abilities to communicate verbally at two years old, for example, pronouncing a few simple words. But Mariam could not speak at all, and there was no eye contact. She was not interested in watching us speaking.

Siti shared these experiences with me in order to clarify Mariam's disability.

At that time the paediatrician diagnosed her with high functioning ASD. Mariam's progress was different from other non-autistic children's progress.

Mariam's learning disposition

Siti described some of the ways in which ASD manifested in Mariam's development. Siti said Mariam was unlike other children as she did not sleep at all on journeys to the many places they visited. This is possibly characteristic of ASD, as Siti indicated spatial memory was evident as Mariam could remember the roads they passed. Siti connected this information to her early experiences as a parent prior to Mariam's diagnosis.

I knew babies usually sleep on a car journey. During the diagnosis phase of ASD, however, Mariam did not sleep while travelling in a car journey. No matter how far the journey was, Mariam would always refuse to sleep. She would stay awake throughout the journey. This was very different from her brother, who at that time was four years old, and would sleep in the car. The same trend continued even when she was three years old. Whenever we were travelling to a faraway place, she wouldn't sleep.

Siti told me that because of Mariam's well-developed spatial skills she preferred Mariam to be her navigator when driving, even when Mariam was quite young. This was because Mariam remembered the routes. She was a good observer and also had a good memory. Siti explained as follows:

There was once, when Mariam was four years old, her dad had an accident in state B, so I had to go to state B to fetch her dad. We were not used to driving to state B and her dad also did not allow me to drive to state B. I requested Mariam to sit at the front seat because she could read. She became the co-pilot instead of her brother. I was more confident to let her sit in front because she remembered the roads well. I had noticed her watching the roads since young. If we were to take a wrong turn, she would say, "Eh! This was not the road".

According to Siti, Mariam had other unique characteristics apart from remembering the routes. She said Mariam would ensure the car had a full tank of petrol before they started their journey.

Mariam had a totally different character than her brother. If it was a non-autistic child getting into a car, he or she won't pay attention if the fuel tank was full or not. Mariam would look at the indicator for fuel. Based on the indicator, she would notify us if we needed to fill the tank. Until we fill up the tank, she would not stop crying. A non-autistic child will never pay as much attention to the fuel indicator. A non-autistic child will only hop into the car and rest. This was the main difference between Mariam and her brother.

This behaviour was most probably because Mariam had the perception they might get into trouble in the middle of the journey if the car suddenly ran out of petrol. Mariam may also have experienced anxiety and other emotional mood problems. Although anxiety symptoms and disorders are often unrecognised or misdiagnosed, they are highly prevalent in children and adolescents with ASD (Kim et al., 2000; MacNeil et al., 2008; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Research suggests that 40% of people with ASD have significant levels of anxiety or at least one anxiety disorder, and the actual percentages may be much higher (Van Steensel et al., 2011). Siti identified the situation as "not a normal behaviour". She realised that Mariam's anxieties could become obsessions.

Siti constructed an idea of a “normal child”, which she saw in Mariam’s brother. She compared Mariam’s behaviour with this idea of normal. These discourses of normality were most evident when Siti spoke of Mariam’s positive qualities and special abilities, and also Mariam’s commitment to following a rule such as obeying traffic lights.

One more thing, I did not go against the red traffic light, otherwise Mariam would make noise in the car. Passing the traffic light illegally and overstepping a junction were a big “NO” for Mariam. She followed rules very strictly.

Siti went on to describe how Mariam demonstrated flexibility and adaptability while putting on the safety belt. She learned to read social situation well. The following situation shows Mariam had adjusted her rigidity in certain social settings.

At times we would forget to put on our safety belts. If she were to not notice that, she would not wear her safety belts either. But, if she saw a policeman standing outside, and the policeman was not performing any checks, she would still pull the safety belt on.

Mariam’s ability to learn directions, rules and routines, and her need to continue to observe these patterns can be seen as one of the indicators of behaviour on the ASD spectrum.

Kindergarten

In giving background to the question of vocational education, the focus of my study, Siti shared with me Mariam’s transitions through stages of schooling from a young age until the present day. The following table shows the summary of Mariam’s early childhood, primary and secondary learning experiences. I first provide this summary overview, and then I focus on the narrative of Mariam’s schooling as told to me by Siti, using the summary as a guide for the narrative that follows.

Table 3: The summary of Mariam's early childhood, primary and secondary learning experiences.

Mariam's age	School (kind of school)	Main purpose, Reason, Focus	Development, Event/Episode, Challenge, Problem	Outcome
Kindergarten (5-6 years old)				
Early 5	Mainstream kindergarten	To provide Mariam with a good start on her learning journey.	Mariam threw objects at students. Mariam's social behaviour became uncontrollable.	Siti moved Mariam from a mainstream kindergarten to a <i>special</i> kindergarten.
5	Special superkids kindergarten	Mariam was taught both academic and self-management skills.	Mariam successfully learned academic and self-management skills.	Siti managed to find a <i>special</i> superkids kindergarten for Mariam.
6	Mainstream superkids kindergarten	To benefit from mainstream education.	Mariam managed to change her behaviour, settled in and enjoyed learning.	No further action from Siti required. Mariam considered for primary mainstream.
Primary school (7-12 year old)				
7	Standard One (mainstream school).	To qualify for basic primary education Mariam passed the IQ test. She successfully completed her KIA test.	Mariam experienced emotional challenges and displayed unacceptable outbursts (kicking table).	Siti had to justify why Mariam was not placed in special school. Mariam remained in mainstream. School required her to manage her behaviour.
8	Standard Two (mainstream school).	To continue her basic primary education in mainstream.	Mariam was bullied by her classmates. They stole her stationery and pocket money.	Siti had to continuously buy new stationery for Mariam.
9	Standard Three (mainstream school).	To continue her basic primary education in mainstream.	The bullying continued.	Mariam maintained a present in mainstream class. Mariam managed the challenges/bullying.
10	Standard Four (mainstream school). Mariam was enrolled	To benefit from upper primary education.	Mariam felt overwhelmed when surrounded by many people at the canteen.	Siti packed food for Mariam so that Mariam did not go to the canteen and meet more people there.

	for most of the academic year. Towards the end of the year, Siti moved Mariam to a mainstream school with an ISEP.	To benefit from the ISEP.	Upon doctor's advice, Siti placed Mariam at the NASOM centre so she could have access to a shadow teacher [teacher aide]. This service was available only in schools with the ISEP.	Siti had to transfer Mariam to another mainstream school with an ISEP.
11	Standard Five Mariam remained in the same mainstream school with an ISEP.	To access the services of the shadow teacher.	Mariam attended the NASOM programmes in the afternoon for only three months. Mariam did not settle in. She was not used to having a shadow teacher.	Mariam used the shadow teacher's services for only three months. Siti wanted Mariam to be independent and not rely on the shadow teacher.
12	Standard Six Mariam remained in the same mainstream school with an ISEP.	To sit PSAT.	Siti encouraged extra classes and focus on her studies for the PSAT.	Mariam attended extra tuition at the school to prepare for the PSAT.
Secondary school (13-17 year old)				
13	Form One Mainstream girls' school	To continue her secondary education in mainstream.	Mariam did not attend school for three months because her friends did not understand her when she threw tantrums. During the three months she missed the School Based Assessments, but returned to school.	Towards the end of the year, Siti decided to enrol Mariam in the school she was teaching in. The school has ISEP.
14	Form Two The school where Siti teaches which has ISEP.	To benefit from the ISEP.	Mariam dissatisfied repetition of content.	Siti demanded that Mariam be placed in the mainstream inclusive class. The senior assistant teacher (ISEP) agreed.
15	Form Three The school where Siti teaches which has ISEP.	To integrate into mainstream inclusive class.	Mariam's peers understood her. This was important for Mariam's learning.	Siti was content with Mariam's progress.

16	<p>Form Four The school where Siti teaches which has ISEP.</p>	<p>To integrate into mainstream inclusive class.</p> <p>In the ICT class which offered optional subjects.</p> <p>In the Science class with less students and Mariam had good friends.</p>	<p>Mariam experienced problems choosing the right stream when in Form Four.</p> <p>Mariam threw a pair of scissors towards a student.</p> <p>Mariam was allowed to choose optional subjects other than Biology, Physics and Chemistry papers.</p>	<p>Mariam was placed in the third class (ICT class).</p> <p>Siti had a meeting with the Senior Assistant of Student's Affairs regarding Mariam's placement.</p> <p>The Senior Assistant of Student's Affairs asked Siti to place Mariam in the Science class.</p>
17	<p>Form Five The school where Siti teaches which has ISEP.</p>	<p>In the Science class but continuing her optional subjects/electives.</p> <p>To be able to sit for MCE.</p>	<p>Mariam settled into the Science class.</p> <p>She focused on studying for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) examination.</p>	<p>Siti did not require to intervene in Mariam's progress.</p>

I begin with kindergarten, the first school setting where Mariam did not seem to fit in. Siti reported that she attempted to send Mariam to a mainstream kindergarten to begin her formal education.

I tried to put Mariam in a mainstream kindergarten, together with her brother, where she was familiar. However, the very first day itself, Mariam showed her uncontrollable behaviour. The kindergarten operator became worried and she called me immediately. The operator said strictly that she was not able to accommodate Mariam in her kindergarten as she was simply throwing things at other students.

The response of the manager of the kindergarten can be interpreted as follows. The mainstream kindergarten probably lacked special education teachers to support children with higher needs. The kindergarten may have not been enabled to hire teachers with special education training to teach Mariam, perhaps because it is costly and Mariam may have been the only student with high needs in the kindergarten. The staff may have been afraid of being accused of not offering proper and sufficient care for Mariam. Because the kindergarten excluded Mariam from the class, Mariam lost a learning opportunity. This kind of response is not a proactive practice of an “inclusive society” in education. This kindergarten was perhaps operating based on the concept of “risk society” (Beck, 1992) as they perceived Mariam’s behaviour as a potential risk to students, themselves, and the reputation of the centre.

After this incident, Siti was forced to withdraw Mariam from the mainstream kindergarten. In Malaysia, there are two types of Superkids kindergartens: *special* superkids kindergarten and *mainstream* superkids kindergarten. Siti contacted the *special* superkids kindergarten which is a kindergarten helping students, with all kinds of disability problems, to orientate them school life.

Superkid was a kindergarten which had a special class for children with ASD and Down syndrome. This kindergarten was usually held in a church.

After Siti had an interview, she successfully enrolled Mariam at the *special* superkids kindergarten. Mariam showed significant development as she was appropriately guided in both academic and self-management aspects as a five-year-old.

Special superkids kindergarten had a curriculum very similar to the one in the mainstream kindergarten. The teachers let Mariam to do plenty of homework. She was also taught the Chinese language. Most importantly, *Special* superkids kindergarten trained Mariam with some proper behaviours such as sitting quietly, listening carefully and obeying orders as the preparation to place her back to the mainstream superkids kindergarten once again.

The *special* superkids kindergarten was a successful transition place for Mariam because it opened up an opportunity to enrol at the *mainstream* superkids kindergarten if she was able to manage herself well at the *special* superkids kindergarten. Mariam was then successfully placed at the *mainstream* superkids kindergarten when she was six. She spent one year there before the transition to primary school.

Primary school: Standards One to Six

Siti reported on six phases of Mariam's time in primary school from Standard One to Standard Six (see Table 3, p. 114 & 115).

Siti reported that when Mariam was about to enter Standard One, the first year of primary school, at age seven, she had to go through many assessments before being deemed suitable to be placed in a mainstream class at a mainstream primary school.

Dr. A conducted an IQ test to test her [Mariam] competence for the Standard One class. After Mariam sat the test, she was successfully placed in a mainstream class at a mainstream school...During Mariam's Standard One examination, she successfully sat all her skills such as reading and writing in her KIA [Early Intervention Class] tests. The KIA test is similar to today's LINUS [Literacy and Numeracy Screening Programme] system.

At that time, Mariam spoke with a limited vocabulary in Malay language. However, she consistently accomplished age-based benchmarks, which showed Mariam's abilities to achieve in examination and screening processes. Siti spoke of the role standardised testing had played in educational opportunities for Mariam. Siti described the assessments Mariam was required to undergo.

Having undertaken the academic assessments, Mariam was placed in the mainstream class for Standard One, but this was not without problems. She experienced emotional problems, that lead to behaviour problems, Mariam started kicking tables as Siti explained:

Mariam was placed in a mainstream class [Standard One] in the primary school. Mariam started to develop emotional problems at her school. Her class friends and teachers failed to understand her condition. For example, Mariam would feel bad when her teacher scolded her classmates. Mariam would sit facing her *ustazah* [Islamic religion teacher] while the *ustazah* scolded her friends. Mariam would feel as though she was being scolded by the *ustazah* and she would start kicking her table angrily. Definitely, this would make the *ustazah* scared.

Mariam may have been unable to understand why the Islamic religion teacher scolded the students, or perhaps did not have the skills to distinguish who was being scolded, and so she felt unjustly reprimanded. She then responded angrily.

With these events, Mariam's place in mainstream education once again was questioned.

The senior assistant of students' affairs inquired why Mariam was not placed in a special school [because of this kind of behaviour].

The decision was made that Mariam could stay in mainstream. However, a requirement was that her behaviour had to change.

Siti said Mariam continued to study in the mainstream class when she was in Standard Two and Standard Three. However, Mariam encountered several problems, including bullying.

Mariam would cry almost every day before going to school as she was bullied in her class. Her classmates would take her pencils and erasers. I had to buy new stationery for her every time. Once, her friends even took her pocket money. Her classmates were a real problem for Mariam in the mainstream school.

According to Siti, in later years, when Mariam was in Standard Four, Siti took initiative to provide packed food for her as Siti understood that Mariam was unable to interact with

people at the canteen. Mariam was overwhelmed when surrounded by many people at the canteen.

When Mariam was in Standard Four, I used to pack food for her so she did not have to go to the canteen and meet more people there. I was only worried about her not feeling comfortable meeting many people.

Towards the end of the year, when Mariam was in Standard Four, Siti was advised by Mariam's doctor to use the services of a shadow teacher from the NASOM centre. Siti took up the doctor's recommendation and removed Mariam from her mainstream school and enrolled her in another mainstream school that had an ISEP.

A doctor who had an autistic child advised me to put Mariam at the NASOM centre by using a shadow teacher [teacher aide] service from the centre. However, the doctor's advice was only applicable in a school which has the Integrated Special Education Programme. Therefore, I had to transfer Mariam to another mainstream school which has this programme.

Mariam was placed in the mainstream inclusive class alongside her peers when she was in Standard Five. Mariam started to use the shadow teacher's services from the NASOM centre. Mariam relied on the shadow teacher from the NASOM centre to aid her learning at school. However, Siti decided that Mariam should use the shadow teacher's services for three months.

In the morning, Mariam went to school, and to NASOM centre in the afternoon. I [Siti] used the shadow teacher's services to help Mariam while she was in her school for only three months. I did not request the shadow teacher to help continuously because Mariam was not used to having a shadow teacher from standard one to standard four. I wanted Mariam to adapt to her school environment on her own.

Siti's focus was on independent learning for Mariam.

The next significant event Siti reported was in Standard Six, the year that Malaysian students sit the Primary School Achievement Test (PSAT), a national examination taken by primary students at the end of their sixth year. This examination is run by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate under the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Mariam continued to study at the mainstream inclusive class when she was in Standard Six. Mariam's afternoon schedule was occupied with tuition classes conducted by her school teachers at school for higher academic achievement in the PSAT.

When Mariam was in Standard Six, she also attended extra classes at school. I wanted her to focus on her extra classes for her Primary School Achievement Test in the afternoon at school.

Siti told me that Mariam performed well in her Primary School Achievement Test. She managed to get through all the subjects which she took.

Mariam scored 1A, 3 Bs and 1C in UPSR [PSAT].

Siti valued Mariam's academic achievement. The whole education system, according to Siti, was appropriate for Mariam's schooling.

Secondary School: Forms One to Five

When Mariam started her first year secondary schooling in Form One, at the age of 13, she was placed in a mainstream girls' school because of her achievement in the PSAT. While her test results were favourable, with this change in schools Mariam demonstrated behavioural problems. Siti said:

When Mariam was in Form One, I put her in a girls' school. She didn't go to school for three months because her friends didn't understand her when she threw tantrums. The afternoon supervisor complained about this matter and the Form Co-ordinator was already tensed up with Mariam as the School Based Assessment evaluation was in progress. The teachers were rushing to complete their modules, and the students had to complete their assignments. Mariam became so stressed.

Mariam was stressed in the mainstream class. Mariam's peers lacked the knowledge to understand her situation and the teaching staff also experienced the stress of curriculum and achievement demands.

Towards the end of the year of Form One, Siti decided that was not the best setting for Mariam to remain at the mainstream girls' school. Siti then approached the District Education Officer to seek advice for changing school for the best interest of Mariam.

The officer questioned Mariam personally. "Mariam, which school do you want to go to?" Mariam told the officer that she wanted to go to mother's [Siti's] school.

Siti agreed with Mariam's decision and enrolled her in Siti's school, when Mariam was in Form Two. Siti's school had the Integrated Special Education Programme, and Siti placed Mariam in this programme.

I had to put Mariam back in the Integrated Special Education Programme.

But while this special education programme may have fitted because of the behavioural difficulties, Mariam seemed to be learning little of academic value.

Mariam complained because she was taught to spell "kereta" [car] repeatedly. She found spelling car repeatedly was boring because she scored well in the Primary School Achievement Test.

On the basis of Mariam's learning needs, Siti then had a disagreement with the senior assistant teacher when she was trying to get Mariam out of the Integrated Special Education Programme.

After that, I fought with Mariam's senior assistant teacher from the Integrated Special Education department to place Mariam in the mainstream inclusive class. Finally, the senior assistant teacher agreed with my decision.

Siti then placed Mariam in a mainstream inclusive class in her school when Mariam was in Form Three. This inclusive approach to education seemed to accept and respect diverse requirement challenges learning needs for Mariam in her school communities. The inclusion of high functioning ASD children in mainstream classroom requires adequate awareness of ASD to ensure that learning take place efficiently and effectively (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2019).

Siti said Mariam took time to adapt in the new environment of her Form Three mainstream inclusive class. She explained the advantages of placing Mariam in a good class with a diverse group of students. Siti thought that Mariam had an opportunity to interact with her peers in a mainstream classroom, and seemed to improve her social skills as her peers and teachers started to accept her into the class.

Placing plays an important role for these inclusive children because not everyone understands them well. The friends' and the teachers' acceptance are very important for them. When Mariam was in Form Three, she was okay. Her friends began to understand her. It happened after a long time.

This placement also seemed to enhance Mariam's self-esteem, as she was studying with her peers in a mainstream inclusive class. Placing Mariam in a mainstream class could also educate her peers and teachers to learn acceptance and patience toward Mariam and other students with diverse learning and behaviour. This will have social benefits for her peers for their future.

Mariam once again faced difficulties in choosing a class when she was in Form Four.

Mariam had problem choosing the right stream when she was Form 4. Even though Mariam got through her Mathematics and Science subjects in the PT3 [Form Three Assessment] examination, she refused to go to the pure Science stream. I also knew that she would not be able to cope in the pure Science stream. Mariam had to enter the third class. The elective subjects were not the same.

Here, Siti is referring to the top stream Science class where it is compulsory for students to take Biology, Physics and Chemistry papers as main subjects. The ICT class, which is a good class, offers options and Science is not made compulsory.

The management team tried to find the best solution for Mariam instead of asking her to find another school, which they could have done in this situation. Social relationships produced a challenge for Mariam's successful integration as Siti explained:

The classmates who were not used to Mariam started to irritate her with their comments. The same old issue repeated again. Once Mariam threw a pair of scissors towards a student. The student made a complaint to the Senior Assistant of Students' Affairs.

Mariam struggled in the mainstream class due to her ASD characteristics. Based on the example provided above, we can see that the administrators of the mainstream school were approachable. They managed to find another option for Mariam instead of sending her to another institution. However, students at the same school were not ready to accept others whose behaviour might not seem typical to them. Mariam in that situation was not able to hold her irritation and anger and reacted in a way that could have caused potential harm to her classmates.

The management team took the initiative to allow Mariam to study in the Science class.

During the meeting with the Senior Assistant, he asked me to place Mariam in the Science class where she had good friends and allowed her to take different elective subjects.

The management team observed Mariam's friendships and used this observation to make a decision. This is because, apart from academic benefits, Mariam could gain social advantages such as acceptance by peers and the possibilities for friendships (Lindsay, 2007; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999; Wiener & Tardif, 2004) especially in the Science class. Students with disabilities often experience difficulties in being accepted by peers (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Smoot, 2004; Symes & Humphrey, 2010) and acquiring friendships (Koster et al., 2010). Pijl et al. (2008) showed that approximately 30 percent of students with disabilities have significant fewer friends and are less accepted by their peers. The social disability associated with ASD could engender anxiety especially in higher functioning youth who have an awareness of their social disability (White et al., 2009). Together with the Salamanca Statement and the CRPD, it is clear that the social participation of students with disabilities in mainstream education can provide challenges for inclusive education, as Mariam's and Siti's stories show.

According to Siti, to whom it seemed important to outline all of Mariam's schooling experiences, Mariam was more settled for the following year when she was in Form Five and seemed to have fewer problems in this class.

The scenario in a Form Five class is different because every student had his or her target to study to sit for SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examination. That is the reason why there were many factors to be considered when Mariam is placed in a mainstream inclusive class.

Siti commented on the need for students in Form Five to have their own targets to achieve for their public examination, the Malaysian Certificate of Education. The Malaysian Certificate of Education is a national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students in Malaysia. This examination is set and examined by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate and it is equivalent to eleventh grade in America's K–12 (education). The Malaysian Certificate of Education is also equivalent to O-Levels in the United Kingdom, which is the second to last public examination at secondary school level before students have an opportunity to enter into tertiary education in Malaysia. Mariam is thus on a relatively inclusive path in her academic schooling.

Here, Mariam's case study illustrates that "time is a critical dimension of our understanding of hope" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). Reasonable hope lies in the premise that the future depends on making sense of what is happening now and filling this time with "working not waiting" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). The change of schools would provide Mariam with scaffolding to prepare for a possible future. By this action, Siti took up a position in **Quadrant 1** (aware and empowered), enacting the hope that Mariam's possible future depends on step-by-step action and access to useful and targeted resources that can address challenges.

Ways of guiding behaviour dealing with tantrums

When Mariam was in Form Five, at age 17 years, Siti followed the advice of a psychologist in a government hospital where Mariam went for treatment, that is to use creative approaches to resolve Mariam's tantrum problems at home. The psychologist proposed Mariam write her problems in a book, as a diary, and consider the diary her best friend.

If she [Mariam] threw tantrum, nowadays I use a psychological strategy. Her main problem why she threw tantrum was she couldn't express her needs clearly. So, I would tell her to write down her problem in a book. She wrote about her problems in the book which seemed like her best friend.

This has worked for Mariam and has reduced the severity and frequency of her tantrums. Mariam seemed to calm down as she could express her feelings in the book.

She wrote how she was focusing on her SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examination. She wrote how tense she was to sit for her SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examination. She was so tensed up because she set her target to obtain 9As.

Siti also gave other examples of occasions when Mariam showed tantrums. According to Siti, Mariam threatened her brother by pointing a knife at him. She tried to explain to Mariam that her dangerous action was not appropriate. Again, Siti showed by her response that she was aware and empowered (**Quadrant 1**) and this time focused on "reforming goals and cultivating pathways" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) to her daughter's future. Siti said:

Mariam used to quarrel with her brother. Last time, she showed a knife towards her brother. We hid the knives afterwards. Mariam had promised the psychologist not to point a knife at her brother anymore. But I didn't want her to do so. I taught her about the danger of pointing a knife at someone.

This explanation had the effects Siti hoped for.

She used to go on a rampage last time. Now, her tantrum has reduced, based on my observation.

Siti said that at school if Mariam showed a tantrum in the past, she would be brought back home by her father. However, Mariam had now been given options to stay in the class or go back home.

There wasn't any problem as regards to the teachers of the school. If Mariam's emotions were unstable, I would request her father to take her back home to calm her down. I would ask Mariam whether she could control her emotions. I asked her, "Do you want to study?" If she said okay, she would remain in the school. On the other hand, if she said, "I couldn't stand it

anymore”, she would be sent home. I provided her with the opportunity to recognise her abilities. At times, she could control herself. Not every time that she was sent home.

In this situation, Mariam’s father was practising “humble hope” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10). Her father still held reasonable hope for his daughter’s success, although the situation was not the desired goal. Humble hope “allows reasonable goals to trump ideal ones” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10).

Siti claimed that Mariam usually decided to stay at school by controlling her tantrum. In particular, Siti says Mariam loved ICT class, a situation where Mariam exercised control over her own behaviour.

Sometimes, she thinks about she has ICT class as she loves the class. She would say, “I could control”.

Learning living skills at the rehabilitation centre

Siti spoke of other difficulties of raising a child with ASD. In support of Mariam’s development, Mariam attended a rehabilitation from age four to 14 because 14 years of age is the maximum age which the rehabilitation centre will accept a child with ASD. These centres provide opportunities to learn living skills and social skills, complementing the young people’s formal education. Siti sent Mariam to a rehabilitation centre to learn living skills. One of the skills Mariam learned was food preparation.

Mariam attended rehabilitation centre at a government funded hospital. At the hospital rehabilitation centre, Mariam used to learn to make coffee and sandwiches at the rehabilitation centre kitchen for children with ASD. The psychologist at the rehabilitation centre asked me to teach Mariam how to make her own drinks and how to cook her own food. Mariam can prepare her own drinks and cook Maggi noodles.

Siti continued to teach Mariam these skills at home as suggested by the psychologist. Siti seemed to understand the concept of repeatedly teaching the same skills to Mariam in order for her to acquire the skills. Practising the same skills, both at the rehabilitation centre and at home, accelerated Mariam’s food preparation skills.

Siti exercised patience and practised reasonable hope (Weingarten, 2010) when teaching Mariam the living skills which became very useful in Mariam's daily life.

I have taught her how to sweep the floor, tidy up her bedroom, open and close the curtains in a tidy way, fold her clothes, choose her own clothes before taking her bath, and put her dirty clothes into the laundry basket. Currently, she washes her clothes and tidies her room. She can do most of the routine work by herself.

Siti believed that learning to do household chores was important for Mariam even though she had to demonstrate these multiple times. Doing household chores can instil in Mariam the satisfaction of and responsibility for contributing to her family. These skills are important for Mariam to be responsible for herself and to live independently. Mariam now is able to perform these living skills by herself.

Social skills for multiple purposes

Siti understood that impairment in social functioning is a central feature of ASD and Mariam was struggling with social skills. For this reason, she enrolled Mariam in the rehabilitation centre to gain treatment for speech delay, as well as to learn social skills.

I started to send Mariam to the hospital rehabilitation centre because Mariam had a speech delay problem when she was two years old. The hospital staff also taught Mariam social skills. They involved Mariam in group work and in bowling at the age of 13.

Siti thinks social skills are important for Mariam to learn to interact effectively and navigate her daily life. Siti further explained that Mariam's social skills would prepare her more for future employment.

The hospital staff then focused on Mariam's social skills to prepare for work.

Social skills are important for one's personal life, social life and career. Siti believed Mariam would need social skills for her future employment even if Mariam's future employment involved interacting with less people.

Vocational Training Potential

Having offered this general education background, Siti then focused on the vocational questions. Siti noticed Mariam's interest in her ICT studies. She invested in many opportunities for Mariam to acquire the necessary knowledge and skill. Siti expected Mariam to excel and successfully establish herself in the field. Siti had already started to work towards Mariam's future plans. She was preparing Mariam to pursue advanced studies in ICT after completing her secondary schooling. Therefore, Siti wanted Mariam to do well in her high school examination as the first step.

I noticed that Mariam has interest in ICT. I wanted her to be involved in ICT because she liked it. Whenever there was an ICT examination, she would be the one to get the highest marks. Mariam is the potential 'A' candidate for the ICT subject.

According to Siti, Mariam has already started to use the language of computers.

Mariam always mentions words like *application*, *hackers* and other ICT related terms. Actually, ICT was a wide scope.

Siti seemed to think the best career for Mariam is something related to ICT. She has observed Mariam by looking at her character, and her preference for less interaction with people to is work from home. Therefore, multimedia and programming are two ICT areas that have drawn the interest of Siti for Mariam.

Multimedia and programming were good for her as well. Mariam knew well that she couldn't choose a career that needed her to socialise with other people. She preferred to be with the computer. Mariam once requested "May I work at home?". She could do online business. She wanted to look for a job that involved very few people. She knew her weakness.

Siti reported that Mariam could discuss ICT-related topics with her brother as they both share the same interests. Sharing the same interest could benefit both Mariam and her brother because they are able to exchange ideas during their conversation.

Mariam's brother studied ICT and application as well. Mariam could share things with her brother because they have the same interest.

Siti used her ability to notice and to take actions to build a possible future for Mariam. Once again, she is aware and empowered (**Quadrant 1**) and willing to provide the environment and resources needed for Mariam to make the most of her skills. Here, Siti shows her belief in focusing on reasonable goals.

Challenges

Lack of communication skills interpreted as a problem

Siti felt disappointed when she read Mariam's Individual Achievement Programme record.

In Mariam's Individual Achievement Programme record, the special education teachers wrote that Mariam was having problems in everything including lack of communication skills.

Mariam's restricted communications skills kept producing challenges for the educators and this was reported in her Achievement Programme. Such limitations require special education teachers to keep developing specific skills and knowledges to assist Mariam. This may require extra time and commitment from teachers.

Specific requirement for mainstream classes

Siti wondered about the requirements for Mariam to enter the mainstream class.

The special education teachers insisted that there needed to be a balance between Mariam's IQ [intelligence quotient] and EQ [emotional quotient] performance to enable her to enter the mainstream class.

Siti expressed her sadness as Mariam needed a balance between IQ and EQ performance in order to be placed in a mainstream class. Children with ASD may have the IQ, but they are likely to need to be supported in meeting the EQ requirement.

Foul language

Siti said Mariam picked up vulgar words in mainstream classes after listening to her peers' communicative language. Mariam began to mimic the vulgar language at home without knowledge of the meanings.

Mariam spoke foul language to me, her father and her elder brother without understanding the meanings. Mariam became a victim of using rude words: *stupid* and *bastard*.

Siti seemed very concerned about the foul language issue that Mariam had picked up. Siti thought Mariam's continuous action of using this language is considered socially inappropriate, and may risk creating negative impacts in interaction with people. Knowing how to use appropriate language is an important employment-related skill.

Overall, Siti's account was much more focused on the history of her schooling experiences, and less on the possible future of employment.

School teacher's narrative: Aisyah

Aisyah was a mainstream secondary school teacher, who had a Muslim Malay background. She taught the Malay language. She had only four months of formal teaching experiences with students with ASD. Mariam was placed in her mainstream class at the beginning of that year in Form Five. Despite being a mainstream school teacher, Aisyah had some familiarity with special education areas because her school had an ISEP. Aisyah also took initiatives to attend ASD-related forums and talks, as well as spending time with students and teachers from the Autism Academy Centre which is a non-governmental organisation under the Autism Association. Aisyah had volunteered for five years at the Autism Academy Centre. Aisyah developed her special education knowledge and skills from the voluntary experiences.

During our interview, Aisyah shared about her voluntary experience at the Autism Academy Centre, before she spoke about Mariam's story.

Autism Academy Centre

Aisyah talked about her initial relevant teaching experiences and why she was involved as a volunteer at the Academy Autism Centre. Aisyah helped in the centre because most of her roles there were related to her current profession as a teacher. Aisyah reported that the centre provides several types of services for students with ASD, such as living skills, academic skills and self-management skills. This is because it is believed that these students should be educated and given exposure to new experiences from an early age.

The students here learn about colours and sizes by arranging blocks and stringing beads. They also learn to mix colours by doing batik prints. Students who are good learn A, B, C and 1, 2, 3. But those who are weak only learn self-management skills. They learn how to use spoon and toilet properly. I myself saw the students showing good table manners and toilet usage after some time. Something great for the centre.

However, Aisyah also said that some of the students still could not master the self-management skills after several training sessions at the centre.

Many students were facing problems managing themselves. Most of them had difficulties while eating by holding a spoon themselves. They might not have a chance to practise the activities when they were small.

Aisyah knew failing to master self-management skills could pose a problem for the students themselves, and their parents and teachers in the future. According to Neitzel and Busick (2009), self-management interventions should be implemented for students with ASD to help these students to learn independently, regulate their own behaviours, and become able to behave well at home, school, and in community settings.

Participation experiences in several activities

Aisyah shared her experiences of some of the programmes as a volunteer at the Academy Autism Centre.

I talked to the teachers there [Academy Autism Centre] and assisted them in whatever way that I could. I got myself involved in every programme of theirs

such as forums, Walk with ASD, charity programmes, dinner functions and excursions.

i. Excursion to a disabled persons activity centre and a zoo

Aisyah and the teachers at the Autism Academy Centre attempted to get sponsors to run excursions successfully. Aisyah was happy to assist students with ASD and encouraged her mainstream students to become involved in ASD programmes.

We organised an excursion to a disabled persons' activity centre and a zoo in State B. The teachers at the centre and I worked together to find sponsors to charter transport, food and other necessities. There were only 18 students with ASD who joined the excursion. Then I chose mainstream students who enjoyed volunteering to make up 40 seats to charter a bus. I instructed the mainstream students to look after the students with ASD.

Aisyah recruited some parents or students' siblings to participate in the excursion. She said:

Older sisters or mothers of students with ASD who were unable to manage themselves came in the trip.

Aisyah reported that mainstream students were given the opportunity to experience how people with disabilities produce floor mats using remnants of cloth. The remnants of cloth were supplied by a textile factory for free. Aisyah encouraged the mainstream students to buy the floor mats to show their support for the centre.

I encouraged the students to buy the floor mats as a donation to support the centre. The thin floor mats were sold at RM 5 each and the thick ones were sold at RM 10 each.

Although Aisyah did not speak in detail about the learning opportunities, it seemed to be the young people with ASD to learn to conduct themselves in the different place for them to find out about going on the bus to follow a map and travel. Children with ASD reveal their sensory problem when interacting with many people (Ashburner et al., 2008; Myles

et al., 2004) and persons with ASD process sensory information in a way that is different from others (Brock et al., 2002; Mottron et al., 2006).

Some of the students with ASD followed rules. But, some of them yelled because the places were new to them. Our teachers and the parents used different approaches, such as firm and persuasive ways to interact with them. We managed to calm down the students.

Through Aisyah's involvement, she attempted to create an inclusive environment where she treated the students with ASD with dignity during the excursion.

ii. Forum

Aisyah also assisted in conducting a forum on ASD which was organised by the Autism Association in State A.

There were three sections in the forum. The first section was conducted by an artist who talked about his experience of having a son with ASD. The second section was conducted by an officer from the Social Welfare Department. This officer told about procedures to get assistance and support for people with ASD. The last section was led by a person from the Education Department in State A. This officer discussed about educational opportunities available for students with ASD, and schools which offered special classes in State A.

Aisyah also encouraged more mainstream students to become involved in this forum about ASD.

I took ten of my mainstream students to join the forum about ASD. I prepared the scripts for the forum. Four of my students, who were learning Multimedia at school, did video recordings of the whole function. I encouraged my students to join the forum because I wanted to raise awareness about ASD to mainstream students. My students told me that they enjoyed the forum and learned more about ASD from the forum.

Involving mainstream students in this forum helped raise their awareness about ASD, an important scaffolding for building understanding and breaking down some of the misconceptions and prejudices that many students might have. Here, the teacher is

practising reasonable hope by “working not waiting” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7) with the aim of developing a more inclusive school environment for students with ASD.

Mariam at school

Aisyah turned next to share her experiences interacting with Mariam at school. Aisyah called on her broad volunteering experiences at the Autism Academy Centre to interact with Mariam at school.

I knew I was using the right approach to interact with students with ASD at the centre and Mariam in class. Mariam was very close to me. She communicated more with me compared to other teachers. Sometimes, she came to the library to see me to discuss some small topics. Although we only discussed small topics, they meant a lot to her.

Initially, the teachers did not accept Mariam’s placement in the Sciences class. Nevertheless, when the teachers were informed of Mariam’s situation, that she was registered under the special education department and her performance would not affect the achievement of the Science class, they consented to her enrolment in the Science class.

Some teachers started to question why Mariam was placed in a Science class when she had not taken any Science [Biology, Physics and Chemistry] subjects before. Finally, the teachers accepted the idea when they were explained the reasons for placing Mariam in a Science class.

When a student with ASD has been registered under the Special Education Department, no matter what grade he or she achieved in the mainstream class, it would not affect the overall marks of the mainstream class. Placement and participation of students with ASD is not only determined by what they themselves can do, but by how the school wants to protect their academic reputation. Thus, school reputation may determine whether or not these students with ASD get an opportunity.

Aisyah further claimed that there were many advantages for Mariam to be registered with the Special Education Department.

It is good that Mariam was registered under the special education department. The marking grades can be brought lower for her and she would be given extra time to answer her papers if such request was asked during her SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examination.

Mariam's school teachers also adhered to the Malaysian Special Education Act (1997 & 2013) which caters for the needs of students with disabilities in order for them to sit their public examination. This step was an important one for Mariam in order to have a good chance in life to further her studies at the tertiary level if she passed the public examination.

Support

i. management team

Aisyah explained that the school management's intervention supported Mariam at school. The school management team listened, accepted, and attended to Mariam's problems in school. The decisions made by the school management positioned Mariam in a comfortable place or space to continue studying in the Science class and made the best use of such an opportunity.

The support given by the management was very good. The management listened to Siti [Mariam's mother] as she was also a teacher there when she explained about Mariam's problem. The management allowed Mariam to be placed and learn together with her peers in a Science class.

The school management thought it was appropriate to place Mariam in the mainstream class. They accepted Mariam for a camp that was designed for excellent students. Under exceptional circumstances, Mariam was selected to attend the camp on academic grounds although she was originally from the special education class.

There was a camp for excellent students, for 30 selected students only. Mariam by right cannot be selected because her name is under special education. However, the school management took Mariam in as her marks qualified her.

The decision of the school management showed that they were practising reasonable hope by making it possible for Mariam to have her needs met. They acted with others and to accommodate the challenges posed by regulations: “Reasonable hope accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10).

ii. peers

Aisyah agreed in this situation small class size and peers who understood were crucial for students with ASD. Mariam was placed in a Science stream class because the Science class only had a few students, which suited Mariam of not studying in a noisy learning environment.

Choosing the right class is also important for Mariam. Mariam was placed in a Science class with only 13 students in total. Mariam felt comfortable studying in that class as her peers were very understanding.

In order to help Mariam settle, Aisyah had already explained Mariam’s situation to her peers. Aisyah was taking time and practised negotiating skills and reasonable hope to build relationship to support both Mariam and her peers.

In advance, I explained to Mariam’s peers how to approach her. Mariam’s peers accepted her in their class whole heartedly. They were kind, wonderful and helpful to her. I should praise her peers here, they took the trouble to explain to Mariam anything that she was unable to catch up during her lessons.

Aisyah shared with me that Mariam’s peers were also very understanding towards her when she had emotional issues in class. Initially, it was difficult for Mariam’s peers to understand her emotions. Aisyah took initiative to tell Mariam’s peers about ASD and how to treat her appropriately. This strategy encouraged her peers to support her properly and it was a good relational practice with a student with ASD.

It was difficult for us [Aisyah and Mariam’s peers] to understand Mariam. Mariam’s mood would change suddenly. However, her peers understood her emotion well.

Peer support for Mariam contributed to Aisyah’s attempt to create an inclusive class.

iii. Aisyah and other teachers

Aisyah seemed to have effective strategy working with Mariam. Aisyah used her skills to select from a range of strategies and tactics in the most appropriate way to respond to situation which provided space for Mariam to manage her behaviour by herself.

Recently, one of Mariam's teachers went on a transfer. While teaching I noticed that she [Mariam] looked very upset, then she started to cry. I was indeed surprised when I asked her why she was crying, she told me that she missed her teacher. I just let her to be on her own.

It is a refined skill for a teacher to know when to approach this student who is distressed, to support them by their presence, and when to withdraw and leave their own to manage what is happening.

Aisyah spoke of applying similar sensitivities in class discussions in which Mariam participated.

When we discuss about some topics, she [Mariam] would have more good ideas. Sometimes I could not agree with her ideas, but I would just say yes without showing any importance to other better ideas at that time. I could not reject her ideas on the spot as it would be very sensitive for her. Mariam could usually accept after some time.

Aisyah demonstrated refined relational skills and good teaching practices in response to Mariam's misbehaviours, by explaining her situation patiently. According to Aisyah, Mariam could demonstrate some mild emotional challenges when she was unable to interpret a rejection. Aisyah said:

For example, one day, one teacher reprimanded all her classmates using harsh words. Mariam thought she was being scolded because she did something wrong. She became very upset and refused to enter the teacher's class again.

Aisyah called Mariam and explained to her why the teacher reprimanded all her classmates and not only her. Aisyah felt that she had to do this to enrich Mariam's social

interaction skills that had been gradually built. Aisyah helped Mariam interpret interactions, and build resilience. Aisyah said:

I explained to Mariam that the teacher was not scolding Mariam only but all her classmates. When I asked, “Why did your teacher scold you?” She told me that the teacher scolded her because she did not do her homework. When I asked her again, “Mariam did you do your homework?” She said, “Yes”. Which meant the teacher was not scolding her but the students who did not do their work. That was how our conversation went on. Mariam understood after I explained to her. The next day, she entered the class as usual.

Aisyah knew Mariam did not yet have the social skills to interpret the meaning of a teacher reprimanding students in a class. Aisyah tried her best to teach Mariam social skills and recognised Mariam could understand and memorise. In realising Mariam needed further explanation to understand the situation, Aisyah was practising “humble hope” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10) from an aware and empowered (**Quadrant 1**) position.

This aspect of teacher thinking is referred to as ‘tacit knowledge’ (see Pijl, 2010). Jordan et al. (2009) describe tacit knowledge as a form of knowledge neither made consciously or used in words. forces, the action and the consequences.

Mariam’s diligence

i. knowledge

Aisyah noticed Mariam’s interest in reading. Because Mariam liked reading, she had broader general knowledge to contribute to discussion, in class, and was able to share quality ideas. Mariam’s work ethic was evident in her behavior that showed her frequenting to library to read often.

Mariam likes reading. She always come to the library to read books, magazines, comics, etc.

Aisyah confirmed Mariam is a clever student through her achievements in school. Mariam scored good grades in the subject History, as well as her favourite ICT, as she

loved to read. She might have a good memory to remember history facts that were most required for scoring in that history paper.

Mariam was the top 50 scorers among the 250 students in Form Five. Siti [Mariam's mother] was teaching History and Mariam scored A in the subject because of her reading habit, I would say.

Mariam's mother love for history may have sparked some interests for Mariam. Mariam was fascinated over the topics like Malaysian policies, questions related to current issues and high-level thinking skills (for example conflict in Syria). Mariam's curiosity rose even further as she began to read and made frequent visits to the library in search of these topics in order to broaden her general knowledge.

ii. Acknowledgement of achievements

Aisyah spoke about Mariam's participation in aspects of school assemblies.

Mariam is an active person. For example, during assembly, she would always go up the stage to answer questions. Last week, the Senior Assistant gave a talk on the ten characteristics of a polluted nature. After that, the Senior Assistant challenged the students to say all the 10 characteristics that he mentioned earlier. He called the students to come up the stage to answer his question. Mariam was the first one to go up the stage to give the answer from the notes that she has noted.

Mariam was attentive in assembly. Although Aisyah does not talk about all the details of these steps, we can imagine the steps that Mariam may have taken. From beginning with listening carefully, to taking notes, to put her hand up and offering to come up to stage, then, accepting the invitation to go up. We can also envisage Mariam climbing the stairs to the stage. She looks at the crowd and then looks to the person who is asking for an answer and lastly, she constructs the answer.

Mariam was responding to rewards and incentives. In the previous studies about incentive use for learning for children with ASD, it was found that incentives may be exceptionally motivating and may also have social elements (Scott-Van Zeeland et al., 2010; Kohls et al., 2011; Dichter et al., 2012). Children with ASD and ADHD respond faster to monetary

than social rewards compared to typically developing children and adolescents. It is possible that children with ASD and ADHD show a more general increase in monetary motivational setting (Demurie et al., 2011).

Mariam received RM10.00 as a reward for that. Prior to that, I also gave some questions to be answered on the stage. She answered them too. She is not a shy person to say about her opinions.

On one hand, assemblies are a challenge for Mariam because she has sensory problems when it comes to noise or disordered environments. Mariam also had social interaction difficulties especially when there are many people. However, despite these challenges Mariam took opportunities to demonstrate her ability to perform during assembly by answering questions well on the stage. This situation indicates that Mariam could cope with the school environment and that these abilities might be applied in work surroundings in future.

Challenges for Mariam in school

Aisyah shared observations about the challenges that Mariam encountered.

i. Difficulty in understanding social issues

Aisyah said she had not experienced many challenges teaching Mariam in class. She described Mariam as a hardworking and good student, but explained that Mariam faced difficulties understanding more complex concepts and social issues in class.

Mariam was a very hardworking student. Whatever homework I gave the students, she would be the first to hand in. However, she just faced difficulty in understanding some social issues such as wedlock and unmarried situations as she was not exposed to such issues.

ii. Difficulty with changes in routines and schedules

Aisyah gave some examples of the characteristics of children with ASD, including her experiences of supporting Mariam in class. Aisyah makes sure to follow up with the tasks

given to her students. In this way, she was able to understand Mariam's situation when she was unable to accept unexpected variations.

Students with ASD do not like changes. For instance, once I told my students in class that we would do essay the next day. Mariam was already ready for that. On the next day when I did something else other than an essay, Mariam kept on asking me repeatedly "Teacher, when are we going to do essay writing?" "Why aren't we doing essay writing today?". It seems a very stressful thing for her. I always attempt to follow whatever I say as much as possible, just to make her less stressed.

Aisyah thought of following routines but she had to adapt her volunteering knowledge to adjust her teaching to Mariam's needs, a constantly changing situation in the classroom. Aisyah seemed to consider the management of Mariam's behaviour and creating a positive classroom environment.

According to Aisyah, Mariam uses listening skills in atypical ways.

While teaching, I could see Mariam was not paying much attention to my lessons. But when I throw question to her, she would immediately recall and say whatever I had mentioned earlier. In fact, sometimes she would be just busy writing something during my lessons.

Students with ASD may not make eye contact with people who are talking, and not show any indication of listening. Mariam listened to Aisyah and learned a lot but in her own way.

iii. Executive functioning challenges

Aisyah further added that Mariam was perceived to have challenges in time management. Mariam seemed to have difficulties if she went too far away from her mother, because Mariam relied on her mother, Siti, to plan her schedule.

Mariam faced difficulty to follow her learning timetable.

Often children with high functioning ASD have poor organising, planning and prioritising skills. These problems often result in these people not being able to complete their school assignments on time, or failing to submit them (Sansosti et al., 2010).

iv. Language difficulty

Aisyah said that one of the challenges facing Mariam was language. She said:

Mariam disliked swearing words such as ‘stupid’. The word ‘stupid’ is a common word among many students. But for Mariam it is an abusive word. If these abusive words were used either on her or her friends, she would create chaos and cry. She would rampage in class by throwing chairs and other things.

Mariam may have a problem with discrimination “reading” social situations. As noted earlier, Mariam has this problem of discriminating when her teacher reprimands other students in the class who have not finished their homework. She thinks that the teacher is also reprimanding her. Whenever her peers utter the word “stupid” she thinks that they are referring her. Children with high functioning ASD are more challenged in social-emotional response which includes tantrums, rage, and meltdown than their counterparts with ASD (Myles & Adreon, 2001).

Aisyah said that Mariam’s mother, Siti, was given the responsibility for supporting Mariam into this learning experience at school. When Mariam showed tantrums by throwing chairs and other things in class, again Siti became responsible for her daughter’s misbehaviour. Aisyah commented:

When this happened, the teacher in charge would call her mother [Siti] or they would tell the students of that class to call her mother immediately. Her mother comes and take Mariam to her room. The mother consoles Mariam. If Mariam still could not control her emotions, her mother would take her home.

Aisyah said Siti was a mother who gives her full commitment and care for Mariam’s learning processes. Aisyah commented:

Mariam's mother is concerned about her progress at school. She would always ask her teachers whether Mariam having any problem in the class or showing any weaknesses. This information is important for the mother to handle Mariam at home.

In supporting Mariam's learning, Siti was once again practising reasonable hope in having knowledge and skills in order to accompany and "bear witness" (Weingarten, 2003) to her daughter's learning journey.

Opportunities

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, Aisyah saw a future for Mariam and held hope that students with ASD would be successful and find a place in society after they have gained some vocational skills.

Aisyah gave some examples of vocational skills, which could be used to earn a wage, if the students with ASD could master these skills. She commented:

Students with ASD learned to make rugs from pieces of unused clothes. These rugs can be marketed to earn some money. Students usually come to the centre in the morning and make the rugs till evening and they are paid monthly.

Drawing [art] could also bring income for these students.

There is an autism centre that teaches laundry methods for their students. Now there is a laundry shop run by people with ASD...

In state A, there is a centre that only employs adults with autism and Down Syndrome to bake cookies.

Aisyah said she could see a possible future for students with ASD. These students could have a job if they were given opportunities to work.

Aisyah felt students with ASD should be educated from a young age and parents should play important roles in raising their children once they have the awareness to support them.

I feel students with ASD could do jobs, all depends on their level of ASD. These students need to get an early intervention as their fingers are not pliable enough when they want to learn skills when they are older. When they have these flexible fingers, they could be easily trained to do any work that provides some income for them. Therefore, awareness among parents is crucial when their children are still young.

Aisyah thought that Mariam has many opportunities for employment. According to Aisyah, Mariam would be able to find employment where there is little interaction with people supporting, her preferred environment.

In terms of tertiary study, Mariam could join off campus learning if she could not join the class on campus. The off-campus programmes are opened to all students who can participate to gain experiences for project-related studies with instructors' guidance. Mariam therefore could have broader learning opportunities related to her interest in ICT.

Mariam has the opportunities. Nowadays, there are many opportunities available. One could take up off-campus studies and learn on his/her own. We only need to know the correct channel supporting them.

Mariam could also develop her ICT skills and apply them by working from home.

Mariam can work from home by setting up an online business as she does not favour in meeting many people.

Mariam would have to compensate for limited social skills by making herself specialised in a specific ICT field so that a future employer might be willing to pay for her skills despite limitations in her social skills.

Summary

Siti and Aisyah worked together in supporting Mariam's education with the hope that it may open further opportunities for employment pathway. Siti applied psychology approaches to guide Mariam to reduce her behavioural outburst problems. These approaches seemed important to help Mariam reflect on what she had done to her brother

at home and her peers in class. Siti may have believed that by educating Mariam through these approaches she provided space for her to manage her own behaviour, which Siti and Aisyah identified as a necessary skill needed for her future.

Aisyah had learned about ASD by volunteering at the Autism Academy Centre. Aisyah's volunteering knowledge also helped her interaction with Mariam in the classroom. Aisyah never gave up on Mariam when Mariam needed support at school. Aisyah explained the difficult topics to Mariam. She also clarified Mariam's situation to Mariam's peers and encouraged them to understand and tolerate her situation. ASD awareness among Mariam's peers in the school setting was an important strategy to cultivate a conducive learning environment for Mariam and her peers. Aisyah also provided enough space for Mariam to calm herself down when she behaved loudly and inappropriately. This strategy was also vital for Mariam to learn and apply in any future employment setting.

Even though Siti and Aisyah worked in different settings, they shared a similar goal in preparing Mariam for her future potential, including employment. The story shows the importance of the "relational" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8) in supporting Mariam's learning and schooling towards possible futures.

CHAPTER SIX:

MUTHU: INTEGRATING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT ACADEMICALLY AND SOCIALLY

Introduction

This case study includes five people and focuses on Muthu, a young man who was 16 years old diagnosed with ASD. Muthu has a Hindu Indian Malaysian background and lives with his family in a major city. He was diagnosed by a clinical psychologist as having mild ASD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms at the age of five. Other participants interviewed in this case included his father (Yuges) and mother (Valli), school teacher (Hui Xin) and the NASOM teacher (Santhi). This case study brings together their valuable perspectives on their respective and collective contributions toward improving Muthu's life experiences, with a particular focus on his potential future employment.

Hui Xin is a special education teacher with a Buddhist Chinese Malaysian background. She has eight years teaching experience working with young people with disabilities. Hui Xin teaches Muthu at the ISEP that Muthu attends in the mornings.

Santhi is one of Muthu's teachers. She has a Hindu Indian Malaysian background. She teaches at the NASOM centre where she has 11 years of experience in teaching young people with ASD and her focus is pre-vocational training.

Young person's narrative: Muthu

Muthu was in Form Two when this research was conducted. He had stayed two extra years in primary school, leaving him two years behind his mainstream peers. Muthu was an enrolled student in the ISEP in the mornings. He also participated in a pre-vocational training programme at the NASOM centre in the afternoon.

After I interviewed his parents, Yuges and Valli, I turned to interview Muthu at the living room in his house. His mother, Valli, brought Muthu to the living room to join our interview. I greeted him with “hello Muthu” when he approached me, and he answered “hello” with a smile. I gained Muthu’s consent to participate in the research by reading out the content on the consent form. This form was later signed by his father, Yuges, as an agreement for me to begin the interview. His parents, Yuges and Valli, were sitting next to Muthu when I interviewed him.

I noticed that Muthu paid attention during our 30-minute conversation. He seemed to feel comfortable and engaged in our conversation. Muthu made eye contact most of the time during the interview. Sometimes, Muthu hesitated when replying. He often took time to think before responding. I followed my interview schedule, supplemented with visual images to aid communication through photo-elicitation.

According to Muthu, he learned English, Malay language, Mathematics, Sciences and Music at school. He also spoke of his cooking class where he learned to prepare sandwiches, chocolate cake, and burgers.

Poh Thin: Did you learn other things at the Integrated Special Education Programme?

Muthu: Cooking class.

Poh Thin: Do you enjoy cooking class?

Muthu: Ya. Sandwich.

Poh Thin: Can you cook?

Muthu: No. But we did cook.

Poh Thin: So, how about this one? Do you like to cook?

(I showed Muthu a picture of a person cooking).

Muthu: Chocolate cake. Make burger at the high school.

According to his mother, Valli, Muthu learned some cooking skills from his eldest sister at home, as well as from teachers at the NASOM centre.

Valli: My eldest daughter does a lot of baking such as cookies and brownie. She tries to get Muthu to help. Muthu then learns some skills at the NASOM centre. The NASOM teachers teach the students make donuts, cakes and so on. For example, one student had a birthday. So, the teachers taught the students to make a cake the day before. And then they celebrated eating the cake with other students.

Muthu also mentioned that he participated in cultural activities at school, and his father, Yuges, confirmed that Muthu could dance and sing.

Poh Thin: Other than cooking, what else do you do in the class?
Muthu: [No reply].

Poh Thin: What else do teachers teach you?
Muthu: Dance, Mr F.
Yuges: Muthu can sing and dance very well.

Muthu nodded his head.

During my interview with her, Muthu's school teacher, Hui Xin, also commented on his dance performance.

Hui Xin: Muthu is a good dancer. He can dance very well. You will love to see him dancing.

Muthu's cultural interests extended outside of school where his musical ability was extended. Muthu's school teacher also noted these talents.

Poh Thin: After going to the NASOM centre, where do you go?
Muthu: I go to see Teacher C on Tuesday.

Poh Thin: What does she teach you?
Muthu: Music.

Poh Thin: What do you do at music class?
Muthu: Play

Poh Thin: Play what?
Muthu: Play the piano and do theory.

Poh Thin: Muthu, do you enjoy music?

Muthu: Yes.

Poh Thin: Do you enjoy playing piano?

Muthu: Yes.

Valli explained that she thought Muthu liked written (theory) more than playing (practical), saying that she felt this was unusual as she brought up an observation of students in piano class, where there are more people expressing interest in the practical component of piano.

Muthu also commented briefly on the career transition programme, glove packing, he participated in at school, which was intended to prepare students for future employment.

Poh Thin: How about this job?

(I showed Muthu a picture of factory operators).

Muthu: Gloves.

Muthu showed recognition when I showed him an image of a library assistant arranging books.

Poh Thin: How about this one? Do you like to arrange books?

(I showed Muthu a picture of some books on the bookshelves).

Muthu: Ya. Arrange books.

Valli: When Muthu was in primary school - this was part of the mainstream course, which means the teacher from NASOM centre would be his shadow teacher - he was also the librarian. So, he knew basically what to do, take the cards, write the names, those kinds of things.

When I asked Muthu about working when he finished school, Muthu initially paused.

Poh Thin: Do you want to go to work after school?

Muthu: [No reply].

Poh Thin: When you finish school?

Muthu: Ya. But, I haven't have graduated.

Poh Thin: Muthu, could you tell me, do you like to do this job?
(I showed Muthu a picture of a person washing vegetables).
Muthu: Ya. I ate the vegetables and I wash the vegetables at NASOM.

According to the NASOM teacher, Santhi, Muthu was interested and talented in ICT-related devices. Her acknowledgement resonated with the parents, Yuges and Valli, who agreed that Muthu had demonstrated talent using computers.

Santhi: Muthu is very good with computer work. For example, he can do typing very quickly. If we ask him to search something, he can do this very quickly. He can do a drawing, make art things on the computer. He is very good in searching for movies from the computer.

When talking about future employment, Muthu explained that he would like to do a job related to “computers and internet”, and that he would prefer working at an office.

Poh Thin: What kind of job do you like when you grow up?
Muthu: Computer and internet.

Poh Thin: Do you like cooking as a job?
Muthu: No. Computer.

Poh Thin: To do computer job, what must you study?
Muthu: [No reply].

Poh Thin: For you to learn the computer, what must you do?
What kind of help you need?
Muthu: [No reply].

Poh Thin: How are you going to learn computer?
Muthu: At the office.

Muthu told me he had computer classes at school every Monday. His interest is likely to have been generated from this class. He seemed aware that further education would be required to work in this field and responded to my inquiry about assistance:

Poh Thin: Who is going to teach you?
Muthu: YouTube.

Poh Thin: Who is going to teach you about using a computer?

Muthu: I learn about computer through the internet or YouTube.

His father, Yuges, explained that Muthu would like someone to teach him how to use the computer. When I asked if he needed anything besides a teacher, Muthu responded: “only a laptop”.

The NASOM teacher, Santhi, also confirmed Muthu had talent in computing area. Muthu, like other students learned many skills during his time at the pre-vocational centre. Once he goes to vocational centre, he will focus on enhancing computer skills, which have been identified as his primary talents by both his parents and Santhi.

Santhi: When he goes to the vocational centre, he will focus on computer skills because he is good at computer.

This potential vocational interest is supported by Yuges.

Whenever I said “look, my phone. It problematic”, he will check and fix it for me. He will fix all the electronics in the house. We want him to use the technology to teach himself.

In addition, according to Yuges, Muthu had good self-learning ability.

Yuges: What Muthu is saying is he wants to learn. He learns things on his own such as he goes to YouTube and learn other things. When Muthu started watching the movies, he picked up some languages. He taught himself Tamil. We can see that he goes on YouTube for self-learning.

Vocational education seemed important and appeared to be a focus area in supporting Muthu in computing skills which might lead to potential employment for him in the future.

Parents’ narrative: Yuges and Valli

Yuges (father) and Valli (mother) are Muthu’s parents. Yuges is a lecturer at a university

and Valli is a full-time mother. They were interviewed together and began by sharing their experiences with their son, Muthu, at the time he was formally diagnosed with mild ASD and ADHD when he was five years old.

Yuges and Valli put a lot of effort into assisting Muthu to minimise his struggles. Yuges said he and Valli were not aware of Muthu's ASD until they started to compare him to his sisters' development.

Yuges: Actually, we were not aware of Muthu's speech problem until we realised that he was not speaking fluently. He was babbling and repeating what we were saying when he was three years old. He is the only son we have. Obviously, we made comparison to our two daughters. Our daughters were able to pick up things very early.

Here, Yuges was at first positioned in **Witness Quadrant 3** (unaware and disempowered) as he was unaware of the meaning and significance of what he was witnessing in Muthu's speaking, and therefore he could not take action. In this position, "one has the potential for being non-protective when one should be protective, and passive when one should be active" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 11). Yuges did not act initially because at first, he did not know that his son had a speech problem.

Pre-diagnosis can be a confusing time for parents (Midence & O' Neill, 1999). Yuges said they tried reading and looking for information about Muthu's situation through the internet, and this helped them to comprehend why Muthu had difficulties.

Yuges: We started to do reading and searching information from internet about why Muthu had speech problem.

According to Yuges, he and Valli were initially in a "denial stage" even though they realised Muthu's development had problems. He said they felt more confident when they were given assurance by the paediatrician.

Yuges: From two to three years old, we suspected something that was not right with Muthu. So, the first person who we consulted was the paediatrician. However, the paediatrician told me that boys speaking late is normal. I think that is what delayed our decision.

Valli: I think the problem was with the paediatrician saying “Muthu will grow up”. The paediatrician said boys often start to speak later than girls. But, the paediatrician was not telling me what to do with Muthu and where to go for further advice.

Medical and gendered discourses appeared in the responses they received from Muthu’s paediatrician, as the paediatrician perceived it was not uncommon for boys to speak later than girls. Shevell et al. (2001) state paediatricians may take 15.5 months on average to make a referral for diagnosis, even if parents refer their concern to them at an early age. It is possible to diagnose ASD in children younger than three years old (Loucas et al., 2008), but it did not happen for Muthu.

Yuges reported that he enrolled Muthu in a kindergarten for two years. However, he was called to withdraw Muthu from the kindergarten because Muthu was not meeting expectations for language development.

Yuges: When Muthu was five years old, we [Yuges and Valli] put him through kindergarten for two years and he was still struggling. So, the teacher called me “I think you should take him away because he is not listening but just babbling. He is not doing his homework and not performing.”

Getting Muthu a basic education in inclusive class at kindergarten was an ongoing challenge for Muthu’s family. At times schools or teachers hesitate to accept responsibility for students with special needs in their class (see Pijl, 2010) or teachers may lack the knowledge and have limited experience in teaching students with special needs, and require additional training (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009; Kavale, 2000).

Yuges said many issues accumulated during kindergarten and prior to Muthu starting school. Yuges realised that it was difficult to find a school that would enrol Muthu. Eventually, these experiences motivated Yuges and Valli to take Muthu for an official diagnosis.

Obtaining a diagnosis for children with ASD is difficult (Howlin & Moore, 1997; Rhoades et al., 2007) and seen as a very daunting process because it takes a long time and

involves a range of expertise (Reid et al., 2009). Parents feel uncertain and may delay making decisions to access the appropriate interventions or educational programmes. Often parents' satisfaction with diagnosis was low (Howlin & Moore, 1997; Midence & O' Neill, 1999).

Yuges and Valli claimed that there were difficulties obtaining a diagnosis for Muthu, and that Muthu demonstrated uncertain features in the diagnosis process.

Yuges: We only took action for formal diagnosis with a clinical psychologist at hospital when Muthu was five years old.

Valli: We also did the Ear, Nose and Throat Examination [ENT Test]. The psychologist took long time to diagnose Muthu because at times he can speak well, but sometimes he cannot. The psychologist then told us Muthu had mild ASD with ADHD.

Muthu's parents did not give up and, despite the paediatrician's suggestion that the delay in speaking was normal for boys, they were willing to consult a psychologist for what they saw as their son's disability.

Yuges claimed that acceptance was an important stage for him and Valli. Yuges initially struggled to accept that Muthu has ASD, a not unusual response of parents (see Midence & O' Neill, 1999).

Yuges: We found it hard to accept that Muthu has ASD because our family did not have ASD.

Yuges appeared to be familiar with the DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) commentary that ASD is a strongly genetic neurodevelopmental disorder, which means the child carries genetic material from parents. This step might have been traumatic or blaming themselves as parents or may have come as a relief.

Valli shared with me that after the diagnosis the psychologist recommended Muthu see a speech therapist. Valli and Yuges subsequently took Muthu to both speech therapy and

occupational therapy. However, Muthu still continued to present behavioural problems despite the intervention and expense of these therapies.

Yuges: We did not find it was very effective because Muthu still demonstrated tantrums.

Yuges felt he and Valli were fortunate to be able to afford to pay the high fees for Muthu's speech therapy and occupational therapy, as they were aware some of Muthu's peers needed early intervention, but could not access it due to unaffordability.

Yuges: So, we were fortunate that we were able to afford to send Muthu to see speech therapist and occupational therapist compared to Muthu's peers.

Valli: The fee to see occupational therapy was very high at RM 200 per hour. The occupational therapist also only assessed small tasks, then asked us to teach Muthu at home. The speech therapist also taught very simple things.

Despite seeking a diagnosis and then follow up treatment, little tangible benefit appeared to have been achieved. Yuges and Valli may have had expectations of the intervention that were beyond what was possible at the time in the circumstances. Weingarten (2010) suggests that hope needs to be reasonable to direct "our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable" (p. 7).

Muthu's schooling (young to primary school)

When Yuges and Valli removed Muthu from kindergarten, they struggled to find a suitable place for Muthu's schooling until a friend introduced Yuges and Valli to a teacher with broad experience interacting with children with disabilities in Malaysia and overseas. This teacher taught at a private centre which caters the need for children with disabilities. Yuges and Valli had to pay to gain access to this teacher's services. Yuges said the teacher managed to educate Muthu well and succeeded in making changes in Muthu. The teacher worked together with Muthu until he accomplished some big achievements in his life. Her action can be understood as doing reasonable hope in finding "goal and pathways" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) that were attainable at the time.

Valli: There was a person from an organization who recommended a teacher who had 17 years experience dealing with children with disabilities in England. This experienced teacher started a centre to cater for the needs of these children.

Yuges: The teacher was quite good interacting with children. She was really helpful in terms of calming Muthu down and sorted out his behavioural problem [controlling Muthu's tantrum]. This is why Muthu is very calm right now. Because Muthu could calm himself down, he started to learn to speak properly and acquired more words as he is able to listen, understand and think carefully. Muthu also learned reading and reflecting after two years learning with the teacher. I am grateful Muthu learned his speech, thinking and reflecting.

Muthu's parents suggest that they are fortunate to have found a good teacher for their son who is able to control his tantrums. At the same time, they are able to see improvement in their son's learning abilities. Unfortunately, Yuges reported that the teacher moved to another state to teach, and they had to find another place for Muthu. It was a challenging process.

After the first private teacher had left for another state, there was a second interruption for Muthu's learning. Yuges and Valli found another teacher, who lived in the neighbourhood. Valli started to send Muthu for private tuition with the second teacher.

Valli: A teacher, from our neighbourhood, introduced the NASOM centre to us. This teacher was initial the tutor at the NASOM centre. She gave personal tuition to Muthu [paid by the parents at home].

Having one's option open to various forms of help is crucial for parents with a special child. Getting access to appropriate education takes persistence and good networks.

However, this teacher used a rattan (a cane). Muthu seemed to fear seeing this teacher. Muthu could not be effectively educated in such a stressful environment.

Yuges: This teacher used a piece of rattan to discipline children. That was why Muthu was frightened to go to see her.

Muthu was too young to go to primary school as he was only six years old. However, his mother had questioned his access to school. The teacher assured Muthu could go to primary mainstream school.

Valli: The teacher said Muthu could be put in mainstream school because he is not so severe compared to other children.

Valli further asked more questions to the teacher. At that stage, the teacher seemed to have no answer when Valli sought clarification.

When I asked her other questions, she seemed have no answers for them.

Valli perceived this teacher lacked knowledge about ASD. Valli ended the relationship.

Muthu's parents were concerned about their son's education. Valli compared and contrasted Muthu's previous teacher with his present teacher and was able to see the different approaches in educating her son.

Valli took initiative to find out more information to support Muthu, and the first time she engaged officially with the NASOM centre.

Valli: Eventually, I did my own research in the area and I found the NASOM centre.

For Standard One to Standard Six, Muthu consistently attended the same school, at mainstream class in the mornings and in the afternoons, he attended programmes at the NASOM centre. Attending NASOM programmes in the afternoons enabled Muthu to use the service of the same shadow teacher who has been with him in school in the mornings for eight years. Later in this chapter, I will introduce the perspective of the teacher (Santhi), who followed Muthu throughout this time.

Here, I suggest that Muthu's parents were aware and empowered (**Witness Quadrant 1**) in the witnessing position by finding the speech therapist and shadow teacher to support and improve their son's situation. Their actions were based on reasonable hope as they

focused on what was needed and available at the time to enable their son to progress in his learning journey.

The principal at the primary school could accept Muthu in the mainstream class because Muthu no longer had behavioural problems compared to his other ASD peers.

Valli: The principal at the mainstream school was really helpful. He accepted students with disabilities to study in mainstream classes as long as the students did not disturb other students in class and the students were willing to learn.

The principal might be seen to be practising “humble hope” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10) as his acceptance opened up learning opportunities for Muthu to study in a mainstream class. In his action of allowing Muthu to be in the class, the principal’s actions demonstrate another of the tenets of reasonable hope “that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8). For Muthu’s parents, the principal’s action provided reasonable hope for Muthu’s ongoing learning opportunities.

The end of primary school

Valli added that Muthu also passed the PSAT.

Valli: He sat the Primary School Achievement Test. Although he did not do well, but he passed all the subjects.

However, Valli advocated that Muthu may perform well in the examination if adequate guidance was provided.

Valli: I noticed I need to explain to Muthu what the requirement is for answering questions [in the examinations]. He cannot perform if the teachers just give him the questions without explaining the requirements to him.

Valli’s approach in coaching Muthu to answer examination questions is important because mainstream teachers who are not trained to teach special children may neglect this aspect of exam preparation.

Yuges further added that children with ASD should be given a different set of questions in public examinations. This is because they may need extra time to understand the questions compared to other students without disabilities. Some may take a longer time to think and write based on their abilities or disabilities. However, Yuges said that the reforming of the educational system seemed costly in Malaysia despite the growing population and this will be a serious problem in future.

Yuges: Autistic children should be given different examination formats in UPSR [Primary School Achievement Test], PT3 [Form Three Assessment] and SPM [Malaysian Certificate of Education] examinations to assess their understanding and knowledge. Feedback from teachers is needed as well. But, I know this approach is expensive. We need to address this problem as autistic children are a growing population. Otherwise, it will become a major problem.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia, up to date, have not set examination questions especially for students with disabilities. The only consideration is that these students are given extra time to complete their examination and in some cases, teachers are assigned to support them during an examination.

Muthu's schooling (secondary school): Language

Instead of placing Muthu in one of the mainstream classes at a secondary school, Valli enrolled him in the Integrated Special Education Programme.

Yuges became aware of the language issue that Muthu may face at school because he spoke English and Tamil at home. As anticipated by Yuges, most teachers at the ISEP class were not able to communicate with Muthu in English, since Malay is their first language. This language barrier at first hindered Muthu from expressing himself accurately to his teachers and also prevented him from getting proper support during learning processes at school.

Yuges: It [language] was not an issue when Mathematics and Science were taught in English, Muthu didn't have any problem at all. Now, the Malay language is being used in the classroom to teach the subjects, Muthu is having problem understanding Mathematics.

Language barriers can make it difficult even for a normal child to seek proper education, but may be more difficult for a special child.

Valli expressed her appreciation when the school took action to address Muthu's language issue. The school simply matched Muthu with the teachers of ISEP class who could speak English and understand him. In this way Muthu was able to tell his problems to the teachers and get help from them.

Valli: The teachers also know that Muthu was not able to speak in Malay language. So, the school acted to allocate teachers who could speak English to communicate and support him.

Again, we see the importance of parents seeking help, and schools responding, when a particular difficulty arises. The action taken by school resonates with Weingarten's (2010) theoretical construct of reasonable hope: "With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future" (2010, p. 7).

Vocational training skills at school

Yuges appreciated that Muthu is learning more skills at the secondary school in the ISEP.

Yuges: The school offers several vocational training programmes such as cooking and handicraft for students.

However, Valli and Yuges were saddened to know that the school teachers were only able to teach the students limited vocational skills.

Valli: In fact, the school teachers wanted to teach more vocational training skills. But, I think they have some limitation. For example, they mostly teach only cooking skills which are related to employment.

Yuges: The school teachers do not have enough equipment.

The lack of equipment was because of insufficient funds to purchase materials and instruments to teach more skills. The financial constraints became problematic and limited the range of vocational skills available. I suggest that the teachers were in **Witness**

Quadrant 4 (aware and disempowered) as they were “aware but uncertain” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 12), that is aware of possible vocational learning opportunities for students but without access to resources.

Valli communicated the personal effort of the NASOM teachers in order to support their students. The teachers sought financial support from many other sources to help to run the centre successfully.

Valli: I think the NASOM centre attempts to find financial support to run the pre-vocational training programmes at the centre.

The teachers at the NASOM centre were practising reasonable hope in their actions of “working not waiting” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7) for the finance to come, but actively seeking this as they saw the importance of providing the pre-vocational support to enable the students to have learning opportunities and lives that were “purposeful and meaningful” (Weingarten, 2007, p. 3).

The NASOM centre

According to Yuges, Valli and he developed meaningful relationships with the NASOM teachers. The relationship also bridged the possible misunderstandings and differences that might appear between Muthu’s parents and teachers in the undertakings of educating Muthu.

Yuges: The teachers would meet the parents twice a year to tell about their children’s development. The teachers would touch on many aspects including school, progress and behaviour. For example, if Muthu can follow instructions at the NASOM centre, we can compare his behaviour at home.

By establishing a strong reciprocal relationship with the NASOM teachers from the very beginning, Yuges and Valli gained in terms of good guidance and strong support from the teachers. Parents who work along with teachers can enjoy the benefit of developing an ASD child together as teachers are very willing to interact, create opportunities and respond to the learning needs of the child. Besides, Yuges’ scheduled meeting with

Muthu's teachers are also helping him to gain a deeper understanding about Muthu's progress, and provide proper support for Muthu's learning at home.

There are studies that illustrate effective parent-teacher communication in which both parents and teachers work collaboratively to enhance a special child's learning and solve problems together concerning the child (Azad et al., 2016; O'Leary et al., 2019). The studies reflect well in the actions of Yuges where he relied on the information shared by the teachers to know more about Muthu's characteristics at the NASOM centre. Honest and open communication between the teachers and Muthu's parents have significantly supported Muthu's academic and behaviour improvements. Nevertheless, considering parents' voice in the communication is also important because parents can provide good feedback on their children's learning and development at home. Teachers and parents were practising reasonable hope by working in partnership to help children with ASD.

Yuges and Valli shared some challenges faced by the NASOM centre. Yuges said that he used to participate in the activities of the NASOM centre to help them.

Yuges: I was involved in the planning of activities for the NASOM centre. I try to get as much support as possible to assist the NASOM centre from outside.

Yuges added that the demands from parents were always high, but the places offered were limited. This is because the NASOM centre has only been taking in younger children. Such decision has put parents with older special children at a difficult situation as they do not know where else to look for further support. The NASOM centre neither has space nor teachers to handle older special children.

Yuges: There are not enough space to cater the high demand of students' enrolment at the NASOM centre. Parents can only send their children only up to 18 years old. The problem is what services are available for children after 18 years old.

Valli believed that fewer occupational therapists may pose a problem for the NASOM centre.

Valli: The NASOM centre also lacks occupational therapists.

The children need these therapists to support and encourage them to overcome physical difficulties while undertaking their daily activities.

Yuges perceived that the teachers at the NASOM centre would perform well if the teachers had completed more special education trainings to support them. There is evidence that the NASOM teachers should have sufficient knowledge about disabilities and ASD in order for them to deal with the children well at the NASOM centre.

Yuges: Some teachers are not very well trained at the NASOM centre. These teachers should be given more professional training support.

Yuges: I think the government can work together with the NASOM centres and other non-governmental organisations to provide training for teachers.

Partnership with government could benefit many non-governmental organisations including the NASOM centre as they generally lack financial support for the purpose.

In short, the government, NGOs, voluntary organisations and parents have to play a greater role to support the NASOM centre because the number of ASD cases are increasingly becoming more prevalent.

Family Support

Treatment of a child with ASD involves the entire family (Dansby et al., 2017; Hastings, 2003; Hastings et al., 2005; Landon et al., 2018; Lin, 2011; Ramisch et al., 2014; Ross & Cuskelly, 2006). Accordingly, Yuges asserted that Muthu receives a lot of support from his family members especially his sisters. Sisters of children with ASD have positive feelings about caring for their brother or sister with ASD (Cridland et al, 2016; Orsmond et al., 2009) and some research has been conducted in the last decade on sibling adjustment (Beyer, 2009; Corsano et al., 2017).

Yuges added that Muthu always listens and complies to his two older sisters' instructions. Muthu may be fortunate to have an older sister with a psychology and counselling background. The sister utilises that knowledge to guide Muthu.

Yuges: Both my daughters realise that they have a special brother. My daughters look after Muthu in many ways. For example, my eldest daughter treats Muthu strictly. She makes sure that Muthu eats vegetables as he does not like to eat vegetables. Muthu listens to his eldest sister if we are not at home. This may be because my eldest daughter studies psychology and counselling. Now, Muthu is more independent.

However, my younger daughter is quite playful. Muthu does not listen to her because she is small sized.

Siblings appear to be important for children with ASD especially in constructing positive social interaction under maximally supportive conditions (Rivers & Stoneman, 2008). Siblings of children with ASD have great potential to influence their sister or brother with ASD in terms of early development, and the acquisition of social competencies (Tsao et al., 2012) like Muthu's older sister. Muthu's older sister used her educational background to facilitate initiations and learn to respond appropriately to Muthu's situation (see Tsao & Odom, 2006), such as adopting suitable circumstances (Tsao et al., 2012) to encourage Muthu to eat vegetables at home.

Sibling relationships are often a long-lasting relationship (Petalas et al., 2009). In Muthu's case, he gets on well with his siblings and they have positive characteristics, which concurs with Rivers and Stoneman's (2003) study. Their findings noted that siblings of children with ASD would be overall satisfied with their sibling relationship. Furthermore, Kaminsky and Dewey (2001) reported that such siblings would have levels of admiration for, and less fighting with, their brother or sister with ASD.

Many siblings also enjoy spending time with their diagnosed sister or brother and they consider her or him to be a close friend of theirs (Angell et al., 2012; Petalas et al., 2012) as Muthu's sister was with him. Muthu's older sister was educated and very much cared for Muthu's learning and development.

It is important for parents of child with ASD to acknowledge the contribution of his or her siblings in order to establish sibling relationship.

Yuges: I always tell my daughters to look after and support Muthu due to his disability. In the meantime, they could express their thought about Muthu.

Yuges has attempted to provide to open communication space and opportunities for his daughters to express their thoughts and feelings, as well as any problems related to Muthu. He tends to promote dialogue opportunities within his family as a way parents can provide support for siblings of children with ASD (see Mascha & Boucher, 2006; see Smock-Jordan & Turns, 2016; see Tsao et al., 2012; see Turns et al., 2016). This approach, a stark contrast to the formal rattan approach of an earlier teacher the family had located, is becoming more common with parents nowadays.

Yuges claimed that his wife and he have a higher expectation for their children's future. They expressed their good intentions in this way, distinguishing between Muthu and his sisters.

Yuges: As Asian parents, we have a very high hope on our children. We attempt to provide the best practice for Muthu. My two daughters are doing very well academically.

Parents should make every effort to explain about ASD to their 'healthy' children so that they, as siblings could understand and conceptualise why their brother or sister with ASD needs extra attention and support (Petalas et al., 2009). When the siblings receive clear feedback from their parents for their support to the brother or the sister, they would feel acknowledged and respected. In this way the parents could foster positive sibling relationship (Tsao et al., 2012).

Strategies to interact with Muthu

Allow time to reflect

Valli and Yuges said that Muthu still exhibited ASD characteristics, such as talking to

himself, despite the support. However, they attempted to minimise the characteristics by allowing Muthu to have more time to reflect on himself.

Valli: Sometimes I see Muthu talking to himself. I will tell him “stop talking to yourself”. I managed to reduce this behaviour in him.

Yuges: When Muthu is stammering, I will explain to him. I will say “ok, take your time, calm down and say what you want to say”.

Valli and Yuges also witnessed that this strategy seemed effective in helping Muthu.

Treat as a normal child

As well as monitoring ASD-related behaviours, Valli and Yuges seemed to treat Muthu like other children, and expected him to manage his own possessions.

Valli: We still expect him to behave as a normal child.

Yuges: For example, Muthu washes his dishes after he has food.

Muthu’s parents attempted to provide scaffolded learning opportunities for him.

Take away favourite items

Valli further said that Yuges and she would confiscate Muthu’s favourite things if he continued to misbehave. They perceived that behaviour modification tended to offer some solutions for Muthu’s temperament issues. Both withdrawal of privileges and giving rewards are helping Muthu to change his character.

Valli: We take away the mobile phone and laptop.

Yuges: Behaviour modification interaction is essentially to interact with Muthu. When Muthu demonstrates good behaviour, we will reward him. For example, I will take him for movies, play video games, and go to the arcade. I also reward him with the things which he likes most. He loves to go to the stadium. I can see Muthu’s behaviour changed after we implement the reward and incentive system on him.

They employed positive and negative reinforcement to encourage Muthu to be responsible for his behaviour.

Monitor activities

Valli and Yuges seemed well aware of Muthu's activities: from the movies he watches to the data he downloads. While they were monitoring Muthu, they also gave agency to him.

Valli: Muthu does not have a sim card on his phone. We checked the websites which Muthu has logged on so that he does not go to unwanted websites. My two daughters told me to keep an eye on Muthu's downloaded movies. My daughters once told me "Mummy, this movie is not good for Muthu as it contains pornography".

Yuges: We did keep track of the movies which Muthu has downloaded. At the same time, we want him to learn. At this stage, Muthu should know what is right and what is wrong.

Monitoring Muthu's activities is important so that he could learn responsible behaviour. This is why Yuges and Valli could see improvements in Muthu when he started to understand the difference between what he should and should not do.

Support all through

Yuges and Valli used behaviour modification strategies to educate Muthu to well behave and learn more independent skills. Yuges seemed to be open-minded about Muthu's future, based on his son's capabilities.

Yuges: I think every child is very different. Parents should not put too much expectation on them. We have to find out what our children enjoy and try to support them. Not every child is good academically. We have to find out what are in their strengths. We have actually learned to accept Muthu as having ASD. As parents, we can make sure these children too, have the right skills, be independent, and happy. Parents should provide them more opportunities based on their capabilities.

Yuges: We make sure that we give enough life skills to Muthu to cope with his life, and achieve his goal. Our focus now is to give Muthu the freedom to do what he wants by providing him enough life skills to be independent. At least, when we are not around, he can look after himself.

Yuges felt that Valli and he had given Muthu enough living skills for him to lead an independent life in the future. Independent living skills such as social skills, communication skills, self-care skills, daily life skills, occupational skills, and functional academic skills (Yikmis, 2016) are necessary for a child-like Muthu to sustain his life independently in the future (see Mannix, 2009). Yuges and Valli seemed to understand well the importance of living skills for Muthu, as they prepare Muthu for life after their absence.

After Schooling

Yuges realised the importance of vocational skills training leading to potential employment for Muthu after reaching 18 years old.

Yuges: I think the vocational skill training is probably needed after Muthu has reached 18 years old.

The skills that Muthu learned in the early part of his life at school can be a useful foundation for him in the future. Hatfield et al. (2017, 2018) emphasise on the importance of real-life experiences and exposure to vocational skills at high school to provide adolescents with ASD insights into adult life while developing their working skills and resilience of work environments.

Currently, Yuges and Valli are looking for career-related workshops that may be useful to enhance their knowledge, and in turn assist Muthu in securing a future job.

Yuges: The Malaysian government has organised a lot of autism talks, but I think most of them are very basic information. However, we are looking for information about career path for autistic children.

Parents' support is a critical component for youth with ASD transition to adulthood (Chen et al., 2019). The parents often search for services, manage service quality and coordination, and seek meaningful activities for their children (Smith & Anderson, 2014).

Yuges also showed concern about the status of young people as they grow older, and the challenges facing parents.

Yuges: What will happen to those in the age group of 18 to 22? I am not sure what is available for them and who is going to provide the after-school services for them. I have no idea where to place Muthu after he has reached 18 years old. This is the challenge that we face next.

The challenges for parents of children with ASD will often locate them in **Witness Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered) at times of transition, as they may be "aware but uncertain" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 12) of what would be the best way to support their children through into the next steps.

School teacher's narrative: Hui Xin (morning teacher)

Hui Xin was an experienced special education teacher, who had eight years' experience teaching students with ASD and a broad special education background. She taught Mathematics in the ISEP, especially for students with ASD. She also supported students with ASD with the glove packing transition project. She offered an overview of Muthu's learning context and vocational education in general, and his participation in the glove packing career transition programme.

Glove packing activities: A career transition programme

Hui Xin's school had taken the initiative to introduce two transition programmes, glove packing and burger preparing, for their students. Hui Xin said she had a new supervisor from the Special Education Department who was very good in arranging some useful skill projects for their students. The supervisor was eager to increase the number of employment opportunities for their students after completing school. The supervisor had started to classify all students with ASD into a class over the last two years.

We have one career transition packing gloves programme class for autistic students. We started this transition class this year which we collaborate with a packing gloves company.

The school is not entirely dependent on the support given by the government alone but also on other organisations such as factories and companies that may offer opportunities for students with ASD to be employed after they have completed school.

According to Hui Xin, she and her colleagues went to a glove factory to communicate with the factory's director about providing the packing gloves project to their ASD students. Then, a worker from the glove's factory came to school and showed the teachers the glove packing process.

We went to a glove packing company to deal with the director to seek his advice about the gloves packing project. The director is very good because he gives an opportunity to our students to pack gloves.

For the sake of the students under her their care, Hui Xin and her colleagues were willing to sacrifice their time to learn occupational skills themselves.

The director suggested our students pack 80 cartons of gloves. However, we only tried to pack 40 cartons of gloves with our students at the first time. My students took approximately more than 3 weeks to completely pack the gloves. After my students finished packing the gloves, a man come to check the completed gloves, collect them and send them to the factory. So far, my students are good in packing gloves.

In accepting only 40 cartons gloves at the initial stage, perhaps Hui Xin and her colleagues wanted to give their students an opportunity to learn to pack gloves perfectly before they could accept more cartons. Packing the gloves repeatedly in a small quantity first may also have resonated with the ASD discourse where the learning style of children with ASD is routine-based.

Hui Xin reported that students with ASD can be educated to become a good worker by giving clear instructions to them for the packing activities. Hui Xin emphasised the

hygiene aspect of her students as hygiene is one of the important features that should be taken into consideration at the workplace.

My students have no problems with the hygiene aspect and packing process as I have already explained the reasons why they have to do so. For example, the students must wash their hands, make sure their hands are clean and dry before they start to pack the gloves. The students also have to clean, dry, and arrange the tables properly before starting packing gloves. I also told my students they can raise their hands if they encounter any problems during the packing process. If we go to a factory, the operators are wearing masks. Therefore, I told my students they need to tell me if they are having flu as I will give them wear mask. The students also need to wear mask when they are coughing.

Hui Xin then explained the procedures of glove packing her students performed.

The students can pack the gloves very well after they know the way to pack the gloves. The students pack 100 gloves in one inner [small box]. They will put ten inners in a big box.

My students are good with the repeating steps. For example, the students are sitting there, checking whether the gloves have hole, and take out the gloves that have holes and replace the new one.

Hui Xin and her colleagues held hope that other glove packing companies would look for potential employees from their students. Therefore, Hui Xin and her colleagues took the responsibility to explain the glove packing process precisely to their students.

We hope some glove packing companies will offer gloves packing opportunity for our students. These companies can come to my school to look for potential students. The companies and our school can collaborate to prepare a module training glove packing for students with ASD at school. This collaboration seems as a pre-training for students to become potential employee. At least, after school at age 19, these students can have a platform to practise at a real workplace. This collaboration is important as a channel. We need this collaboration and support to provide employment opportunities for our students.

The glove packing transition programme resonates with the premise of reasonable hope that “the future is uncertain but open” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8), and that the focus should

be on providing opportunities to build the skills to enable these students to have a meaningful future. Furthermore, for reasonable hope to be realised will usually take community involvement.

Vocational training programmes

Hui Xin explained two vocational training programmes are being offered at her school. She perceived that the programmes aim to prepare the students for the real working environment in the future.

Cooking and multimedia are two vocational training programmes that we officially offer from our school if we follow the new Secondary School Curricula Standard for Special Education syllabus.

Cooking is a common vocational training programme for every Integrated Special Education Programme. My school is very good at cooking programme. Students are taught to make pizza, bread and other meals.

Teachers who were in charge of the cooking programme also needed to undergo examination within a three years period. The Malaysian Ministry of Education requires teachers who involved in this programme to acquire the skills in order to evaluate their students' cooking performance.

After finishing the cooking programme, the students would be acknowledged with a certificate, as they would with the multimedia programme.

These students have 24 cooking periods to enable them to get a certificate after they have completed the cooking course.

A certificate gives these students a qualification to support them to secure a job in future.

Hui Xin recognised that vocational training both at school and at the NASOM centre is a pathway to support students with ASD.

Vocational training skills are very important for students with ASD. I went to the NASOM centre nearby here. I saw the teachers at the centre teach students to tie floor mats, and packing cutlery of KFC. At least, the students learned about the skills.

Again, I suggest that vocational training can be seen as a practice of reasonable hope as the “goals” identified were realistic for the students and the staff could provide the necessary “pathways” by teaching students how to achieve these goals (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9).

Teaching Mathematics

Hui Xin equipped herself with a suitable teaching pedagogy for Mathematics in order to teach her special students effectively. She sought professional development by going to learn from the teachers at the NASOM centre, observing the new ideas and methods used by the NASOM teachers to teach Mathematics. Hui Xin learned and incorporated the same teaching approaches to facilitate and engage her students in Mathematics lessons at her school.

The NASOM teachers do a great job. I went to observe how the NASOM teachers teach Mathematics. The teachers prepare step-by-step charts to teach Mathematics. The students learn Mathematics very well following this chart at the NASOM centre.

In order to teach her students successfully, Hui Xin also followed the Malaysian Special Education Secondary School Standard Curriculum. She used the allocated curriculum and documents for her teaching. This syllabus is of a lower level if compared to the mainstream syllabus.

The text book is written in the Malay language. Mathematics only has four chapters in the syllabus. The first chapter is Even Numbers. I just finished the first chapter. The second chapter is Basic Operations which include addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. For the addition operation, students only learn addition of numbers less than ten.

There were several teaching strategies that Hui Xin used in her class to make her lesson interesting for every student, and her students responded well to her teaching strategies.

For instance, Hui Xin prepared a module having a chart as visual support tool (see Hayes et al., 2010) to encourage her students' involvement.

I prepare a simple module which consist of step-by-step strategy to teach my students, an idea I adopted from the NASOM teachers.

Hui Xin perceived that her students with ASD were good at basic mathematics.

Mathematics is easy for autistic students if they follow step-by-step and they can solve the problem very fast. I noticed majority of them are doing great in Mathematics, especially for basic addition less than number ten.

Hui Xin here focussed more on learning achievements rather than learning deficits for her students. She respected her students' position and gave value to their accomplishments by setting a low enough expectation of them. She perceived her students could perform well using the special education syllabus. The senior teacher of the special education department supported her efforts in teaching Mathematics to the students by allowing her to use alternative strategies from the NASOM centre, such as utilizing pictorial resources to support the teaching of Mathematics, and developing a simplified step-by-step model of instruction.

The acquisition of a mathematical concept depends on applying previously learned concepts. In Muthu's case, he only encountered difficulty in understanding bigger numbers. Hui Xin commented that it was not easy for Muthu to connect his previous mathematical knowledge when the numbers became complex.

Muthu is from the NASOM centre. He has no problem with the numbers, but he only confuses when I teach the too big number in class.

Here, Hui Xin expresses the problem as a teaching one – “when I teach too big numbers” - rather than a learning one.

Hui Xin thought mathematics formulas are helping these students to understand the processes easily; they can simply apply the formulas to solve a mathematical equation. It is known that children with ASD learn best through repetition in performing Mathematics

tasks (Larkey & Adkins, 2013). Teaching basic addition to students with ASD through the use of visual clues, such as chart at the NASOM centre, also will facilitate permanent learning of the students (see Yikmis, 2016).

When students faced problems, Hui Xin used a one-to-one coaching style to guide her students to understand Mathematics concepts.

In the class, only two students are not performing well. Therefore, the challenge that I face is I need to use one-to-one approach to coach the two students.

Again, Hui Xin's emphasis is on her responsibility as a teacher to pitch her teaching to the learning needs of particular students.

I need to spend my time to make my students understand. When they understand the concept, they can perform very well.

Hui Xin was willing to interact with her students, she found ways to understand them by responding to their specific learning needs.

The methods employed by Hui Xin seemed to be very effective for her students under her care. Hui Xin's commitment to try different teaching techniques ensured her students reasonable success in her Mathematics classes despite knowing students with ASD have specific learning needs (see Miller & Hudson, 2007).

The story above showed Hui Xin care for her students: she recognised their special needs and responded to her students' difficulties in learning Mathematics accordingly. This aligns with the description that explains care as requiring both receptive attention and responsiveness (Noddings, 1984). Students with ASD also need to experience care. Hui Xin was showing a dedication to finding a "goal and pathway" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) to support her students, as she was aware and empowered (**Witness Quadrant 1**) about what she needed and could do to develop the skills and knowledge to scaffold her students' learning.

In the following, I present the participant's field text illustrating how Hui Xin applied Mathematics' knowledge and skills to support the glove packing project.

Hui Xin applied a cross-discipline emphasis when teaching glove-packing skills to her students.

I apply Mathematics counting concept in the glove packing programme.

Hui Xin reported that she gave a clear instruction to her students on how to pack gloves. For embedded instruction (see Su et al., 2010), mathematical instruction was used to count the packing. The students counted the gloves in clusters of ten to become 100 gloves. When the students were counting the gloves, they learned counting concepts.

I emphasise on counting when the students count 100 gloves to put in one inner.

Hui Xin did not just see her students as having to learn rote activities in the glove packing programme. She was passionate about the opportunity that was provided by integrating in some academic learning skills with the basic with work training in packing gloves. This is another example where Hui Xin was aware and empowered as she took small steps to scaffold her students learning of Mathematics and glove packing. She was ensuring that her students' present was "filled with working not waiting" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7).

Students who managed to count and finish the glove packing process were rewarded with a social reward.

I offered a tin of 100 plus carbonated drink to each of my students.

Students with ASD can respond well to food cues (Cascio et al., 2012) and social rewards can help in the development or expression of autistic attributes (Dichter et al., 2012).

Hui Xin appeared to care for her students' learning as an expectation of teachers in the teaching profession generally; teachers have to care for their students. This action resonates with the ethics of care discussed by Noddings (1984), in which the concept of

care is seen as a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning (Noddings, 2012), embedded in daily teaching practices. In terms of teaching, ethics of care brings with it a moral responsibility supporting learning of children as well as their families (Noddings, 1984). The contribution of caring looks simple but it is essential to promote the development of a caring attitude or disposition (Noddings, 2012). For example, Hui Xin's students responded to her caring behaviour, the care had been received and recognised when her student performed well on basic addition after her encouragement.

Muthu at school

Hui Xin reported that she was not having much problem to teach Muthu at school. She was happy that Muthu always recognised her outside school. Hui Xin also complimented Muthu on his good characters.

I was Muthu's form teacher last year. He greets me whenever he meets me outside school.

Muthu and Hui Xin seemed to have developed a positive student-teacher relationship despite the fact that children with ASD show less closeness and establish high conflict with their teachers (Blacher et al., 2014; Longobardi et al., 2012). Here, Hui Xin has probably applied her eight years of broad teaching experiences and the knowledge of handling students with ASD to build a positive relationship with Muthu. More experienced teachers are reported to have greater closeness and lower conflict with their ASD students (Caplan et al., 2016) and the long-term experiences are used to develop the necessary skills needed for the students and foster higher quality student-teacher relationships (Corona et al., 2017).

Hui Xin said she knew about Muthu's condition from the NASOM centre. Hui Xin perceived that Muthu can be educated if he is given individual attention and proper instruction.

Muthu needs special attention. For example, when I say to all students in the class, "take out your text book," Muthu will look around at other things in the class. When I said "Muthu, take out your text book", only then he will do. Then, I need to continue giving him instruction such as "open your book".

Muthu will say, “teacher, I have finished answering all the questions”. In fact, he would not have finished yet. I need to remind him to finish the rest of the questions. If Muthu understands the questions, he will answer them.

As explained in the above statements, attracting and sustaining the attention of students with ASD is also part and parcel of their teaching approach in class. These students have the tendency to be easily distracted and they may need to be reminded over and over again about every task.

Hui Xin tried to relate Muthu’s pre-vocational learning at the NASOM centre and the glove-packing activity at school. Muthu seemed to have developed his good work skills at the NASOM centre and then he continued to perform the skills at school.

Muthu is doing great from the NASOM centre. I visited Muthu at the NASOM centre on Friday when he was attending his pre-vocational programme. He was doing tying the floor mat while his friends were cutting the unused clothes to a certain size. Muthu tied the floor mat nicely. Muthu told me he was going to sell the floor mat for his mother when he finished tie them.

Hui Xin added that Muthu’s ability to pack the gloves well at school is actually the reinforcement to the coaching he received at the NASOM centre.

In fact, Muthu can be educated. He is doing great in the glove packing career transition programme as well.

Muthu is able to learn several skills with support and guidance from both his school teacher and the NASOM teacher who were practising reasonable hope in working together to establish a relationship. This story shows the importance of connection between those providing support for the students to witness learning.

Strategies to interact with students with ASD

Hui Xin suggested that rewarding students with ASD can improve their learning. This has some relevance to the strategy used by Yuges and Valli at home. They employed

behavioural modification strategy for Muthu. Meanwhile, Santhi practised the same incentive and rewards system as Hui Xin at the NASOM centre. According to some scholars, embedding reinforcement in routine daily practices could produce a desired behaviour or developmental skill (see Muesbeck et al., 2018) for students with ASD. In the case of Muthu, the consistency of adopting incentive and rewards system at home, school and the NASOM centre is increasingly shaping and educating Muthu to be a good worker in the future. She commented:

Teacher A often reward a tin of energetic carbonated drink [100 plus drink] for students who do great in packing gloves. Sometimes, Teacher A also rewards the students with an ice-cream.

In the above statements, Hui Xin has demonstrated the value of reward for her students with ASD. Here, Hui Xin tends to express the value of extrinsic reinforcement (see Alsedrani, 2017; see Dearden et al., 2017) where she encouraged her students with ASD to sustain their interest up to finishing the glove packing tasks with rewards. A drink and an ice-cream became the value of extrinsic reinforcement for Hui Xin's students; the drink and the ice-cream have promoted engagement to complete the given task for the students. Without rewards or the absence of reinforcement, the students with ASD may occasionally feel less motivated in performing their tasks (see Alsedrani, 2017) and thus have less hope.

Strengths and weaknesses of people with ASD at a workplace

Hui Xin said students with ASD can perform their work well if they were given clear instructions.

These students can perform very well in glove packing, floor mat tying and packing sets of cutlery for KFC as they can stay focus on these jobs. For instance, in KFC and McDonald's fast food restaurants, autistic students can clean table if they undergo the training. In fact, they can do a lot of work if they are given proper training. Autistic students can be a very good worker if they understand the instructions as they are able to follow rules.

However, Hui Xin perceived these students need to work in environments where they interact with less people. This resonates with ASD discourse where students with ASD have challenges interacting with member of the public or co-workers.

I don't think autistic students can be placed at reception counter, answering phone calls or job which interact with many people as they are lack of communication skills. They are having difficulty of making friends.

For example, Hui Xin mentioned her concern that these students might make a direct criticism about their colleague without considering their colleagues' feelings at the workplace. This concern is also evident in research outside of Malaysia, for example, McIntosh and Harris's (2018) study of perceptions of people with ASD in the hospitality industry in New Zealand suggested colleagues and employers had reservations about employees with ASD's ability to maintain social and interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Working with Parents

Hui Xin reported that in general parents knew well about their children's condition. She mentioned the parents were easy to interact with when the teachers found their children to be misbehaving at school. Hui Xin said she and her colleagues would contact the parents to learn more about a child's condition or situation. Hui Xin and her colleagues also tried their best to respond to her students' problems by working together with parents to produce reasonable hope.

We work together with parents to support their children. In fact, parents are very understanding about their children's problems. For example, when students have a problem entering class, I will Whatsapp the parents to find out what is the reason behind the problems. I will ask is the reason related to changes of medicine taking, mood changes or lack of sleep. Parents tell us what happen to their children at home.

Working closely with parents helps teachers to understand their students' situation and help them to devise appropriate lessons for the day, or responses to behaviour.

Hui Xin perceived that Muthu has parents who are very easy to associate with. Muthu parents seemed very responsible for making sure they have given full co-operation to the school teachers.

I communicate with Muthu's mother using English as his mother does not know to speak Malay language. For example, Muthu just enrolled at this school last year. I need Muthu's details including a photocopy of the birth certificate, bank book, and fill in some forms as the forms were prepared in the Malay language. I contacted Muthu's father about the requests. The next day, his mother sent all the documents to me. His mother is very good.

Muthu is a very good student. His parents are very good as well. Every morning, Muthu's mother will send him to school. He never comes late to school. Last year, I was Muthu's form teacher. His mother messaged me before 7.30am because Muthu got fever and he did not come to school. Then, the next day the mother gave me a sick leave letter. It is very easy to deal with Muthu's parents.

The responsibility shown by Muthu's parents towards their son and his schooling appears to be unlimited. As educated parents, both Muthu's father and mother play their part to cater for the needs of their son at school.

Challenges encountered by the school teachers

Hui Xin perceived that school teachers face two issues; time and money for attending ASD-related and other disabilities courses, despite the fact that the courses could assist in their professional development.

We lack time to attend many courses. We also need to pay for some courses by ourselves.

However, these teachers could obtain the knowledge through in-house training conducted by the teachers who have already attended the courses. In this way, the 'left-out' teachers can be at an advantage of gaining the new knowledge about ASD by means of internal professional development arrangement.

Hui Xin felt that teachers in the schools are not innovative enough in varying their ideas on teaching vocational skills to the students with ASD. She commented that more was needed than a burger preparation programme:

Not all people eat burger every day. We need to find more ideas to support these children, but we lack networking with outsiders.

Establishing connection with outsiders such as suppliers could provide more employment opportunities for the students after they have finished school, but it takes time to set up.

Hui Xin reported her success outside the network. She has helped her school to establish a collaboration with local Rotary Club to support her school students. Hui Xin further emphasized that the Rotary Club has been putting a lot of effort to help the children, the teachers and the school.

We collaborate with Rotary Club. The Rotary Club is doing a good job. The club sponsored us [teachers] to attend National Autism Conference.

I requested to change the floor [not so hard and not so soft] of my therapy room that may cost from RM 5000 to RM 6000. The Rotary Club sent contractors to my school, and they made the floor according to my request.

The club also sponsored sand for us. I use sand therapy for my students. The students can touch, feel, dig and walk above the sand.

The club also sponsored trays for our cooking class.

Financial aid seems to be a setback for many special education schools. Hui Xin's school has taken the initiative to seek help from a local Rotary Club, which has made useful contributions to equipment and to staff training and showed "collective commitments" to open a future "full of possibilities" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) for these students.

The NASOM teacher's narrative: Santhi (afternoon teacher)

Santhi was an experienced NASOM teacher for art classes at the pre-vocational training centre. She had 11 years of working experience with students with ASD using her wide knowledge of special education art. Santhi was only teaching four students in her class.

Shanti is Muthu's shadow teacher. Santhi had been helping Muthu as his shadow teacher in the primary mainstream school (extended an extra two years) in the morning and later in the afternoon at the NASOM centre for the past eight years. Santhi offered an overview about Muthu's learning and pre-vocational education at the NASOM centre.

Santhi shared her experiences of becoming a teacher for students with ASD. The main reason was a child of her relative who was diagnosed with ASD. She wanted to know more about ASD and help him, so she took up a course related to ASD in the disability field. Once she had completed her studies, she applied for a job at the NASOM pre-vocational centre and started her career there. For the first three months, Santhi faced some difficulties handling the students but later she managed to work and interact well with her students.

According to Santhi, she had to put in a lot of effort to understand more about her special job.

I was struggling to interact with these students as I have less knowledge to deal with their behavioural problem, at the beginning when I newly joined the NASOM centre. I also did not know how to prepare Individualised Education Programme for the students as I was very new to this field. Fortunately, my coordinator was very supportive. I also put in a lot of effort to learn the students' behaviour because I am interested in this area.

Santhi spoke about the commitment of the NASOM centre to the teachers. The centre has been preparing many ASD-related workshops for its teachers to ensure they know all the new developments within the ASD teaching. These courses and workshops are also equipping new teachers like Santhi with ASD-related knowledge and assisting them to interact effectively with their students.

The NASOM centre used to send me for courses and workshops related to ASD. I have attended more than 50 different workshops and I have gained 50 certificates. The NASOM centre organises workshops for us every year. Every teacher has to attend workshops during the holidays. Sometimes, we have to attend three days' workshop. Sometimes, we have to attend a one-week workshop excluding Saturdays and Sundays. The workshops would usually start at around 8am and finish at 5pm. So far, the NASOM centre organises two to three courses for us, teachers. However, new teachers have to attend autism courses every year.

According to Santhi, professional development opportunities for the teachers of students with ASD is very useful and critical. Santhi appreciated the effort of the person in charge at the NASOM centre who took the trouble to send the teachers to attend many ASD-related workshops for their personal professional development. In spite of that, Santhi also took her own initiatives to join other courses outside to gain more knowledge about ASD students.

I am attending the extra Educational Kingsary Training Course, which is a 32 hours course and is run over four days. This course is conducted in English and Mandarin. This course has five levels. After the candidate passes Level One, they then can proceed to Level Two. At Level One, I learn how to motivate students.

After 11 years of teaching students with ASD, Santhi could vividly explain her experiences with the students. Her added experience was her role as a shadow teacher at the ISEP where she had specially assigned students, in the mainstream class in the morning, one of whom was Muthu. This role had allowed Santhi to become familiar with Muthu's behaviour, so she could support him whenever he faced any difficulties at school.

I have many opportunities to interact with autistic students because through my experiences teaching at EIP [Educational Incentive Programme] class, elementary, pre-vocational and vocational class. So far, I have eight years of teaching experience at the mainstream class. These mainstream class students go to school in the morning and come to the NASOM centre in the afternoon as I am their shadow teacher.

Santhi's teaching experiences and her roles as a shadow teacher placed her in **Witness Quadrant 1** (aware and empowered). She was able to find ways to help her students because she had knowledge and skills that she could draw on.

Syllabus used at the NASOM centre

Santhi shared some explanations regarding the syllabus being used at the NASOM centre. She emphasised two distinct types of syllabi specially designed depending on the disability.

We have syllabus such as behavioural problem and Individualised Education Programme.

Santhi explained more about the Individualised Education Programme. This programme is noted to be a very important document for every student as it contains personal and academic information related to each of the students. The programme can also act as a report card. It helps parents to closely monitor their children's academic progress as well as individual problems at the centre.

We prepared Individualised Education Programme for every student including Muthu. Based on the programme, parents see their children's progress once in three months. We write all aspects in the programme such as what the student can do, and what they cannot do. Parents then can give suggestions on how they want the teacher to teach their children. For example, some parents want us to teach more social skills to their children. One parent wanted us to teach her daughter how to comb hair.

Additionally, the Individualised Education Programme is also becoming a useful document for the teachers to track their students' progress based on the information available; the strengths and the weaknesses. The information seemed to guide the teachers to adapt the right approach for handling their students, be it skills or behaviour.

At the NASOM centre, Santhi had to accommodate two syllabi, the common syllabus of the mainstream students and the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) of the Educational Incentive Programme (EIP) for transition classes, pre-vocational programme and vocational programme.

We use the KSSR [Primary School Standard Curriculum] and KSSM [Secondary School Standard Curriculum] for mainstream students at school because they are following syllabus at school. We also use the STAR programme for special students.

According to Shanti, the centre started to use the STAR syllabus from 2012, and the syllabus is a special preparation for their students at the NASOM headquarters. The STAR syllabus is actually a modified version of a foreign programme adapted to Malaysia's setting by changing some of the terms used such as *pie* to *rice*. The teachers

have to attend workshops and courses to understand better the usage of the STAR programme at the NASOM centre.

Teaching approach

Santhi used the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to interact with some students at the centre. The PECS allows people who have communication challenges to use pictures for their interaction. A child or adult with ASD can use PECS to request or represent their thought by pointing to pictures that were pre-prepared:

I use Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to communicate with my students who are less verbal. Otherwise, I communicate using language with my mainstream students as they understand and can articulate in Malay language and English.

Santhi also shared her experiences of how she identified her students' interest in class. She perceived herself as a good observer because she could tell what the likes and dislikes of her students are based on their task performances and reactions.

We have four students in one class. We have cooking class, art time, computer class. All of my four students are interested in cooking. They bring all the cooking stuff everyday. They will look at the clock, if the clock shows 3pm, the students know it is cooking time. I know my students' interest from their reactions for example. I have one student who looks moody when it is art time. When I ask him to colour, he colours without showing any interest.

Santhi and her colleagues observed their students' abilities because every student had different strengths.

We see the ability of the students during the classes. Some students are good at baking and sewing.

Santhi and her colleagues did not separate her students based on their interest. The students have to learn a comprehensive list of skills offered at the pre-vocational centre.

We are pre-vocational centre. Therefore, students will learn more skills at our centre. This is good for them to learn as many skills as possible before they focus to one specific skill at the vocational centre.

Santhi added there are advantages for students to learn all skills so that they would have multi skills in the future.

Pre-vocational training skills at the NASOM centres

Santhi explained the NASOM centre that she has been engaged with accepts young people exhibiting a broad spectrum of ASD from mild to severe. She then introduced five types of follow - through classes that the NASOM centre offers to its students.

The categories start with the Educational Incentive Programme (EIP), then followed by transition classes, mainstream classes, pre-vocational classes and vocational classes. The EIP is for young students. Students who can perform academically will be enrolled at the transition and mainstream classes. Otherwise, they will go to the pre-vocational class. We categorise the students for the pre-vocational class based on their achievements on their working skills instead of age range.

Santhi further clarified that in the pre-vocational classes the students learn all about living skills in a step-by-step manner. She stressed that the focus is actually to train the students for independent living.

We teach all the skills step-by-step to the students. Our centre prepares the students for living skills such as washing shoes and clothes, cleaning the centre and sweeping.

According to Santhi, there are several pre-vocational classes being offered at the NASOM centre. The teachers have to take the responsibility to teach the students with different daily living skills such as take bath, wash clothes or cook a meal all on their own. Such skills are perceived to be important for the students' self-management as well as to form self-discipline habits for their future employment. In the same pre-vocational classes, the students are also being prepared for employment skills as explained:

We teach cooking skills to our students so that they can lead an independent living.

We also teach baking skills for our students. They learn to bake biscuits and cakes. Then, they can sell their baking products.

As for sewing skills, the students make cushion, pillows and mats. Then, we sell the products for them.

We also help to pack the cutlery sets for KFC. Here, our students learn the packing skills.

We are also teaching our students some stitch skills and artwork. Students learn to paint and put decorative items on tiles and vases. We always sell these products during our Family Days.

Alongside all the above structured skills, Santhi and her colleagues also taught money management skill to their students because they personally felt financial literacy is important for their students to take the skills to the next level.

Sometimes, we bake cakes and muffins. Then, we would ask our students to buy the cakes and muffins from us. We educate our students to learn about money management using fake notes to buy the products. This can be helpful when they become the mainstream students where they have to buy food at the school canteen on their own. Our students showed good interest and improvement learning these skills.

Santhi and her colleagues attempted to equip their students with as many daily living skills as possible because they know well that the skills are crucial for their students' personal grooming and living. These skills including personal hygiene, meal preparation, and money management are considered important to gain independent living and obtain employment (Bal et al., 2015; Ninci et al., 2015) for individuals with ASD who are at a high risk of being unemployed (Shattuck et al., 2012) and even worst if they are impaired in their daily living skills (Gray et al., 2014). However, individuals with ASD have often demonstrated a relative strength of daily living skills including social and communicative adaptive skills (Farley et al., 2009; McGovern & Sigman, 2005) across childhood and into young adulthood (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2014; McGovern & Sigman, 2005; Szatmari et al., 2009).

There are several challenges the NASOM centre has to face in implementing the pre-vocational training or classes besides the greater opportunities it offers for the students with ASD.

We often face behavioural problems of our students. Our students would show mild challenging behavioural problem by refusing to finish their homework. We have to teach them good conduct behaviour at the centre and we also tell the parents to monitor their children at home.

Santhi proposed that parents should work together with NASOM teachers to better support their children in managing behavioural problems associated with ASD. Santhi's view showed the importance of building relationship based on connecting the knowledge and skills she had with parents who could then "work not wait" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7) in helping their children to address behavioural difficulties. Both parents and teachers need to work together to handle these problems.

Both parents and teachers need to work together to handle these problems.

However, Santhi was fortunate as she did not have much problems associated with the parents in relation to their children's problems at the NASOM centre.

Parents give full co-operation to us as they could see improvement in their children. For example, one student had stopped wearing pampers after one month he enrolled at our centre.

Muthu's parents co-operated with requests from Santhi and other teachers in continuing to use learning aids at home.

Muthu also showed improvement after his parents followed our instructions that need to be carried out at home. For example, Muthu's parents used the Pictures Exchange Communication System (PECS) that I prepared to interact with Muthu at home during his school holidays.

After his parents followed the instructions and activities suggested by Santhi, Muthu showed progress. His future was being scaffolded through his achieving the small goals set for him based on reasonable hope (Weingarten, 2010).

Muthu's learning experiences

According to Santhi, early intervention seemed important for students with ASD. If the students were sent to NASOM or other centres earlier, they were able to improve their behavioural problems, functional routine and living skills as these improvements took times.

Parents need to bring their children to our centre when they are still young. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to change their behaviour because changes take time.

Muthu seemed very fortunate as his parents sent him to the NASOM centre early.

Santhi reported that she faced difficulties in educating and interacting with Muthu at the beginning.

At the beginning, Muthu was very stubborn. For example, he refused to listen to me. He won't sit at one place. He was aggressive. He kicked, bit and ran away.

Santhi described her response:

I put a lot of effort to change his behaviour by trying to be friendly to him. I also used social-based stories to educate Muthu.

Her responses had a number of effects.

After six months, I saw some improvement in him. He also started to eat rice instead of biscuits. He could read, sing, dance and run. His favourite is dancing. I was in charge of Muthu for eight years. Now, Muthu is doing well. He learns to listen to instructions. His parents trusted us after seeing Muthu's development.

Muthu finally succeeded to self-regulate himself. According to Santhi, Muthu made improvements after going through the intervention given by her.

Santhi also used behaviour modification approach with Muthu.

I rewarded Muthu by giving him the opportunity to do what he likes such as watching television programmes, listening to songs, attending computer classes, and treating him with KFC. He showed improvement with the reward incentive system.

This approach was consistently used at home by Yuges and Valli as well. This consistency in the method used at home and in school to modify Muthu's behaviour can be seen as is perhaps why Muthu behavioural problem reduced successfully. As noted previously, children with ASD cope better if they are given clear and consistent guidelines.

Santhi also realised that Muthu is now a very independent boy, which aligns with Yuges's acknowledgement as well.

Now, Muthu is a very independent boy. He is very good in memorising things and uses English as a mode of communication. However, he is a bit slow academically.

Santhi appeared to agree with Yuges that Muthu performs better in pre-vocational skills.

Summary

Yuges and Valli encountered diagnosis difficulties for Muthu at an early stage. However, they managed to find experts to diagnose their son. Initially, they also faced challenges to find ways to support their son's educational opportunities, with two interruptions. Then, Yuges and Valli had an opportunity to access a shadow teacher's service (Santhi) for eight years. This meant that, Muthu had consistent education in the same primary mainstream school and the NASOM centre under the care of the same teacher. Muthu started to show a significant improvement in his behaviour and skills. The resources the family provided meant that Muthu had reasonable hope of having opportunities to work towards.

Hui Xin also played her role in supporting Muthu at school. Apart from teaching Mathematics, she also assisted with a glove packing project for students with ASD. She integrated counting skills in the glove packing project to make her teaching more effective. She also took the initiative to visit the NASOM centre to learn and adapt using the chart skills in teaching Mathematics in class. Hui Xin also worked alongside Yuges and Valli to assist Muthu at school.

Santhi had eight years of experience interacting with Muthu as his shadow teacher in the primary mainstream school in the mornings, and a mainstream teacher at the NASOM centre in the afternoons. She managed to control Muthu's misbehaviour while he was still young. This approach became very important for Muthu to gradually learn and develop new skills in his life. Santhi also managed to build a good relationship with Yuges and Valli to support Muthu's learning in self-management skills, living skills and pre-vocational skills.

Parents, school teacher and the NASOM teacher (also as a shadow teacher) worked well together and contributed equally to shape and develop Muthu. While it was not yet clear what his vocational future might be, he had been exposed to some limited vocational programmes, and learned some useful skills that might contribute towards independent living.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

MAHATHIR AND MENG NAN: POSSIBILITIES AND RESOURCE LIMITATIONS

Introduction

Having set up the case studies for the previous three chapters, I asked myself what new perspectives could be learned from the remaining research materials – the cases of Mahathir and Meng Nan and their parents and teachers - that had not already been presented. Thus, I present in this chapter only those materials that offer an account of significant difference – that is, they make a new contribution to the stories told in my study, or they make clearer a story already told. As discussed in Chapter Three, Methodology and Research Methods, the representation strategy in this chapter turns from the case study approach of the previous three chapters towards a wider social commentary. This change was made to recognise that a degree of narrative saturation (as described in Chapter Three, Section Field Text Analysis, p. 60 & 61) had been reached. The focus of this chapter is on elements of the experiences of young people with ASD in vocational education that had not emerged from the previous narratives. Thus, the commentary is no longer centred on one particular “case” but on two sets of research materials and the wider context of vocational education, family, workplace, policies and resources, as well as the role of the community.

Mahathir’s and Meng Nan’s narratives

Mahathir was an 18-year-old young man diagnosed with ASD. Mahathir was assessed by a pediatrician at the age of three as having ASD and Epilepsy. As well as Mahathir, I also interviewed his mother (Satijah) and school teacher (Faridah), also Muslim Malaysian. Satijah is a full-time mother, and Faridah is Mahathir’s Malay language teacher who also supported cooking classes at the ISEP which Mahathir attends in the mornings.

Meng Nan was an 18-year-old young man diagnosed with ASD. He was assessed by a pediatrician at the age of two as having ASD. I also interviewed his mother (Li Ping),

school teacher (Bao Ting) and the NASOM teacher (Yun Xiang), also Buddhist Chinese Malaysian. Li Ping is a full-time mother. Bao Ting is Meng Nan's English teacher at the ISEP in the mornings. Yun Xiang teaches young people with ASD at the NASOM prevocational training centre, where Meng Nan attends after school in the afternoons.

Vocational Education

Vocational education is important for students with disabilities, including those with ASD. Vocational education offers a pathway that provides professional training to students with disabilities and develops their skills to prepare them for a workforce after they complete their secondary education.

Entrepreneurship

Mahathir's school was the only school where I learned about entrepreneurship skills. While in the previous case study chapters, teachers spoke about students learning to make burgers and some skills in selling the burgers to others, this is the only research field text of specific, named skills involved in commercial activities.

Based on the experiences of three years' cooking classes that were available to Mahathir and other students, the school then offered a two-year career transition programme focusing on entrepreneurship. Here, time is a critical dimension for our understanding of hope "between the present and the future filled with anticipation" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). Mahathir's teacher, Faridah, said:

For example, if these students learn cooking and they want to sell bread, they need to master the concepts of having capital, labour cost, and gains and losses.

Faridah detailed how students are given access to introductory skills required for entrepreneurial-type activities.

Students learn counting skills in the basic entrepreneurship class. After which they sell bread to their teachers at school to see how much they have earned. We don't want our students to lose money without this knowledge.

We teach them counting to see how much they have gained.

These specific steps are a further example of doing hope: “the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). The new material this field text offers is to show the ways in which a vocational class such as cooking is extended to include basic commercial understandings and skills, under the title of basic entrepreneurship.

Grape selling

Another way for young people with ASD to develop commercial understandings and skills is to enable them to participate in food production experiences. In Meng Nan's school, the opportunity to engage in grape selling was offered to high-functioning students with learning disabilities.

Meng Nan's teacher, Bao Ting, explained that grape selling was one of the career transition programmes available in her school, through which students could learn vocational skills to enter food service and horticultural occupations. This vocational programme reflected a local industry, which potentially offers opportunities for employment.

Grapes are commonly grown in Malaysia, as they are well suited to the climate, and involvement in this industry creates economic benefits for the school, as well as vocational skills development for participating students. Grapes are one of the most important and economical garden fruits in the world (Shahraki et al., 2012) and have many benefits. They “can be eaten raw or can be used for making jam, juice, jelly, wine, grape seed-extracts, raisins, vinegar and grape-seed oil” (see Brady et al., 2010; Kalimang`asi et al., 2014, p. 1). As well, they increase profitability and add stability to a family farm (Brady et al., 2010) even though they are seasonal fruits.

Bao Ting explained:

We emphasised the quality of the grapes and students' hygiene.

The teacher in charge taught the students many steps before they could sell the grapes to the teachers of their school.

We taught our students how to pack the grapes which weighs 1kg per pack. We also taught them how to use the weighing scale. In the meantime, we taught the students to pick the spoiled grapes out from the plastic bags and repack the grapes in a new plastic bag and weigh 1kg. Then, we sold the grapes to the school teachers. We kept the profit for our students' benefit.

The money earned by the students from selling the grapes would be used to finance other vocational activities held in their school.

Bao Ting then explained the community source where the grapes came from.

We got the grapes from the port through the customs officer with a market price of RM 19 per kg, and we sold the grapes for RM 24 per kg. Normally, we order nine big boxes of grapes. One big box weighs 9kg. We ordered nine big boxes, which came up to 81kgs.

The grape-selling programme was responded to well by the teachers of the school.

Most of the teachers like the grapes and they bought 2kgs to 4kgs per person.

In this particular case, even though the grape-selling programme was a success, the school did not continue this programme due to unreliable market prices (see Kalimang`asi et al., 2014) - another lesson in entrepreneurship for students and teachers.

The selling price was the same as the market price which was RM 24 per kg. It was pointless if we continue this programme because we didn't earn any money even though our students could really perform well in grape packing skills.

The students lost a good learning opportunity when this programme stopped abruptly. Here, the teachers were in **Witness Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered) as they knew

what was desirable for the students' learning but did not have "the internal or external resources" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 12) to make it happen.

Reflexology

Practising reflexology, a further dimension of vocational education that might offer reasonable hope for future employment, emerged for the first time in these interviews as relevant for some students with ASD. There were two phases to this teaching.

The rationale behind teaching basic reflexology skills is to prepare the students to develop basic skills.

We teach students from Forms One to Forms Five [five years]. For the first three years, we teach them basic knowledge of finding the pressure points and the correct order in massaging.

Autistic students can stay focused. When we teach them reflexology skills, we introduce to them the pressure points which need to be massaged. This will make them remember the pressure points better.

While the teacher does not name the full breadth of skills involved, it can be assumed that as well as learning aspects of physiology – the pressure points – students will also need interpersonal skills such as introducing themselves, asking questions to inquire whether the pressure being exercised is acceptable to the clients. All these aspects will enhance client comfort, and satisfaction.

Faridah suggested that, as a vocational training programme, reflexology would offer real-life employment opportunities for students with ASD, including the benefit of gaining a qualification. Students in this programme not only learnt how to deliver a service to customers, they also learnt business skills, such as financial management and budgeting, as Faridah explained:

In the fourth and fifth years, we teach them to generate income from the reflexology skills learned. Students learned costing and capital knowledge apart from learning reflexology skills.

If these students have completed Level 1 in reflexology skills, they will be given a certificate to help them to get a job in future. The potential employers will be more convinced and confident to hire these students.

A further advantage of reflexology, for the school, is that it requires limited resources.

My school offers reflexology skills because these skills don't incur a high cost as we only need a few massage chairs, oil and towels.

Learning reflexology skills could provide opportunities and reasonable hope for the future employment of students with ASD. As Weingarten notes, "an open future is full of possibilities" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9) and "reasonable hope maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8). However, student ability and interest play a role in whether or not students have this vocational learning opportunity. In this particular situation, Faridah explained that Mahathir did not have the required basic communication skills and was therefore not selected to enter the reflexology programme.

Family

The involvement of families of students with disabilities in a transition process from school to adult life is vital. For example, parents and caregivers may function as their children's advocates in that process and search for suitable post-secondary options.

Parental access to information and skills

Parental responsibility was an important thread in each of the case study chapters. For example, Mariam's school teacher mother, Siti, played a critical role (see Chapter Five) in getting Mariam access to appropriate schooling as she progressed through each level. But not all parents have the degree of knowledge that Siti had. Meng Nan's school teacher,

Bao Ting, had been taking her own son for swimming lessons on Saturdays, three years earlier than the time of my interview with her. She met Meng Nan and his mother, Li Ping, at the swimming pool. One day, while waiting for her son to complete his swimming lesson, she noticed that Meng Nan was a special child. Then she approached Meng Nan and his mother and had a conversation with them. Meng Nan's mother told Bao Ting that her son is autistic and they had just relocated from another state since her husband got a new job here.

Bao Ting had a long conversation with Meng Nan's mother. His mother told Bao Ting that Meng Nan experienced being bullied - which was not unusual for children with ASD - (see Tipton-Fisler et al., 2018; Zeedyk et al., 2014) in the previous school. Bao Ting explained to Meng Nan's mother that Meng Nan still had three more years of schooling available to him. The mother's witnessing position can be seen to be in **Witness Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered) as her distress was caused by being "aware but uncertain what to do or lacking the internal or external resources to act exactly as he or she knows to do" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 12). Bao Ting told me how she had introduced herself to Li Ping as a special needs teacher and encouraged her to send her son to an integrated special school.

Bao Ting said:

I am a special needs teacher at the Integrated Special Education Programme.
I could see that Meng Nan will benefit from enrolling at school again.

This teacher was practising "humble hope" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10) by providing useful information for the mother. The teacher felt there would be many learning opportunities for Meng Nan at her school, and that he could benefit from learning social skills by interacting with other students. Here, in contrast to Meng Nan's mother, the teacher was aware and empowered in **Witness Quadrant 1**.

Bao Ting's information first attracted Meng Nan's mother because of the co-curriculum activities in her school. For example, Meng Nan could join many co-curriculum activities such as running and sports in school. The school also organised sport activities

at district level. These activities included futsal, netball, bowling, dancing and singing competitions.

Bao Ting further explained to Meng Nan's mother that her school is a government school (ISEP) which uses the Malay language as the main communicative language. Bao Ting knew Meng Nan was good in English, but she wanted Meng Nan to learn the Malay language as this language is compulsory and is the national language. Meng Nan would benefit from being multilingual in this country. For instance, Meng Nan can communicate and socialise with other students who come from different backgrounds and use different languages to communicate. He will have Chinese, Malay and Indian friends in his class, as Malaysia is a multicultural country. In her view:

Meng Nan can learn many languages and interact with his peers in class.

Bao Ting then gave the contact number of an officer in the district education department to Meng Nan's mother and told her to file an application for her son to come to Bao Ting's school. Meng Nan's mother then followed the instructions given by the officer and filed an application. After six months, Meng Nan's mother told Bao Ting that there was still no reply from the department. Bao Ting told Meng Nan's mother to call up the officer concerned to find out what was happening.

After another six months, Bao Ting saw Meng Nan's mother brought him to school. Bao Ting was happy because Meng Nan was given an opportunity to attend school again instead of staying at home or undergoing homeschooling.

Parental access to information is a vital component in supporting the practical implications and adjustment for the child with ASD and their families as there is a gap between information needs and information source availability and accessibility (Gibson & Martin, 2017). It is very common among parents of adults with ASD to experience a dearth of information sources (Gibson & Martin, 2017). In Meng Nan's case the valuable information gained by Meng Nan's mother enabled Meng Nan to have learning opportunities at school again. Bao Ting had provided current, relevant and accurate

information to facilitate decision making for Li Ping based on her son's needs and circumstances (see Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015).

In a further example of parental responsibility, Ai Fang told stories of carefully structuring the activities as Ming Fu learned car-washing. Mahathir's mother, Satijah, told of how she learned to use pictures to support his learning.

I watched the movie "Forest Gump" in which an autistic child was taught using cards and pictures. Therefore, I learned and applied this method to teach Mahathir. I used pictorial books to teach him. I repeated the same words to Mahathir. For example, a for apple. Then, I asked him to pronounce and spell "apple" repeatedly. I also used the same approach to teach him the Malay language. Eventually, Mahathir became very good at spelling.

It seems that Satijah's use of a mix of pictures and speech, and of repetition, played a part in Mahathir's learning. Mahathir speaks good English. He also can spell and write in English. During my interview with Mahathir, he spoke less and preferred to write down the answers on a piece of paper for me. After the interview, I showed and discussed the answers with Mahathir's mother as it was part of my ethics agreement that the parents could know what their children say. Mahathir's mother, Satijah, was touched because she did not know that her son had those writing skills. This story demonstrates how parental access to information helps a child with ASD.

Workplace

A supportive workplace including adequate infrastructure, colleagues' attitudes and training is needed for students with disabilities to help them fully demonstrate their abilities and skills at the workplace (McIntosh & Harris, 2018). This is because students with disabilities need more support in order to succeed in the workplace.

Housekeeping

One of the jobs which is in demand in a developing country like Malaysia is housekeeping in the hospitality industry. Hotels are mushrooming in many cities in Malaysia because

of tourism. As such, there are many opportunities for adults with ASD to find employment in hotel work in the hospitality industry and tourism (McIntosh & Harris, 2018).

Housekeeping in the hospitality industry was one of the career transition programmes initiated by Meng Nan's school. Six students with disabilities participated in the first experiment. According to the teacher, Bao Ting, the hotel manager initiated training opportunities for the students.

We have housekeeping programme in collaboration with a hotel. The manager of the hotel agreed to take in our students to learn at the hotel twice a week. The students were trained under housekeeping and kitchen side.

The teacher in charge had brought the six students to the hotel twice to learn and observe how the hotel staff perform their tasks. Unfortunately, the school could not continue this programme because the staff member at the hotel resigned and the hotel lost the expertise to teach, mentor, supervise and support the students.

I only had opportunities to bring the students out twice. We had to stop the programme because the supervisor who trained our students left as he got a better job promotion in another place.

In this situation, reasonable hope “accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair” when “one can feel despair and reasonable hope simultaneously” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10). Although the students were offered hope initially through the programme, this hope was no longer available.

This story resonates with Ai Fang's story of the vegetable cutting (see Chapter Four). Ai Fang brought Ming Fu to a food stall to learn vegetable cutting skills. However, there was not the particular expertise to coach him at the food stall and so the opportunity was lost. Many workplaces are unprepared to accommodate students with ASD special needs as there is still a lack of knowledge on how to provide the best support for them.

Employers and co-workers should consider several aspects when providing a supportive learning environment for people with ASD (Walsh et al., 2014). Individuals who supervise, interact, or collaborate with people with ASD will require flexibility and

tolerance in their workplaces (Mawhood & Howlin, 1999). The work environment has to modify, adjust, and commit to communication exchanges, and refined specialised for students with ASD (Hagner & Cooney, 2005). ASD awareness training could foster understanding of the support required among these people in workplaces (Hagner & Cooney, 2005; López & Keenan, 2014).

Policies and resources

Policies should be tailored and resources are allocated based on the interests of young people with disabilities graduating from high school. A primary focus of policies should be on developing adequate post-secondary options for them.

Laundry work

Meng Nan's school teacher, Bao Ting, suggested to me that learning skills to do laundry was a potential career transition programme for the school.

Autistic students are able to do laundry because these students just need to put in all the dirty clothes into the washing machine and take the clothes out after the washing process is done. These students can handle the washing machine well. The students give the customers back their clothes after washing them.

Students could learn the skills of washing, drying, ironing, folding and presenting laundered clothes to customers. Students with ASD are able to sort out the clothes to be laundered when there is proper categorisation strategy training for them (Bock, 1999). As well, laundry skills are one of the daily living skills that can help to promote independent living. Bao Ting had hoped that students with ASD could perform the tasks well because it involves calling on small steps where the students only need to use detergent and fabric softener to wash clothes (see Horn et al., 2008). However, Bao Ting felt disappointed as her school was unable to afford machines in order to introduce this transition programme to her school.

Unfortunately, my school doesn't offer this programme because it is costly to buy washing machines.

Here is another example of teachers being in witness **Quadrant 4** (aware and disempowered). In this case, knowledge and skills were available but a lack of financial resources meant that teachers and students were not offered the opportunity to build a future based on "working not waiting" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). If such a transitional programme is to succeed in a school, it will need wider community support from outside of school to give young people work experience. If people send their clothes to the laundry shop inside the school, it will help to create job opportunities for students with ASD.

Multimedia visual

The school where Bao Ting taught offered Multimedia visual skills as a vocational training programme for students with disabilities including those with ASD. The students with disabilities follow the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2017) in which the students learn word processing skills and basic design.

[They learn] the basic designing skills include preparing PowerPoint slides, editing photos and inserting software to edit photos.

Bao Ting further explained that Meng Nan was assigned to learn a Multimedia visual vocational training programme at the computer class because of his small physical size and he showed interest in using computers.

Meng Nan is a very thin boy. He might have difficulties carrying a heavy box. Therefore, we placed him in the computer class because of his thin frame and his interest in this area. We think that computer skills are more suitable as his potential career.

Meng Nan's mother, Li Ping, also agreed with the teacher that her son could perform well in Multimedia learning. She said the following:

Meng Nan could understand lessons using the computer. He knows a lot of words and sentences. Meng Nan also has the patience to sit and do the typing.

He also attends computer classes at the NASOM pre-vocational centre after school in the afternoons.

However, the Multimedia visual skills programme also experienced a number of setbacks. The teacher faced problems in completing the syllabus of this programme. These students were unable to follow the structured traditional lessons planned by the teacher because they needed more time to learn the skills. The flow-on effect of this incomplete syllabus meant that students were unable to finish their modules.

The school also struggled to provide an adequate number of computers. The programme attracted a high number of students. Bao Ting said:

We also lack ICT [Information and Communications Technology] equipment.

Meng Nan's mother, Li Ping, explained that the school had enough staff members interested and motivated to teach. She identified the following:

The school lacks financial aid to buy more computers for students, even though the school has enough teachers to teach computer skills. The students have to take turns to learn computer skills. Therefore, the teachers can't fully train the students on computer skills. It would be great if the school could provide more computers and students could have more learning opportunities.

Meng Nan will be going out for work soon. So, if he has more time to learn computer skills, he can apply these skills in the workplace.

The adequacy of the facilities that are available to adults with ASD could determine the success of the vocational outcomes, wrote Schaller and Yang (2005). Even though the school places the students based on their interest and ability in vocational programmes, it still encounters challenges in the lack of adequate financial aid to make programmes available and smooth running. This story demonstrates the complexity of the challenges facing those providing support for students and the need for those providing the opportunities to be in the **Quadrant 1** (aware and empowered) witnessing position. This position could offer reasonable hope for students such as Meng Nan to build a "future full of possibilities" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 9).

Agriculture

Agriculture is one of the vocational training programmes offered to low-functioning students like Mahathir and Meng Nan in their schools.

Learning agriculture can be important for students with disabilities in order to gain basic skills and practical hands-on knowledge. They learn about the environment and gain some experience which they could apply in their daily tasks, coursework in college, or get involved in the agriculture industry (Pirtle, 2012). Agriculture also could provide the development of knowledge and skill sets (Elbert & Baggett, 2003) as well as job opportunities for these students once they have completed the programme (Elbert & Baggett, 2003; Giffing & Warnick, 2012; Pirtle, 2012).

The teacher who was in charge of this programme taught the students from the basic process until the end process of selling the vegetables to school teachers. Meng Nan's teacher, Bao Ting said:

We teach our students how to use the hoe to dig the soil, how to plant vegetables, how to put fertilizers for the plants and how to pick the vegetables. This is because some of our students don't know how to differentiate between grass and water spinach. Planting vegetables are seasonal. After planting, we wait for the harvest. Then, we sell the vegetables to the school teachers.

Bao Ting explained that the students learned how to plant several types of vegetables.

We teach our students to plant mustard leaves, winter melons, lady's fingers, Chinese broccoli, lemongrass and water spinach.

These vegetables are very common in Malaysia and are in high demand in the local markets. These students could have employment opportunities and income if they commit themselves to vegetable planting and growing.

The two school teachers who were in charge in teaching the agriculture programme provided positive agriculture education and "make a positive difference in their students' lives" (see Giffing & Warnick, 2012, p. 11; Stair, 2009). Faridah and Bao Ting explained:

Faridah: In this school, we use herbaceous plants. We buy readily made soil. Then, the students just have to mix the readily made soil with fertilizer and finally put in the seeds because we lack land.

Bao Ting: Our teachers are so creative and smart. The teachers cleared the land in front of the school, fertilised the soil and prepared some nets for the planting programmes. We still face problems like lack of space and suitable soil for planting.

A lack of adequate space to plant vegetables proved to be an impediment to a programme with significant potential, another example of teachers' frustration as being aware but disempowered in the **Quadrant 4** witnessing position.

Swimming and bowling activities: Extracurricular learning

Efforts were taken to have external activities outside Meng Nan's school. The school tried to include swimming and bowling activities which was open for all students with disabilities and students with ASD with the hope that they could help them to develop in physical activities and social skills, as well as to provide fun and create social interaction among students.

The participation of the students was encouraging as they had never been outside for swimming or bowling. The teacher, Bao Ting said:

The parents of these students have never taken them out for either swimming or bowling. They were so excited to join those activities.

Bao Ting further explained that both swimming and bowling activities could be beneficial for the students to build their confidence and communication skills.

Swimming therapy is held to build the students confidence when they are in the water. This is because not all students know how to swim. Initially, there were many students who couldn't even step on the base of the swimming pool. When the students have acquired these skills, they gradually mingled with other students who were good at swimming.

We showed the students how to use three fingers to carry the bowling balls and how to bend their body to strike the pins. These games built the students' confidence. For example, when the autistic students struck ten pins, they felt very confident and shouted, "yeah, yeah, yeah."

With great disappointment, Bao Ting expressed that her school had to discontinue both swimming and bowling activities due to safety concerns.

We were given consent by the local district officer who allowed us to use the swimming pool for free and the trainings were conducted by a well-trained coach. The well-trained coach guided the students one at a time by holding their hand. He made them go into the water and also let them hold the sides of the pool so that they would be confident to step into the pool by themselves. Our teachers were coaching the students from the side.

The students were fortunate as they were given proper guidance by a well-trained swimming coach who guided the students step-by-step, assisted by the school teachers. However, according to safety regulations, there should be more than one well-trained swimming coach in order to ensure safety while in the pool and while walking towards the swimming-pool.

Our principal didn't allow us to take these students out during school hours because our students needed time to learn and engage themselves in swimming and bowling.

Bao Ting further clarified that the teachers in charge of swimming and bowling activities also had to follow many procedures before taking the students out for activities because there are many risks involved when taking them out after school hours. Again, teacher efforts to provide for their ASD students encountered impediments. Here, Weingarten (2010) suggests that hope needs to be reasonable to direct "our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable" (p. 7).

Community support

The role of communities in supporting young people with disabilities is also significant. They can contribute by organising fundraising activities to provide financial assistance for disability-related governmental and non-governmental organizations so that they can run their programmes regularly.

Rotary Club

Rotary Club is a non-governmental organisation established in 1928 to help the community and this club is open to all cultures, race and religion for participation. Rotary Club provides services to the community, in the workplace, and throughout the world. The Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur Diraja is the oldest and one of the largest and most active Rotary Club in Malaysia. The Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur Diraja is conferred this name because it has served the disabled community for the past 70 years, for example, donating wheelchairs and hearing aids and having medical camps.

The Rotary Club has relations with schools where both Muthu and Meng Nan are by supporting the students and the teachers who needs assistance. Two of the teachers commented on the contribution of the Rotary Club to them. Like Muthu's teacher, Hui Xin, Meng Nan's teacher, Bao Ting, expressed that the Rotary Club was providing professional development opportunities for them. Bao Ting said:

Since last year, we have co-operation with the Rotary Club. I know a member of Rotary Club. She invited me to attend the Autism International Conference. The conference was about the inclusion of autistic children in the mainstream class. The organiser invited a medical doctor who was running an inclusive programme at the United Kingdom for 18 years. The doctor has come back to Malaysia, and she was willing to offer and share inclusive knowledge with us. The organiser also invited officers from the Health Department and Deputy Director of Malaysian Ministry Education to share their idea about inclusiveness and autism. Well educated parents such as doctors and lawyers also attended this conference.

The conference offering could enhance the knowledge about inclusion and autism for the teachers. The teachers then could apply the knowledge and skills to interact better with their students.

I note here that in Chapter Six, I reported that Hui Xin explained the efforts that the Rotary Club put in to support her school, such as sand for sand therapy, contractors to rebuild the floor and cooking equipment.

In a situation where schools struggle for resources for programmes for students with special needs, the teachers appreciated the donations made by Rotary Club as a service club. In these terms, as Weingarten (2009) claims, hope functions in a relational context and becomes the community's responsibility: "I hope because we hope" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8). A collective commitment will offer students a future which is open with possibilities (Weingarten, 2010). The donations made by the Rotary Club enable the students to learn the skills they need to make a contribution to society.

Summary

In summary, vocational training programmes and career transition programmes both focus on teaching students skills to enable them to engage in meaningful employment. The vocational and career transition programmes that the schools have tried offer many possibilities for future employment for students with disabilities. However, at times, the schools' good intentions faced some practical limitations, which meant they could not continue offering these programmes.

The family of these children are directly involved in their education. Social and emotional support from parents often have a great influence on the selection of a suitable educational pathway for a child with ASD. However, the family may not always have access to the correct information or be well connected to the schools' programmes. The swimming pool story showed that connection and action can happen when people are in a position to do hope by witnessing struggle and acting on this. The small action of providing knowledge to the mother about the school opened up future possibilities for a child and

their family. In Weingarten's concept, reasonable hope is about making sense of what is happening to us towards actions when people work together.

In the workplace, there may be people with high commitment to help, who have previously attempted to work with people with disabilities and people with ASD. However, they may not have enough resources to continue this work, or may only have limited knowledge and skills to train some of their staff to support people with disabilities.

This chapter has highlighted that support from families and workplaces (employers and employees) is critical to the success of young people with ASD in vocational training and career transition programmes. However, further conditions, including policies, resources, and community support, are also critical, as these important aspects influence the successful implementation of vocational and career transition programmes. The involvement of all parties created a community of care to support these young people. This action can be seen to be underpinned doing reasonable hope.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My study investigated opportunities and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia. It explored participants' hopes and aspirations for education and the transitions involved in moving towards adult life through semi-structured interviews and case studies, informed by the research questions below:

1. What are the links between schooling and vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
2. What vocational education opportunities are available in family, school or community for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
3. What are the challenges in the provision of vocational education for young people with ASD in Malaysia?

Focusing on young people with ASD, their families and teachers in Malaysia, the case studies I present demonstrated young people's everyday life, struggles, and successes with their families and teachers. Such narratives provide insights into participants' lived experiences and can be used to explore how the different participants construct meaning in their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study used a narrative approach to explore the implementation of young people's engagement with vocational training designed specifically for young people with ASD. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study in Malaysia that uses a narrative case study approach to investigate opportunities and challenges in the vocational training area for young people with ASD.

I collected and analysed field texts using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) analytical approach, which is based on three dimensions: situation (physical places or the storyteller's places), interaction (personal and social) and continuity (past, present, and future). Examples have been provided to illustrate these three dimensions in this thesis. For instance, the situation in this study broadly refers to the Malaysian cultural and educational setting as the research context. Additionally, I interviewed participants at the specific places or contexts agreed upon, such as their homes, school, or pre-vocational training centres. The stories they told in these settings reflected their thoughts and feelings

at the times and in the spaces they chose for the interviews. Participants spoke about interactions in particular places, such as a swimming pool. The study paid attention to the continuity of children's development. Thus, the participants' accounts portrayed the young people's lives across time. Their mothers or parents spoke about their children's development from when they were small (past), to what they are doing to support their children now (present) and what they hope for their children's future (future). These narratives reflected the parents' interpretations of their children's development as they were engaged in a meaning-making process. Teachers reported their efforts in the past, currently and what they have planned for the future to prepare the young people with career possibilities or social learning opportunities.

A narrative case study makes sense of the lived experiences, binding together the interrelationships between situation, interaction and continuity. This study highlights the history, chronology and learning steps narrated by my participants in the process of preparing for futures, with a particular focus on the developmental phase of vocational education.

I began this study with this narrative inquiry approach based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions. However, over time my study has gone beyond these three dimensions of narrative inquiry, to weave in Weingarten's (2010) concept of the value of reasonable hope. While my fieldwork did not ask about reasonable hope, this narrative possibility arose in the many-layered stories of doing hope within my field texts. These stories gave me the sense of the importance of people doing hope, a new perspective on the value of narrative inquiry. This is because there were stories after stories that can be understood through Weingarten's (2010) theoretical construct of reasonable hope. Thus, I claim that bringing this construct of reasonable hope into a study framed within the general disability field is a particular contribution of this study as part of its investigation of vocational education for young people with ASD.

Two brief snippets from my findings chapters show the value of the theoretical construct of reasonable hope in providing a richer understanding and insights into the ways small actions by individuals working with others can open up future possibilities for children and their families. First, a teacher who was at the swimming pool at the weekend with her own son observed Meng Nan and his mother for some time. Doing hope - that is

enacting hope as a verb - she approached Meng Nan's mother and asked her whether she knew how to access information to enrol her son in ISEP at a special school. Through this action of one mother doing hope, while in the social and exercise space of a swimming pool, another mother eventually managed to enrol at the special school suggested by the teacher. In Weingarten's concept, reasonable hope is about making sense of what is happening to us towards actions when people work together.

A second example also involves swimming and Meng Nan. Teachers at his school took students out to a local swimming pool as part of extracurricular learning. Here again it was taking action toward possible opportunities to build students' confidence and communication skills, as well as to provide fun for them. The students were given guidance step-by-step by a well-trained swimming coach, assisted by the school teachers. The students managed to learn swimming skills even though they initially faced challenges of learning swimming. In Weingarten's construct, the swimming coach and the teachers "offer accompaniment and bear witness" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 5) for the students' success and "managing challenging situation" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 5).

Families and teachers told about small actions or everyday events that, I argue, are evidence of practices of doing hope. In paying attention to these practices of doing hope, this study highlights the significance of a narrative of reasonable hope in the processes of vocational education for young people with ASD. The study shows how small actions of individuals working with others can open up future possibilities for young people and their families.

Doing hope requires in the first instance that a person is aware of what is happening, and secondly that they are empowered to take some sort of action. A further concept from Weingarten, witnessing positions (see Chapter Three), adds to the understanding of how to do hope. My case studies show the witnessing positions the participants found themselves in in relation to doing hope.

Narrative cases

Many of the narrative cases highlighted the challenges faced by the young people engaged

in their life journeys and how the practice of doing reasonable hope provides a link between opportunities and challenges. It is evident that young people with ASD struggle to engage in vocational training that might lead to meaningful employment, despite the support they receive from the services with which they engage. Teachers work hard, but despite their efforts, young people still experience significant limitations and challenges when accessing vocational education and pre-employment opportunities. Each of the case studies points to a particular opportunity for the development of vocational education where reasonable hope places an essential role.

My analyses demonstrated the pain of the struggle often met by parents and teachers who interact with young people with ASD. Ming Fu's mother helped to open opportunities for him and guided him to function in work-related settings, starting with car washing, vegetable cutting and mat-making. Alongside these hopeful skills trainings, she was also confronted and discomforted by her son's inappropriate sexual behaviour which she struggled to acknowledge. One example of this challenge became apparent when, as a researcher, I witnessed a situation where Ming Fu masturbated in the car when his mother took him and me to the NASOM centre after I had interviewed them at their home. Ming Fu's school teacher, Faiza, and the NASOM teacher, Suhaila, also confirmed Ming Fu's unregulated sexual behaviour. This situation may have brought shame and embarrassment for Ming Fu's parents and teachers because masturbation holds particular moral and cultural meanings and taboos in Malaysian society (see Khalaf et al., 2014; Mohd Mutalip & Mohamed, 2012; Zulkifli & Low, 2000). However, when family support was not available for Ming Fu to learn about appropriate sexual behaviour, the school teachers took action; they sought guidance within the health system and devised strategies to guide Ming Fu towards appropriate social behaviour. By identifying realistic goals, and pathways to support learning appropriate behaviour is an action that resonate with Weingarten's (2010) statement that reasonable hope "seeks pathways to identified goals" (p. 5).

A recommendation arising from this case study is that sex education training should not only be available for teachers, but also for parents of young people with ASD. For example, workshops could be held to advise parents on how to guide their children, so that they understand their sexuality and learn to express it in line with cultural, social and workplace norms. Sex education for young people with ASD may give them the ability

to manage their sexual desires and conduct themselves appropriately, so they can take up the vocational opportunities and possibilities available.

Mariam's accounts offered an alternative perspective on doing reasonable hope; one that concerns the importance of inclusive education for students with ASD in mainstream classes. In Mariam's situation, her mother, Siti, changed Mariam's school a number of times in order to give Mariam access to the kind of schooling that would best meet her needs, as a young person diagnosed with ASD. The culture in Malaysia values parents' involvement in their children's education and lives, and Siti's involvement had opened the space for Mariam to have the opportunity to continue her schooling with full support from her school teachers. Indeed, I then became aware of how Aisyah, Mariam's school teacher, used her tacit knowledge and creativity, as well as her flexibility, to come up with solutions to the frustration caused by Mariam's inappropriate outbursts during class. As I have noted, the teacher was aware and empowered (**Witness Quadrant 1**) and could provide reasonable hope by supporting Mariam in class. The teacher's interventions and actions supported hopeful outcomes, allowing Mariam the opportunity to remain in a mainstream class. Such an opportunity calls for creativity, respect and patience on the part of the teacher in enacting her passion for teaching. I learned that support from both Siti and Aisyah, parent and teacher, taught Mariam to manage her responses to stressful events. The moderation of emotion is a significant life skill necessary for successful functioning not only in education but also in a work environment. Successful moderation of emotions supported Mariam to continue in her mainstream schooling, thus offering her the potential for the university study that she and her family had hoped for.

Muthu's vocational education at the ISEP was influenced by his family's beliefs and values, in particular the Indian cultural custom which positions extended family as the primary source of support in their children's lives and learning (see Abu Talib, 2010; Baptiste, 2005). The implications of Muthu's case study account suggested that children with ASD who have financially well-off and educated parents are likely to receive more support to manage their special needs. For instance, Muthu benefitted from having parents who were able to afford costly private speech and occupational therapy sessions for him, from quite a young age. Clearly, his parents were both aware and empowered (**Witness Quadrant 1**). By using their resources based on reasonable hope, they could "work not wait" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). Muthu demonstrated significant improvement from these

therapy sessions, thus opening education opportunities that might otherwise have been limited. Muthu's parents could also afford to hire a shadow teacher for eight years, when Muthu was enrolled at the NASOM centre. The consistent use of one single teacher, Santhi, helped Muthu in his learning, as they developed a supportive relationship and successful learning strategies together over this time. While Muthu's family could and would continue to support him financially into adulthood, they still hoped he would develop as many skills for independent living as possible, and they aspired for him to gain meaningful employment. Here, their hope was in "working not waiting" through developing supportive relationship with the resources they had (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7). In analysing this case study, I learned that support from many parties was able to shape Muthu to manage his behaviour, including the calmness which was my impression of him the first time I met him. Muthu's calm approach and the opportunities he has had in vocational education and at home to develop good computing skills, makes a job in the ICT field a possible option for him.

In the final case study, Mahathir's and Meng Nan's accounts demonstrated the consequences of limited resources at the two schools they attended, which reduced the overall effectiveness of learning opportunities for students with disabilities, including those with ASD. Students at both these schools were not able to fully participate in the range of vocational and educational activities envisaged that the school would like to provide. Opportunities such as grape selling, housekeeping, laundry work, multimedia visual skills, agriculture, swimming and bowling, were possibilities that the young people could have been engaged in to learn life and vocational skills. However, many limitations of resources, such as trained staff and finances to run programmes, meant these possibilities did not materialise or were not sustained over time. This case study highlighted that some schools and teachers were in **Witness Quadrant 4**, aware but disempowered because they could not access the resources needed. A lack of funding for equipment, including computers, impacted on the quality of support and vocational education available for children with ASD. Vocational and life skills are critical for students with disabilities, and government policies should take account of what is needed for this diverse group of students. Through analysing these two case studies, I learned that activities associated with life skills and vocational education are considered supplementary programmes that are intended to support students to have better learning opportunities. These initiatives, which may bring employment opportunities and other

career possibilities after completion of their studies, are essential. Therefore, reviewing existing policies to address their current limitations would seem to be necessary, including funding anomalies, in the implementation of the programmes.

Links between schooling and vocational training for young people with ASD

There are a range of links between schooling and vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia. The two stories presented below are examples of the complexity of the pathway between schooling and vocational training for young people with ASD and the need to provide a scaffold to address the students' issues in taking what they had learned in school into vocational training.

A process of scaffolding

The parents of children with ASD have to take on a higher level of responsibility for their children's education, life skills and vocational preparation, as most schools and disability services may not provide specialised services for the special needs of children with ASD. In the first case study in this project, as a mother and a teacher, Siti possessed knowledge about how to access education for her daughter, Mariam, whose ASD-related behaviour produced problems in class. Siti sought an appropriate educational setting that would support Mariam's learning and pay particular attention to her social and behavioural needs. So, she moved Mariam from one school to another.

Siti's hope, wisdom, knowledge and skills, alongside her parental responsibilities, resulted in achieving fruitful outcomes for Mariam's education, which had implications for opportunities for vocational or advanced academic education and so for possible future employment. In order for advanced education to be possible, Siti also desired Mariam to have behavioural and social education to manage herself sufficiently to enrol at university. Siti knew both the limitations and the places where Mariam's interest could be nurtured and thus the particular focus of university education was also relevant to Siti's hopes and plans. Siti knew that Mariam performed better in an environment with fewer people. She wanted Mariam to be introduced to ICT work or programming in the school

in preparation for advanced study. Thus, Siti's knowledge shaped the doing of hope for Mariam's future from schooling to vocational training.

Hope for Mariam's future opportunities extended wider than Siti. When Mariam had behavioural and emotional problems at school, at first the school called the family every time, and her father took her home. Over time, Mariam was given opportunities to express her preferences and decide whether to stay at school or to go home. The teachers treated Mariam with respect and dignity, collaborated with her family and Mariam learnt to manage her responses to the everyday social interaction and learning requirement in the classroom. Managing her own behaviour enabled her to fit in the range for continuing schooling at mainstream school in the hope that she would be able to move to adult life with appropriate behaviour and social skills.

Mariam's case study demonstrates a past and a present filled with both working and learning, two of the conditions Weingarten (2000) suggests contribute to the practice of reasonable hope. According to Weingarten's claim, this working and learning is done step-by-step - as we see with Mariam changing schools for example - towards possible futures. While the case study narrated a longer story of Mariam's education, the timing of the study is at the developmental moment in Mariam's life where her secondary schooling is coming toward an end and she is looking toward vocational opportunities. Over time schooling has provided the scaffolding opportunities for Mariam towards possible futures: "With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7).

Scaffolding in action

In this study, parents with a high level of education call on their knowledge to make meaning of the limitations that their children face, another form of hopeful working and learning. They strategise and plan to provide extra support for their children, as parents in Vetrayan et al.'s (2013) study also did.

Muthu's parents, Yuges and Valli, made the most of what could be possible, supporting their son with financial resources by acknowledging limitations and identifying support,

such as speech language therapy. Again, I turn to Weingarten (2010) to theorise their efforts. Weingarten suggests that hope needs to be *reasonable* to direct “our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable” (p. 7). Muthu’s parents sent him for speech and occupational therapies when he was young, extra steps within his education journey: their focus was on what was within reach, attainable at that time. Their understanding of their son’s limitations also led to them seeking individualised support for Muthu, again doing what was within reach. For eight years Muthu was assigned to one single teacher, Santhi, as a shadow teacher at the NASOM centre. Santhi helped in shaping Muthu’s behavioural and social skills needed in everyday life and to progress through the school system. The resources the family paid for took into account their child’s special needs and so facilitated developmental pathways, from a position of hope that was reasonable, that was “oriented to the here and now, towards actions that will bring people together to work towards a preferred future” (p. 8).

Identifying learning and developmental needs is important feature of planning action that will scaffold young people with ASD between the present situation and future possibilities. Mariam and Muthu had different possibilities due to their particular capability. The family resources made it possible to meet their particular these needs both formally and informally.

Vocational education opportunities in family, school or community

All the parents who participated in this study expected that their children would become employable in some way at some time in the future. Parents thus maintained hope for their children’s development, and aspirations for their futures, indicating that parental hopes may be an important resource for young people with ASD as they move from schooling towards adult life. They held hope their children can be educated appropriately and given employment opportunities. They contributed to these hopes by scaffolding in a range of ways as the case studies report.

Doing hope through meaningful activity at home

People find purpose in what they are doing in the construct of reasonable hope as “the practice of hope connects one to the webs of meaning and relationship that make life purposeful and meaningful. It gives one something to do” (Weingarten, 2007, p. 3). In Ming Fu’s case, the practice of hope lay in Ai Fang’s response to Ming Fu’s initiative in washing a car. For Ming Fu, his purpose may have been just washing a car. However, his mother saw car-washing as an opportunity to support her son in developing skills. These skills may or may not have led to possible potential employment, but an important point here is that Ai Fang not only understood her son’s limitation, but she had knowledge of what was possible for her son. Ai Fang, therefore, exercised patience and facilitated the scaffolding of small skills to teach car-washing to Ming Fu. The step-by-step instruction given by his mother helped to build Ming Fu’s skills and confidence so he worked towards performing car washing independently in the future. Ai Fang held hope for Ming Fu’s future as she believed that her son could find purpose and meaning in the process of learning in small steps. When reasonable hope is practised, we aim toward a goal rather than accomplishing it (Weingarten, 2000), as in the case of Ming Fu. Ai Fang was not worried about the car being cleaned - the end point. What she was interested in was breaking down the steps to enable her son to achieve small goals. Both mother and son had the sense of accomplishment in the steps themselves.

The story demonstrates the importance of family contribution to setting a potential vocational pathway for their child, but also providing a way for them to gain meaning in their lives. The story also shows there may be potential vocational opportunities when parents look at actions that scaffold the children into learning the skills to do particular tasks. Focusing on the accomplishment of small steps is an integral part of the pathway as people’s lives gain meaning by the “doing of hope” for, as Weingarten notes, it is important for our lives to have meaning and purpose.

Meaningful learning meets global pandemic

Both Ming Fu’s and Muthu’s schools implemented a glove-packing transition programme, as part of a career transition programme for students with ASD, by collaborating with a

local glove supplier to pack gloves for hospital use. This programme built hope for students with ASD as they applied their skills to a meaningful task that required a focus on details and repetitive work, abilities within their experience or reach. Teachers had the opportunities to instruct and support the step-by-step learning process on each aspect of the task. Schools worked alongside the community to offer the students employment-relevant learning opportunities. Such a project supported students' and parents' hope for education and employment. These opportunities created the inclusion for young people with ASD, and provided them with positive and meaningful roles in daily life for the period they were working in the programme. A community needs a combination of commitments to inclusiveness, such as systematic planning, long term commitment to provide resources, and responsiveness to current information, knowledge and skills.

Since the field work for this study, a career transition programme like glove packing appears to offer young people with ASD unanticipated opportunities beyond those planned. With the global COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of the Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18 March 2020, there have been very limited business activities that are allowed to operate in Malaysia (Lim, 2020). However, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry has allowed special dispensation for medical glove producers to operate at full capacity, even though the government initially mandated a 50 per cent capacity for manufacturers of medical supplies and other products to run their business (Bernama, 2020b). The government's decision has helped the country to produce about 225 billion pieces of gloves to meet 65% of the global demand during the COVID 19 pandemic (Bernama, 2020a). Even though Malaysia has started to use automation to produce gloves, manual glove packing is still continuing. This pandemic has relied on Malaysia as the world's biggest producer of medical gloves to help doctors, nurses and other health care professionals confront the coronavirus crisis (Zaugg, 2020). Thus glove-packing becomes a possible emergent employment opportunity for young people with ASD, if they have had experience of glove-packing in career transition programmes which involved links with industry.

The global importance of Malaysia's rubber manufacturing industry has been highlighted during the 2019-2020 COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has emphasised the importance of skills, such as producing medical grade gloves, which require the labour of low-skilled workers. While, prior to COVID-19, glove packing was perceived as a small

and menial task, during the pandemic Malaysia has been recognised as the main global supplier of medical gloves amid the COVID-19 crisis (see Medina, 2021), and as making an important contribution to global healthcare. Malaysia Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has also recognized the importance of this industry to the country's industrial resilience and domestic economy (see Medina, 2021), elevating the status of this work. The point here is that we cannot be certain where and when opportunities will arise: as Weingarten suggested hope is not necessarily focused on a future certainty, but on the hope of some opportunities becoming productive. Reasonable hope “maintains that the future is uncertain but open” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8) and thus can provide opportunities for generating new meanings and possibilities.

Opportunities in different workplace establishments

Employment is fundamental for people with disabilities to live independently (Ormerod & Newton, 2013). The hospitality industry is one of the industries that McIntosh and Harris (2018), suggest might employ people with disabilities, if social barriers were to be removed. Groschl (2004) pointed out the industry's extensive variety of tasks compared to other industries. However, people with disabilities who work in hospitality have been frequently perceived to lack talent and potential for advancement (Chi & Qu, 2004; Groschl, 2004). They experience stigmatisation even though they desire to work (Chi & Qu, 2004; Ormerod & Newton, 2013; Paez & Arendt, 2014).

It would seem that young people with ASD could be involved in the hospitality industry, in areas such as food preparation, the Autism Cafe Project (Zhen, 2019) and supermarket work in Malaysia. Even though the field texts did not give me the direct experiences of my participants, I could see opportunities and potential in providing skills and experiences that could offer a foundation for this kind of employment for young people with ASD. The food preparation activities undertaken at home, school and the NASOM centres could provide hope for Ming Fu, Muthu and Mahathir as these activities would fit well into the hospitality settings.

In the hospitality industry especially restaurants, employees with learning disabilities demonstrate the quality of valuable workers with repetitive, tedious tasks and those

performed away from customers (Chi & Qu, 2005). For instance, Ming Fu (see Chapter Four), Muthu (see Chapter Six) and Mahathir (see Chapter Seven) had potential to undertake food preparation activities as shown in the narrative case studies in the chapters.

Ming Fu's, Muthu's and Mahathir's food preparing skills could be used in a setting such as the "Autism Cafe Project". The Autism Cafe Project is a catering business that opened in 2016 a year before my field work started was set up to hire young people with ASD in Malaysia. It was initiated by a father, Mohd Adli Yahya, with financial resources, who has a 21-year-old son with ASD who is nonverbal, Muhammad Luqman Shariff (Tan, 2018). Therefore, the father was in the witnessing position of being aware and empowered (**Witness Quadrant 1**) in having knowledge of what would be helpful for his son and the resources to make it happen. Glove packing skills could be transferable and used in packing cookies, washing dishes and wiping tables at the cafe, as these tasks require repetition. The cafe also provides employees with opportunities to be independent, providing them with training and employment opportunities (Maganathan, 2019). This initiative by one father with a young person with ASD could be taken up more widely in the community, and perhaps this type of opportunity could be funded in rural areas, such an initiative would require building community awareness of the possibilities of young people making a meaningful contribution to the community.

Apart from working in the hospitality industry, young people with ASD could also be able to work at supermarkets. There have been developments in the way supermarkets organise their days, so that people with ASD could be employed there. As a researcher, I have been interested in noting a way a supermarket in Malaysia is catering for diversity by introducing calmer environments during the day. For instance, The Sunway Putra Mall (2021) offered "Autism Friendly Shopping Day" on every Tuesday except public holidays, from 10am to 5pm with facilities of a calm room and sensory walls, alongside a number of other services for people with ASD. With the services and responsibility provided by the corporate supermarket responding to the community come potential career possibilities and opportunities for young people with ASD. For example, three of the young people in this study, Ming Fu, Muthu and Mahathir could pack vegetables at the supermarket and also restock shelves. They would have the skills because of their previous experiences at home, school and the NASOM centre. Their meaningful, personal,

unique and memorable lived experience could secure career possibilities and opportunities which could lead them towards independent living.

Small stories from my study and the wider community give hope for initiatives that open a door for employment possibilities and opportunities for people with ASD, when their special needs are being heard, and adequate support provided to assist them at the workplace. As Weingarten (2000) says “hope must be the responsibility of the community” (p. 402) when the practice of doing hope together with others co-creates hopefulness.

Challenges in the provision of vocational education for young people with ASD

The study has identified a number of challenges in the provision of vocational education for young people with ASD in Malaysia. The main areas that emerged were related to the resourcing needs for vocational training and career transition programmes, provision for teachers’ professional development, the need for skills training opportunities, language skills development, and social and behavioural development. Examples from the stories illustrate these challenges.

Vocational training and career transition programmes

Considerable support is needed in order to enable young people with ASD to transition into work. While the Malaysian education system provides opportunities for students with disabilities to transition from school into work, this study has highlighted the limitations and challenges of both vocational training programmes and career transition programmes, at least in the settings particular to this study.

Involving the wider cohort of young people with ASD in vocational training programmes can be more challenging. While it is possible to shape the programmes for specific students to some extent, the vocational training programmes have a national curriculum, a high standard, and a national examination for which students must prepare. The national examination standard excludes some students from participating in these programmes if

for various reasons they are seen as not being able to achieve the standard required, as in Meng Nan's and Mahathir's cases.

Career transition programmes offer an alternative pathway for young people as a useful preparation to enable them to develop the life skills and self-management skills that would allow them to participate in vocational training, or employment, in the future. These programmes can therefore function to 'bridge' students into vocational training to acquire particular skills for the workplace. For example, Ming Fu and Muthu participated in a career transition programme where they learned glove packing. This pathway provided opportunities for both Ming Fu and Muthu to learn life skills and self-management skills as well as learning glove packing skills.

However, as my case studies showed, both vocational training programmes and career transition programmes offered limited opportunities due to resourcing issues. A challenge related to vocational training was the lack of resources required to provide specific high-quality programmes. For example, in Meng Nan's multimedia visual skills vocational training programme, there were several limitations to implementation, such as lack of computers and funding for further skills development. Contemporary education in multimedia requires sophisticated electronic resources, which may be beyond the reach of educational institutions more familiar with providing practical resources for students with special needs.

For a career transition programme like laundry work, Meng Nan's school could not afford to buy washing machines despite the teachers being capable of implementing the programme. The teachers had ideas about what could be done to help the students to learn appropriate skills. However, the uncertainty of funding produced programme uncertainty too. Uncertainty about funding and so the continuity of the programme has effects for teachers and students and families. Programme viability not only depends on funding, but also continuity.

While the teachers in my study had many creative ideas, several related problems were identified as creating uncertainty. For example, agriculture in both Mahathir's and Meng Nan's schools was one of the vocational training programmes that did not continue to operate as there was lack of adequate space to plant vegetables. Housekeeping in the

hospitality industry was one of the career transition programmes in Meng Nan's school that came to an end as the hotel staff in charge of the programme resigned and there was then a lack of expertise at the hotel to coach the students to perform the required tasks. It was not safe or realistic for students to participate in a programme that no longer had appropriate oversight in the employment setting. The grape selling career transition programme in Meng Nan's school had to stop due to the unreliable price of grapes. Here market forces were a limiting factor as the grape-selling programme could only run if it broke even financially. Without the government subsidies, the programme was not viable.

The finding of a lack of resourcing does bring into question how successfully Malaysia is responding to the commitment to the United Nations Convention, as noted in Chapter Two, to meet the educational and vocational needs of young people with disabilities. More resourcing is clearly desirable to provide students with equitable learning opportunities.

Despite there being many challenges facing the provision of both vocational training programme and career transition programmes, they still could offer reasonable hope for students with disabilities including those with ASD by providing learning opportunities to build skills and expertise. Within a framework of reasonable hope, "we are not looking for the perfect solutions but are considering what may be good enough" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 19) in order to make these programmes viable and meet the needs of the diversity of students with ASD. Nonetheless ongoing commitments to resource provision are needed.

Teachers' professional development

My study findings showed the need for teachers' professional development opportunities to support students with ASD. In Weingarten's terms, such professional development would provide both knowledge and skills, in a context of practical resource provision. At the time of my study field texts collection in 2017, there were some significant limitations and challenges in this aspect. A very recent development, the Zero Reject Policy 2019, outlined in Chapter Two, applies to every student with disabilities including those in the rural areas with access to education and facilities. All teachers from mainstream and

special education schools from both primary and secondary schools are offered the opportunity through professional development to upgrade their knowledge and skills to support students with disabilities. There is potentially significant value in this new policy given the range of challenges identified for teachers working with students with ASD, although the policy does not specifically refer to ASD. The implementation of the policy is also likely to be challenging as considerable resources and infrastructure to meet the range of needs to be accommodated in the disability sector will be needed. However, the policy is likely to provide hope for the families and their children because of the funding provided for professional development.

Government policies and practices, as well as funding, may not always be sufficient to meet the needs of diverse students. From the narrative accounts of the school teachers and NASOM teachers, professional development is needed so that classroom and specialist teachers can better understand how to work alongside young people with ASD. This claim resonates with Kofidou and Mantzikos (2017) and Malak et al. (2013). They also suggested that teachers should receive more training on effective educational practices and application for students with ASD. Teachers need guidance via workshops or on-going training to equip them with better understandings of ASD (Finch et al., 2013; Mohamad Razali et al., 2017). A particular example from my study was Muthu's school teacher, Hui Xin, who as a mainstream teacher went to the NASOM centre to learn more about how to teach Mathematics to students who had difficulty in grasping or understanding mathematical concepts numbers in particular. The NASOM centre provides many up-to-date autism-related workshops for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills, as well as improving confidence levels for teachers when teaching students at the centre. However, in my study, Muthu's NASOM teacher, Santhi, also self-funded a course because she realised the importance of continuous professional development for both her students and herself. Muthu's school teacher, Hui Xin, also reported that she and colleagues had to pay themselves for some courses.

Given the importance of the professional development, it would seem resourcing is the major concern. Although some resourcing is available, it is evident that this is not sufficient for the degree of specialist knowledge needed for providing the best learning opportunities for students. There is still reasonable hope provided through both government and non-governmental organisations like Rotary Club to provide

professional development opportunities for both Muthu's and Meng Nan's school teachers, an example being funding their attendance at the National Autism Conference to enhance their knowledge about autism and inclusion. This professional development "softens the polarity between hope and despair, hope and hopelessness" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7) and allows people to place themselves in the category of the hopeful. However, more support would cement this position of hopefulness.

Skills training

For the families in this study, parents take considerable responsibility to support their children when they experience difficulties due to a lack of knowledge about ASD in the community. Parents reported experiences of the wider community, who appeared to lack training in, and knowledge of ASD, as well as limited, inadequate and inappropriate resources that they considered crucial to providing support for a child with ASD (see Woodgate et al., 2008). The parents of the children in the study took action and showed initiative by accepting that their child's need for the support extended outside the home. The parents' actions resonate with Weingarten's concept of reasonable hope, which is based on actions toward a goal-oriented pathway, even though doubt and despair may remain present (Weingarten, 2010). It would seem that parents of children with ASD may have to be prepared to intervene at times to address any issues related to their children's special needs, when their child is engaged in other learning environments.

For instance, Ai Fang was called to take Ming Fu home when he accidentally cut his finger at an assorted dishes stall, which spelt the end of a learning opportunity for him. Ai Fang responded immediately and went to the stall, as there was a lack of expertise to handle her son's situation in this informal vocational skills opportunity, which she had helped set up. The concept of doing hope is helpful for individuals and families experiencing life changes and transitions as they cope with difficulty and complex decision making in managing challenging situations. The owner's initial willingness to employ Ming Fu provided hope for Ai Fang as the owner seemed to believe that Ming Fu had the potential to make a useful contribution to the owner's business. As well as learning vegetable cutting, Ming Fu would have the opportunity to develop his social skills through being out in the community and meeting people and coping with his

disability. This doing hope might lead to a possible shift away from the focus on correcting “deficits” in individual youths with ASD, and towards a whole of community approach that maintains and enhances the aspirations of children with ASD and their parents.

Communities could contribute toward doing hope by working together with parents, teachers and non-governmental organisations to form supportive relationships with young people with ASD and providing more educational and working opportunities for them. In these terms, as Weingarten (2009) claims, hope functions in a relational context and becomes the community's responsibility. In this situation, reasonable hope manages complexity because it holds hope in relationship without “doubt, contradiction and despair” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 10).

Language and ASD

Many of the participants voiced their concern on language barriers that could prevent their children from understanding the school curriculum and coping with the demand for higher education and vocational education, particularly in a sociopolitical context where bilingualism is a priority. This priority is shown by the requirements of the government and the educational policies and curricula. The Ministry of Education’s language policy MBMMBI that allows the use of instruction in both Malay and English languages in schools is becoming an opportunity for dual language learning for many students, including students with disabilities.

The parents of the children in my study have very high expectations and they are willing to provide resources needed to help their children to become bilingual to increase their education opportunities and employability. They consider their children can achieve language competency through early language interventions and by giving more opportunities to use the language of choice both at home and at school. Continuous family support in language development for children with ASD is seen as an important component of enabling children to achieve language competency (see Kamio et al., 2013; Vincent & Ralston, 2019). Research shows that many children with ASD are capable of acquiring two languages at the same time, depending on the amount of exposure the

children receive to the languages (Gonzalez-Barrero & Nadig, 2018) and the amount of support and resources the children have.

However, the social impairments associated with ASD do present challenges to children with ASD for language learning (Hambly & Fombonne, 2012). These impairments may also limit the ability of children with ASD to learn languages in bilingual environments (Hambly & Fombonne, 2012). In Muthu's case, he did not do really well in school when he was been taught in another language – the Malay language. During the interview, he only used one-two words sentences to communicate with me and it was only in English. It would seem that Muthu experienced difficulty in expressing himself in both languages, Malay and English, even though he was exposed to both of them and his difficulty may be more related to his disability to master the languages and communication skills. In looking back as a researcher, I was doing reasonable hope in continuing to work and engage in explicit actions with him even though he responded with only one or two words. I was making the best of what was available to me at the time.

Based on the above findings, I argue that the Ministry of Education could consider more ways to support the language development of students with ASD at school. This would support parents who hope for bilingual competency when raising their children, but parents also have to recognise any limitations that their children might face in learning languages and find the most appropriate way to support this development, as the stories here demonstrate.

Social and behavioural development

Professional resources may be needed for teachers and parents to meet the special requirements of young people with ASD who bring social and behavioural challenges with them, for example Ming Fu's masturbatory activities. It appeared that Ming Fu's mother did not have enough knowledge and resources to support the development of her son and to teach him age-appropriate and place-appropriate behaviours. His sexualised behaviours almost inevitably became a challenge for the school. The school has to cope with what the family had not had the resources to do, a challenge to identify appropriate available professional resources to access the sex education.

I note that the teacher took action to manage the behaviour in her own classroom – by prohibiting Ming Fu to put his hands below the table and segregating all boys into one class – and she called his mother for discussion. She also looked more widely at what might be useful for his ongoing life. Thus, the school teacher set up a behavior modification programme at school, bringing in professional resources by responding to anticipated learning needs for young people and sexuality education, and idiosyncratic needs when a young man expresses sexuality in inappropriate ways. The action taken by the school teacher can be seen as doing reasonable hope: the teacher had the skills to bring in professional resources, doing what could be possible to do by taking small steps to support the young man. Further this was an expression of reasonable hope as relational: the teacher, Faiza, took responsible action to seek wider support, “acting with others” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 7), as part of a wider initiative, when a less hope-oriented approach may have led to individualising the problem and confronting the mother. The teacher again practised hope in that her actions that suggested she saw Ming Fu as teachable, and particularly when the teaching was adjusted to his need. In doing reasonable hope, the school called on professional resources to support a student whose in-class behaviour was inappropriate:

By subscribing to reasonable hope, we enhance our ability to offer accompaniment and to bear witness...No one gives or provides hope to another, but rather one creates the conversational space for hope to arise from the forms of conversation one shares. (Weingarten, 2010, p. 11)

In terms of my study this story does reasonable hope, suggesting that sex education, and social and behavioural concerns can usefully be integrated into the curriculum in career transition programmes. The challenge here can be to see the breadth of learning possible in such programmes, alongside the more conventionally work-skill oriented aspects, such as grape-packing, of career transition programmes.

Clearly, there are many challenges in the provision of vocational education for young people with ASD in Malaysia which need to be acknowledged. At present, resourcing is one of the main challenges identified, as well as building capacity and knowledge in the community to address issues that arise. However, the government and non-governmental organisation could do hope by working collectively to address these challenges to

effectively support young people with ASD, and these students will have reasonable hope through access to adequate resources.

Limitations of this study

There are two main limitations to this research. First, I acknowledge the limitations of my knowledge and experience in conducting interviews with young people with ASD. As a secondary mainstream school teacher, I am more familiar with my mainstream young students, so I looked to the literature in considering my approach to the interviews. Most research suggested that using photo-elicitation is the most effective method to interact with people with ASD (Danker et al., 2016; Ganz et al., 2012; Harrington et al., 2013). However, I did not obtain rich field texts by using pictures to communicate with my young participants. The pictures that I chose might not have been the best pictures to use for interviewing the young people with ASD. My hope had been for a study where young people's accounts could feature more strongly.

The other limitation is that although the focus of this study was on vocational education, the field texts from most of the cases covered much wider education experiences. Only Ai Fang focused on vocational aspects, speaking of her attempts to provide as many skills as possible for Ming Fu. Other parents emphasised the importance of academic education compared to skills acquisition, perhaps because of a general emphasis on benefits for children if they do well in formal academic education.

Future research

Further research on the preparation of young people with ASD for life after schooling might follow a number of directions. Different participant groups might be recruited. I would suggest more research be conducted amongst lower socio-economic families of young people with ASD as this research recruited participants from the NASOM centre where families could afford to pay the NASOM service fees. The voices from less well-off families could demonstrate further the hardships and setbacks parents encounter in order to provide adequate support for their children. This research recruited within one city. Studies might be extended to East Malaysia to capture a broader range of

complexities of people's lives and difficulties in order to gain a wider picture to provide support and assistance for young people, families and schools.

This study did not gather rich field texts from the young people themselves, largely due to the language and communication limitations associated with ASD. My research design included the perspectives of teachers and parents who knew the young person well. Studies with young children with limited verbal ability in Early Childhood settings have yielded helpful results using the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001). It has been suggested by Clark and Moss (2001) that these methods might also be applicable to children with disabilities, but there are limited empirical field texts showing how these techniques have been applied outside of the early childhood context, or to children with ASD. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible that had methods from the Mosaic Approach been used or adapted for use with older children with language limitations, richer field texts could be possible. However, caution would need to be applied, as young adults with ASD do not have developmental delays, and are more cognitively competent than infants and young children, so the techniques used would have to reflect this. This is something to consider in future research with young people with ASD diagnoses.

It may also be useful for the Ministry of Education Malaysia to collaborate with other stakeholders such as non-governmental and welfare organisations to extend the range of educational and vocational opportunities they can provide for people with ASD. These stakeholders' experiences in providing programmes to meet the needs of people with ASD would be useful when the ministry is developing new policies and practices in the disability sectors.

This study suggests that young people with ASD have the potential to gain employment if they are given appropriate guidance and acknowledgement with the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) when completing formal education. Employers will be more convinced to hire these young people who have a certificate as an official recognition in employment settings. But as the case studies here show, there are many life and workplace skills that may not be captured by the terms of a formal certificate.

Final statement

As a mainstream secondary school teacher, my initial somewhat naive interest, was in the education experiences of a group of students who seemed to have unusual behaviours that might influence their participation in learning activities. Having completed this research, I am now more aware that some of the perspectives that I had at that time were based on assumptions associated with 'ableism'. I am now more aware of this bias and am committed to challenging these views to promote more inclusive practices. Like many mainstream teachers, I did not understand enough about the struggles faced by young people with ASD before I embarked on this doctoral journey. Through this study, I have developed an understanding of inclusive education by exploring more possibilities for understanding diversity among young people, along with different ways of conceptualising the students' struggles. While I do not regularly teach young people with ASD, I have nonetheless reflected on my own practice and on my students' responses and struggles. The reflection that has arisen from the rich descriptive accounts offered by my participants has given me insights into the lived experiences of young people with ASD and the parents and teachers who support them. I will now be better able to practise inclusion in my classroom by responding to any unique differences more empathetically, and by providing more support to students and their families where unique differences influence access to education.

I learned how teachable and adaptable young people with ASD can be, when education practices meet their unique circumstances, in the hope that job opportunities could be available to them in the future, if there is scaffolding for them to learn life skills and vocational skills. However, commitment and education are required to ensure their special needs are understood by everyone, including their teachers, future employers and co-workers and members of society with whom they need to interact. Strategic support will be required for them to transition into employment settings and deliberate and focused attempts made to reduce the societal stigma associated with the challenges young people with ASD face conforming to social, cultural and communication norms in school, the workplace and in society. These actions underpinned by reasonable hope which

“accommodates doubt, contradictions and despair” (Weingarten, 2010, p.10) may provide young people with a future that is open and holds promise.

With this knowledge, I now see myself as an ally and advocate for young people with ASD, and their parents and teachers. I hope to be able to continue to educate and inform others about the daily struggles experienced by people with ASD and to increase awareness and understanding of ASD in schools and communities. In particular, I intend to continue to educate and support others to recognise the potential of young people with ASD, and to advocate for the creation of possibilities for meaningful and fulfilling employment in their chosen fields. These actions will be underpinned by reasonable hope as this construct provides a way of accommodating and responding to the challenges I will encounter in my attempts to influence policies and practice to increase opportunities for young people with ASD in my country.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix A: President of NGO - Application to recruit participants

Tang Poh Thin
Batu 11, Jalan Kodiang,
Kampung Paya Nongmi,
06010 Changlun,
Kedah.
Malaysia.

Date:

National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM)

Jalan PJU 1a/4, Pusat Perdagangan Dana 1, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. Attn:
The President, En. Razin bin. Murat

Dear En. Razin,

Permission to invite young people with ASD, parents or caregivers, assistant teachers and school teachers to participate in Doctor of Philosophy research project “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

My name is Tang Poh Thin, NRIC: 830826-09-5054. I am a Doctoral student from University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand and I am wanting to explore what opportunities are available for vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia.

I am writing to seek your permission to recruit participants drawing from your database of young people with ASD, their parents or caregivers, assistant teachers and school teachers. Alongside this letter, I attach an invitation letter and information sheet of my research for you to forward to them.

Further, I hope to include those who identify with different religions in Malaysia, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and others, in order to gain insight across the range of religions.

I also wish to include and hope to recruit different racial participants such as Malays, Chinese and Indians because these races are common in Malaysia. I also hope to recruit participants of aboriginal groups from the largest indigenous groups such as Negrito, Senoi and Proto-

Malay from Peninsular Malaysia; Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau and Murut from Sabah; and Dayaks from Sarawak who stay in Peninsular Malaysia.

I will recruit participants from two sites, one from those residing in Kedah (two) and a second in Kuala Lumpur (three). I am focusing on Kedah and Kuala Lumpur because Kedah is located in a rural area compared to Kuala Lumpur, which, as the capital of Malaysia is urban.

I plan to focus on approximately five young people with ASD (16 years old to 19 years old) to understand their story of life, educational and vocational education challenges, choices and opportunities. Where possible I will also aim to interview their parent/caregiver, one of their teachers, and an NGO professional who works with them. This will mean recruiting approximately fifteen adults in the roles of school teachers, assistant teachers in the NGO and parents or caregivers altogether. As there may be difficulties in communicating effectively with these young people I am more interested in spending time to help create their stories with depth and a richness that captures the complexity of the topic. If I am unable to achieve communication with approximately five young people I will still be aiming for at least five teachers, five NGO assistant teachers and five parents/caregivers.

Why I want to carry our research on this topic

I am a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of teaching experience with young people (13 years old to 19 years old) in Malaysia. In my teaching I was concerned about what I thought was the “weird behaviour” of a few of my students. I perceived that they did not seem willing to participate in class activities or socialize with their peers. This affected their abilities to engage in the learning activities. I was also concerned about their interaction in the classroom. They seemed to prefer to isolate themselves and did not communicate well with their peers. I talked to my colleagues and looked for information in order to find out more about my students’ behaviour. In my teacher education training I had not been exposed to special education or the various disorders and disabilities my students may be dealing with. From my reading and information gathered from my colleagues I realised my students whose behaviour I had thought was ‘weird’ could be classified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I realised that greater numbers of individuals are being diagnosed with ASD and that the number of adolescent and young adults with autism is rising. I also found out that knowing what is happening for current young adults with ASD in their lives is crucial to enable planning for any future support requirements to be carried out (Eaves & Ho, 2008). There

was a great lack of awareness and research in Malaysia about the interests and experiences of this group of young people.

Research Focus

Malaysia recognizes the right to participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation and leisure as provided by Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on 30th March 2007. However, Malaysia should recognise Article 27 according to which persons with disabilities are to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training 27 1(d), and governments are to promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities 27 1(k). I want to know how well we in Malaysia are doing in enabling this right for young people with ASD between the ages of 16 and 19 years old who are preparing for the world of work. I hope the outcome of this thesis will help this group of people by promoting awareness of ASD in Malaysian society, leading to greater efforts to support this group of young people in their aspirations for training and work.

In reality, such as my classroom situation, young people with ASD are in an environment where they are not understood, their needs are not attended to, and in many cases, their education is being ignored.

Data Generation

The data will be generated via open-ended individual interviews which will be audiotaped with participants' consent. Prior to each interview commencing a consent form will be signed. I will transcribe and send the transcript to the participants.

Keeping Anonymity and Confidentiality

I will be using the information gathered at interviews in my PhD thesis, and in any future conference, publications or seminar I undertake as part of the dissemination of my research findings. After the data is gathered all steps possible will be taken to safeguard the identity of the young people. Each participant's anonymity will be protected by using a pseudonym. However, I also realise that anonymity cannot be guaranteed, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard the identity of participants. I will ensure as best I can that I amend the name of location, people and workplace when transcribing the interview session. I will label each interview recording with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript.

This research has been approved by Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. A full copy of the ethical approval from Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee is attached for your information. If you have any inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me at pohthintang@gmail.com or my mobile phone at +6017 485 1992 or my Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

– School Teachers, Assistant Teachers, Parents/caregivers & Young People with ASD

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Invitation to participate in my Doctor of Philosophy research: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study to examine opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia.

This study is conducted by me, Tang Poh Thin, a doctoral candidate, supervised by Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I invite you to join this study.

My research question is:

1. What are the opportunities in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
2. What are the choices in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia?
3. What are the challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia?

I attach an information sheet to introduce my study and what will be involved if you are interested in taking part in my study. I will contact you when I receive the Participant Reply Form from you. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in my study. If you are interested in participating in my study, please do not hesitate to contact me at pohthintang@gmail.com or on my mobile phone at +6017 485 1992. Thank you very much.

Your sincerely,
Tang Poh Thin

Appendix C: Information Sheets

Parents or caregivers

Tang Poh Thin
Batu 11, Jalan Kodiang,
Kampung Paya Nongmi,
06010 Changlun,
Kedah.

Date:

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Tang Poh Thin, NRIC: 830826-09-5054. I am a Doctoral student from University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand and I am wanting to explore what opportunities are available for vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia. I am writing this letter to invite you to share your views and experiences about this issue. I would be very much like to hear about your experiences with your family members in this area. Your information will be very valuable for my study.

My research focus is:

What opportunities are currently available for vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia?

Why I want to carry out research on this topic

I am a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of teaching experience with young people (13 years old to 19 years old) in Malaysia. In my teaching I was concerned about what I thought was the “weird behaviour” of a few of my students. I perceived that they did not seem willing to participate in class activities or socialize with their peers. This affected their abilities to engage in the learning activities. I was also concerned about their interaction in the classroom. They seemed to prefer to isolate themselves and did not communicate well with their peers. I talked to my colleagues and looked for information in order to find out more about my students’ behaviour. In my teacher education training I had not been exposed to special education or the various disorders and disabilities my students may be dealing with. From my reading and information gathered from my colleagues I realised my students whose behaviour I had thought was ‘weird’ could be classified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I realised that greater numbers of individuals are being diagnosed with ASD and that

the number of adolescent and young adults with autism is rising. I also found out that knowing what is happening for current young adults with ASD in their lives is crucial to enable planning for any future support requirements to be carried out (Eaves & Ho, 2008). There was a great lack of awareness and research in Malaysia about the interests and experiences of this group of young people.

Research Focus

Malaysia recognizes the right to participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation and leisure as provided by Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on 30th March 2007. However, Malaysia should recognise Article 27 according to which persons with disabilities are to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training 27 1(d), and governments are to promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities 27 1(k). I want to know how well we in Malaysia are doing in enabling this right for young people with ASD between the ages of 16 and 19 years old who are preparing for the world of work. I hope the outcome of this thesis will help this group of people by promoting awareness of ASD in Malaysian society, leading to greater efforts to support this group of young people in their aspirations for training and work.

In reality, such as my classroom situation, young people with ASD are in an environment where they are not understood, their needs are not attended to, and in many cases, their education is being ignored.

What I am asking parents or caregivers to do

I want to ask you to participate in an open ended individual interview which will be audiotaped. The interview questions will be prepared in three languages (Malay, Chinese and English). You can choose which language you prefer to use during our interview. Prior to the interview commencing a consent form will be signed. The transcripts will be sent back to you to check and amend any information you wish. You will have two weeks to make these changes after I have transcribed the interview. You will be reminded of this date a week after I send the transcripts to you via email and phone.

Participants' time will be required

The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes if I need to follow up on information stimulated from the first interview. I expect participants would take approximately one hour to read one transcript although this is not a requirement of participation.

Keeping Anonymity and Confidentiality

I will be using the information gathered at interviews in my PhD thesis, and in any future conference, publications or seminar I undertake as part of the dissemination of my research findings. After the data is gathered all steps possible will be taken to safeguard your identity. Each participant's anonymity will be protected by using a pseudonym. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard the identity of participants. I will ensure as best I can that I amend the names of location, people and workplace when transcribing the interview session. I will label each interview recording with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript.

This research has been approved by Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. A full copy of the ethical approval from Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee is attached for your information. If you have any inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me at pohthintang@gmail.com or my mobile phone at +6017 485 1992 or my Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Information Sheet - Assistant Teachers

Tang Poh Thin

Batu 11, Jalan Koding,
Kampung Paya Nongmi,
06010 Changlun,
Kedah.

Date:

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Tang Poh Thin, NRIC: 830826-09-5054. I am a Doctoral student from University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand and I am wanting to explore what opportunities are available for vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia. I am writing this letter to invite you to share your views and experiences about this issue. I would be very much like to hear about your experiences you work with the young people in this area. Your information is very valuable for my study.

My research focus is:

What opportunities are currently available for vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia?

Why I want to carry out research on this topic

I am a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of teaching experience with young people (13 years old to 19 years old) in Malaysia. In my teaching I was concerned about what I thought was the “weird behaviour” of a few of my students. I perceived that they did not seem willing to participate in class activities or socialize with their peers. This affected their abilities to engage in the learning activities. I was also concerned about their interaction in the classroom. They seemed to prefer to isolate themselves and did not communicate well with their peers. I talked to my colleagues and looked for information in order to find out more about my students’ behaviour. In my teacher education training I had not been exposed to special education or the various disorders and disabilities my students may be dealing with. From my reading and information gathered from my colleagues I realised my students whose behaviour I had thought was ‘weird’ could be classified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I realised that greater numbers of individuals are being diagnosed with ASD and that the number of adolescent and young adults with autism is rising. I also found out that knowing

what is happening for current young adults with ASD in their lives is crucial to enable planning for any future support requirements to be carried out (Eaves & Ho, 2008). There was a great lack of awareness and research in Malaysia about the interests and experiences of this group of young people.

Research Focus

Malaysia recognizes the right to participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation and leisure as provided by Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on 30th March 2007. However, Malaysia should recognise Article 27 according to which persons with disabilities are to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training 27 1(d), and governments are to promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities 27 1(k). I want to know how well we in Malaysia are doing in enabling this right for young people with ASD between the ages of 16 and 19 years old who are preparing for the world of work. I hope the outcome of this thesis will help this group of people by promoting awareness of ASD in Malaysian society, leading to greater efforts to support this group of young people in their aspirations for training and work.

In reality, such as my classroom situation, young people with ASD are in an environment where they are not understood, their needs are not attended to, and in many cases, their education is being ignored.

What I am asking assistant teachers to do

I want to ask you to participate in an open ended individual interview which will be audiotaped. The interview questions will be prepared in three languages (Malay, Chinese and English). You can choose which language you prefer to use during our interview. Prior to the interview commencing a consent form will be signed. The transcripts will be sent back to you to check and amend any information you wish. You will have two weeks to make these changes after I have transcribed the interview. You will be reminded of this date a week after I send the transcripts to you via email and phone.

Participants' time will be required

The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes if I need to follow up on information stimulated from the first

interview. I expect participants would take approximately one hour to read one transcript although this is not a requirement of participation.

Keeping Anonymity and Confidentiality

I will be using the information gathered at interviews in my PhD thesis, and in any future conference, publications or seminar I undertake as part of the dissemination of my research findings. After the data is gathered all steps possible will be taken to safeguard your identity. Each participant's anonymity will be protected by using a pseudonym. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard the identity of participants. I will ensure that I amend the names of location, people and workplace when transcribing the interview session. I will label each interview recording with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript.

This research has been approved by Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. A full copy of the ethical approval from Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee is attached for your information. If you have any inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me at pohthintang@gmail.com or my mobile phone at +6017 485 1992 or my Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Information Sheet – School Teachers

Tang Poh Thin
Batu 11, Jalan Kodiang,
Kampung Paya Nongmi,
06010 Changlun,
Kedah.

Date:

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Tang Poh Thin, NRIC: 830826-09-5054. I am a Doctoral student from University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand and I am wanting to explore what opportunities are available for vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia. I am writing this letter to invite you to share your views and experiences about this issue. I would be very much like to hear about your experiences you work with the young students in this area. Your information is very valuable for my study.

My research focus is:

What opportunities are currently available for vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia?

Why I want to carry out research on this topic

I am a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of teaching experience with young people (13 years old to 19 years old) in Malaysia. In my teaching I was concerned about what I thought was the “weird behaviour” of a few of my students. I perceived that they did not seem willing to participate in class activities or socialize with their peers. This affected their abilities to engage in the learning activities. I was also concerned about their interaction in the classroom. They seemed to prefer to isolate themselves and did not communicate well with their peers. I talked to my colleagues and looked for information in order to find out more about my students’ behaviour. In my teacher education training I had not been exposed to special education or the various disorders and disabilities my students may be dealing with. From my reading and information gathered from my colleagues I realised my students whose behaviour I had thought was ‘weird’ could be classified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I realised that greater numbers of individuals are being diagnosed with ASD and that the number of adolescent and young adults with autism is rising. I also found out that knowing

what is happening for current young adults with ASD in their lives is crucial to enable planning for any future support requirements to be carried out (Eaves & Ho, 2008). There was a great lack of awareness and research in Malaysia about the interests and experiences of this group of young people.

Research Focus

Malaysia recognizes the right to participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation and leisure as provided by Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on 30th March 2007. However, Malaysia should recognise Article 27 according to which persons with disabilities are to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training 27 1(d), and governments are to promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities 27 1(k). I want to know how well we in Malaysia are doing in enabling this right for young people with ASD between the ages of 16 and 19 years old who are preparing for the world of work. I hope the outcome of this thesis will help this group of people by promoting awareness of ASD in Malaysian society, leading to greater efforts to support this group of young people in their aspirations for training and work.

In reality, such as my classroom situation, young people with ASD are in an environment where they are not understood, their needs are not attended to, and in many cases, their education is being ignored.

What I am asking school teachers to do

I want to ask you to participate in an open ended individual interview which will be audiotaped. The interview questions will be prepared in three languages (Malay, Chinese and English). You can choose which language you prefer to use during our interview. Prior to the interview commencing a consent form will be signed. The transcripts will be sent back to you to check and amend any information you wish. You will have two weeks to make these changes after I have transcribed the interview. You will be reminded of this date a week after I send the transcripts to you via email and phone.

Participants' time will be required

The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes if I need to follow up on information stimulated from the first

interview. I expect participants would take approximately one hour to read one transcript although this is not a requirement of participation.

Keeping Anonymity and Confidentiality

I will be using the information gathered at interviews in my PhD thesis, and in any future conference, publications or seminar I undertake as part of the dissemination of my research findings. After the data is gathered all steps possible will be taken to safeguard your identity. Each participant's anonymity will be protected by using a pseudonym. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard the identity of participants. I will ensure that I amend the names of location, people and workplace when transcribing the interview session. I will label each interview recording with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript.

This research has been approved by Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. A full copy of the ethical approval from Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee is attached for your information. If you have any inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me at pohthintang@gmail.com or my mobile phone at +6017 485 1992 or my Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Information Sheet - Young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Tang Poh Thin

Batu 11, Jalan Kodiang,
Kampung Paya Nongmi,
06010 Changlun,
Kedah.

Date:

Dear (Name)

My name is Tang Poh Thin. I am writing this letter to invite you to tell me about what is happening in your life right now and what kind of life you want in the future. It is important that we know what you want so we can plan for your future.

Why I want to carry out research on this topic

I am a mainstream secondary school teacher with eight years of teaching experience with young people (13 years old to 19 years old) in Malaysia. In my teaching, I was concerned about some of my students with disabilities. I worried that they had trouble learning. How will young people with ASD find work in the future? I asked the Malaysian government for money to talk to young people, parents and teachers about what support you need. I hope the outcome of my research will help in promoting awareness of ASD in Malaysian society and that the result will be better support for you in getting into training and work.

What I am asking you to do

1. You will sign a form saying you are happy to be interviewed by me.
2. You can use Malay, Chinese or English language when we talk.
3. You will talk to me about what your life is like.
4. I will record what you say.
5. How long it takes will depend on what you want to tell me about.
6. A caregiver or parent can assist with our communication if you would like to.

Questions for discussion

1. Will you be working?
2. What kind of work will you be doing?

After we have finished the interview, I will be returning and reading the transcript to you. You can tell me if what I have typed is OK and if you want me to change anything about what you have said.

Keeping Anonymity and Confidentiality

As much as possible, I guarantee that you will not get into trouble for anything you say to me.

1. I have approval from my university to interview you.
2. After the data is gathered I will take steps to safeguard you and what you said. I will use a different name for your ideas when I write about them and I won't say where you live.
3. I will label each interview recording with date and number on the audio-recording and transcript.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Appendix D: Participant Reply Forms

– School Teachers, Assistant Teachers, Parents/caregivers

PARTICIPANT REPLY FORM

Researcher: Tang Poh Thin

Project Title:

Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia.

If you need me to contact you, please complete this form, save it and email to me at pohhintang@gmail.com

Participant:

I have read and understand the research information sheet above and I am interested to participate in this research.

1. My ethnic background: _____

2. My religious belief: _____

3. Gender: _____

4. Place of residence: _____

I agree that Tang Poh Thin can contact me via the mobile phone number and / or email address to arrange an initial meeting at a time and location to clarify my enquiry about this study.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Contact no: _____

My email address: _____

Participant Reply Form- Young People with ASD

PARTICIPANT REPLY FORM

Researcher: Tang Poh Thin

Project Title:

Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia.

If you need me to contact you, please complete this form, save it and email to me at pohthintang@gmail.com

Participant:

I have read and understand the research information sheet above and I am interested to participate in this research.

1. My ethnic background: _____

2. My religious belief: _____

3. Gender: _____

4. Place of residence: _____

I agree that Tang Poh Thin can contact me via the mobile phone number and / or email address to arrange initial meeting at a time and location I prefer to clarify my enquiry about this study by agreement from my parents or caregiver.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Contact no: _____

My email address: _____

Appendix E: Consent Forms for Individual Interviews

Consent Form for Individual Interview – School Teachers

Doctoral Research Project: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

Name : Tang Poh Thin

Contact details : a). Email address: pohthintang@gmail.com

b). Mobile phone number: +6017 485 1992

Supervisor : Associate Professor Lise Claiborne

Affiliation : The University of Waikato

Faculty of Education

I have read the information sheet regarding the research and have had details of the study explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher up to my satisfaction. The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes and will be conducted if the researcher needs more information. I understand that it will take approximately one hour to read the transcript if I wish to.

I understand that I have two weeks to either withdraw completely, or remove part of my contribution after receiving the final transcripts from the follow up interview. I do not have to give any reason. I will be reminded about returning my contribution through an email and/or phone call from the researcher a week after my transcript has been sent out to me. I know I can contact the researcher (Ms Tang Poh Thin) directly or her supervisor if I have any concerns about any part of the process.

I agree to participate in this study based on the conditions below:

(please tick the box to confirm your understanding about participation)

This research is conducted in face-to-face interviews regarding opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia.

I agree to participate in this study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I can either withdraw completely, or part of my contribution without giving any reason.

I agree the interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

I understand all the conversation in the transcript will be anonymised. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed even though all actions will be taken to safeguard my identity.

I have the right to review, amend and remove any part of the transcript.

It is my responsibility to inform the researcher of my updated email address so I can get the electronic form of the thesis when it is completed.

I understand if I have any ethical concerns, I can contact the researcher, Tang Poh Thin (pohthintang@gmail.com) or her Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Your background and experiences

Please respond to the questions:

1. What is your specialization?

Special education

Non special education

2. Do you have any experience dealing with or teaching young people with ASD?

Yes

No

If yes, please state how many years of your experience? _____

3. How are you aware that you are teaching young people with ASD at classroom?

Reading

Seek opinion from special education department

Own experience

Others

4. How do you handle problems when dealing with or teaching young people with ASD at classroom?

Own reading and learning

Seeking opinions from administration or colleagues

Own direct experience

Attend autism workshop or talk

Others

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Consent Form for Individual Interview – NASOM Teachers

Doctoral Research Project: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

Name : Tang Poh Thin

Contact details : a). Email address: pohthintang@gmail.com

b). Mobile phone number: +6017 485 1992

Supervisor : Associate Professor Lise Claiborne

Affiliation : The University of Waikato

Faculty of Education

I have read the information sheet regarding the research and have had details of the study explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher up to my satisfaction. The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes and will be conducted if the researcher needs more information. I understand that it will take approximately one hour to read the transcript if I wish to.

I understand that I have two weeks to either withdraw completely, or remove part of my contribution after receiving the final transcripts from the follow up interview. I do not have to give any reason. I will be reminded about returning my contribution through an email and/or phone call from the researcher a week after my transcript has been sent out to me. I know I can contact the researcher (Ms Tang Poh Thin) directly or her supervisor if I have any concerns about any part of the process.

I agree to participate in this study based on the conditions below:

(please tick the box to confirm your understanding about participation)

This research is conducted in face-to-face interviews regarding opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia.

I agree to participate in this study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I can either withdraw completely, or part of my contribution without giving any reason.

I agree the interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

I understand all the conversation in the transcript will be anonymised. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed even though all actions will be taken to safeguard my identity.

I have the right to review, amend and remove any part of the transcript.

It is my responsibility to inform the researcher of my updated email address so I can get the electronic form of the thesis when it is completed.

I understand if I have any ethical concerns, I can contact the researcher, Tang Poh Thin (pohthintang@gmail.com) or her Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Your background and experiences

Please respond to the questions:

1. What is your specialization?

Special education

Non special education

2. How many years of experience do you have and dealing with or teaching young people with ASD at NGO?

less than 1 year

1 year to 5 years

5 years to 10 years

more than 10 years

3. How do you handle problem when dealing or teaching young people with ASD in NGO?

Reading and learning

Seek opinion from administration

Own experience

Attend meeting monthly and discuss with colleagues

Attend autism workshop or talk

Others

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Consent Form for Individual Interview – Parents or Caregivers

Doctoral Research Project: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

Name : Tang Poh Thin

Contact details : a). Email address: pohthintang@gmail.com

b). Mobile phone number: +6017 485 1992

Supervisor : Associate Professor Lise Claiborne

Affiliation : The University of Waikato

Faculty of Education

I have read the information sheet regarding the research and have had details of the study explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher up to my satisfaction. The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A follow up interview session may take another 30 minutes and will be conducted if the researcher needs more information. I understand that it will take approximately one hour to read the transcript if I wish to.

I understand that I have two weeks to either withdraw completely, or remove part of my contribution after receiving the final transcripts from the follow up interview. I do not have to give any reason. I will be reminded about returning my contribution through an email and/or phone call from the researcher a week after my transcript has been sent out to me. I know I can contact the researcher (Ms Tang Poh Thin) directly or her supervisor if I have any concerns about any part of the process.

I agree to participate in this study based on the conditions below:

(please tick the box to confirm your understanding about participation)

This research is conducted in face-to-face interviews regarding opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with ASD in Malaysia.

I agree to participate in this study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I can either withdraw completely, or part of my contribution without giving any reason.

I agree the interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

I understand all the conversation in the transcript will be anonymised. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed even though all actions will be taken to safeguard my identity.

I have the right to review, amend and remove any part of the transcript.

It is my responsibility to inform the researcher of my updated email address so I can get the electronic form of the thesis when it is completed.

I understand if I have any ethical concerns, I can contact the researcher, Tang Poh Thin (pohthintang@gmail.com) or her Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Your background and experiences

Please respond to the questions:

1. When did you realize your child has ASD?

2. How do you deal with your child's ASD at home?

using picture to communicate with them

observe their activities at home

teach them at home using methods learned from the autism centre.

3. How do you handle problem dealing with young people with ASD who are struggling at home?

Reading and learning

Seek opinion from expertise

Attend autism workshop or talks

Bring them to swimming or other sport activities

Others

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Consent Form for Individual Interview - Young People with ASD

Doctoral Research Project: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”.

Name : Tang Poh Thin

Contact details : a). Email address: pohthintang@gmail.com

b). Mobile phone number: +6017 485 1992

Supervisor : Associate Professor Lise Claiborne

Affiliation : The University of Waikato

Faculty of Education

I have read or listened to the information sheet regarding the research and have had details of the study explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher to my satisfaction. The time of the interview will be flexible depending on how long I need to tell my story. A face-to-face follow up interview session will be conducted if the researcher needs more information. Both a transcript and recording will be supplied for me to read the transcript. I can take time to read the transcript although I do not need to do this as part of the agreement to participate in the study.

I understand that I have two weeks to either withdraw completely, or remove part of my contribution after receiving the final transcripts from the follow up interview. I do not have to give any reason. I will be reminded about returning my contribution through an email and/or phone call from the researcher a week after my transcript has been sent out to me. I know I can contact the researcher (Ms Tang Poh Thin) directly or her supervisor if I have any concerns about any part of the process.

My parents or caregivers can contact the researcher directly or her supervisors if they have any concerns. I agree to participate in this study based on the condition below:

(please tick the box to confirm your understanding about participation)

This research is conducted in face-to-face interviews regarding opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with autism in Malaysia.

I agree to participate in this study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I can either withdraw completely, or part of my contribution without giving any reason.

I agree the interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

I understand all the conversation in the transcript will be anonymised. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed even though all actions will be taken to safeguard my identity.

I have the right to review, amend and remove any part of the transcript.

It is my parents' or caregivers' responsibility to inform the researcher about their updated email address if they would like to get notification once the thesis has been completed and be provided with the link to access the electronic form of the thesis.

My parents or caregivers understand if they have any ethical concerns, they can contact the researcher, Tang Poh Thin (pohthintang@gmail.com) or her Doctoral Supervisor Associate Professor Lise Claiborne at lise.claiborne@waikato.ac.nz

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Letter of appreciation to respondents excluded from the research

(School teachers, assistant teachers and parents/caregivers)

Dear respondent,

Thank you very much for showing interest in my research: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”. Now I have more participants than required to conduct my study. Therefore, your participation is not required. I am very grateful however for your enthusiasm to participate, and thank you for your time.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

(young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD))

Dear respondent,

Thank you very much for allowing your child to participate in my research: “Opportunities, choices and challenges in implementing vocational training for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Malaysia”. Now I have more participants than required to conduct my study. Therefore, your child’s participation is not required. I am very grateful however for your enthusiasm to participate and thank you for your time.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

Tang Poh Thin

Appendix G: Indicative Questions for Individual Interview

N. B This list is indicative only and may be added to or cut down as necessary

School Teachers

1. How are you aware that you are teaching students with ASD in the classroom? Bagaimana anda sedar anda sedang mengajar pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您如何发现在课室中有自闭症学生?

2. Could you share your experiences of teaching students with ASD in the classroom? Bolehkah anda berkongsi pengalaman mengajar pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您可以与我分享教自闭症学生的经验吗?

3. Are there any particular problems involved with teaching students with ASD?

Adakah terdapat sebarang masalah tertentu yang terlibat dengan pengajaran pelajar autistik?

您在教自闭症学生时,有面对什么特殊问题吗?

4. How do you handle problems when dealing with or teaching students with ASD in the classroom?

Bagaimana anda menyelesaikan masalah apabila berhadapan atau mengajar pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您是如何与自闭症学生交流或者如何在课室教导他们?

5. How do you associate with parents regarding any problems caused by students with ASD in the classroom?

Bagaimana anda berhubung dengan ibu bapa tentang masalah pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您是如何与自闭症学生的家长沟通关于他们在课室中的问题?

6. Do you think students with ASD are being neglected in any areas?

Adakah anda fikir pelajar autistik sedang diabaikan dalam mana-mana bidang?

您觉得自闭症学生会被忽略在哪个方面?

7. What skills can students with ASD learn from vocational training in the classroom? Apakah kemahiran yang boleh dipelajari oleh pelajar autistik daripada latihan vokasional dalam bilik darjah?

您觉得自闭症学生在课室修的职业培训技能中,可以学到什么技巧?

8. How do you think vocational training as a pathway to support students with ASD could work?

Bagaimanakah anda fikir latihan vokasional dapat dilihat sebagai satu laluan untuk menyokong pelajar autistik boleh dijayakan?

您觉得职业培训技能是否是个有效地路径来帮助自闭症学生?

9. What vocational training skills are needed by students with ASD in school?

Apakah latihan kemahiran vokasional yang diperlukan oleh pelajar autistik di sekolah?

您觉得自闭症学生在学校需要怎样的职业培训技能?

10. What are the vocational training programmes being offered at your school?

Apakah program-program latihan vokasional yang ditawarkan di sekolah anda?

您的学校有什么职业培训技能活动给自闭症学生?

11. What opportunities are available after students with ASD undergo vocational training at school?

Apa peluang-peluang yang disediakan selepas pelajar autistik mempelajari latihan vokasional di sekolah?

您觉得如果自闭症学生在学校有修职业培训技能,他们未来会有怎样的机会?

12. What choices are available for students with ASD to learn vocational skills at school?

Apakah pilihan-pilihan yang disediakan untuk pelajar autistik mempelajari latihan vokasional di sekolah?

自闭症学生在学校有哪方面的职业培训技能选择?

13. What challenges are there in implementing vocational training for students with ASD at school?

Apakah cabaran-cabaran dalam melaksanakan latihan vokasional untuk pelajar autistik di

sekolah?

您觉得在学校执行职业培训技能给自闭症学生会有什么挑战?

NASOM Teachers

1. Could you share your experience of teaching students with ASD in the classroom?

Bolehkah anda berkongsi pengalaman mengajar pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您可以与我分享教自闭症学生的经验吗?

2. Are there any particular problems involved with teaching students with ASD?

Adakah terdapat sebarang masalah tertentu yang terlibat dengan pengajaran pelajar autistik?

您在教自闭症学生时,有面对什么特殊问题吗?

3. How do you handle problems when dealing with or teaching students with ASD in the classroom?

Bagaimana anda menyelesaikan masalah apabila berhadapan atau mengajar pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您是如何与自闭症学生交流或者如何在课室教导他们?

4. How do you associate with parents regarding any problems caused by students with ASD in the classroom?

Bagaimana anda berhubung dengan ibu bapa tentang masalah pelajar autistik dalam bilik darjah?

您是如何与自闭症学生的家长沟通关于他们在课室中的问题?

5. Do you think students with ASD are being neglected in any areas?

Adakah anda fikir pelajar autistik sedang diabaikan dalam mana-mana bidang?

您觉得自闭症学生会被忽略在哪个方面?

6. What skills can students with ASD learn from vocational training at the NGO?

Apakah kemahiran yang boleh dipelajari oleh pelajar autistik daripada latihan vokasional di badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得自闭症学生在非政府组织团体修的职业培训技能中,可以学到什么技巧?

7. How do you think vocational training as a pathway to support students with ASD could work?

Bagaimanakah anda fikir latihan vokasional dapat dilihat sebagai satu laluan untuk menyokong pelajar autistik boleh dijayakan?

您觉得职业培训技能是否是个有效地路径来帮助自闭症学生？

8. What vocational training skills are needed by students with ASD at the NGO?

Apakah latihan kemahiran vokasional yang diperlukan oleh pelajar autistik di badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得自闭症学生在非政府组织团体需要怎样的职业培训技能？

9. What are the vocational training programmes being offered at the NGO?

Apakah program-program latihan vokasional yang ditawarkan di badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得在非政府组织团体, 有什么职业培训技能活动给自闭症学生？

10. What opportunities are available after students with ASD undergo vocational training at the NGO?

Apa peluang-peluang yang disediakan selepas pelajar autistik mempelajari latihan vokasional di badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得如果自闭症学生在非政府组织团体有修职业培训技能, 他们未来会有怎样的机会？

11. What choices are available for students with ASD to learn vocational skills at the NGO?

Apakah pilihan-pilihan yang disediakan untuk pelajar autistik mempelajari latihan vokasional di badan bukan kerajaan?

自闭症学生在非政府组织团体有哪方面的职业培训技能选择？

12. What challenges are there in implementing vocational training for students with ASD at the NGO?

Apakah cabaran-cabaran dalam melaksanakan latihan vokasional untuk pelajar autistik di badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得在非政府组织团体执行职业培训技能给自闭症学生会有什么挑战？

Parents or Caregivers

1. When did you realize your child has ASD?

Bilakah anda sedar anak anda menghidapi autism?

您几时开始发现孩子有自闭症?

2. Could you share your experiences dealing with your child's ASD at home?

Bolehkah anda berkongsi pengalaman berurusan dengan anak autistik anda di rumah?

您可以与我分享, 在家里您是如何与自闭症孩子互动吗?

3. How do you handle problems dealing with your child who is struggling at home?

Bagaimana anda menyelesaikan masalah apabila berhadapan dengan anak yang bergelutan di rumah?

您是如何与自闭症孩子互动和交流?

4. How do you associate with school teachers and assistant teachers at the NGO?

Bagaimana anda berhubung dengan guru-guru di sekolah dan guru-guru pembantu di badan bukan kerajaan tentang masalah anak anda?

您是如何与学校老师和非政府组织团体的老师们沟通您自闭症孩子的问题?

5. Do you think children with ASD are being neglected in any areas?

Adakah anda fikir anak-anak autistik sedang diabaikan dalam mana-mana bidang?

您觉得自闭症孩子会被忽略在哪个方面?

6. The most important social barrier for young people with ASD is being able to gain vocational skills. Do you send your child to learn vocational skills? What is happening for your child now?

Perkara paling penting halangan sosial kepada orang muda autistik ialah memperoleh kemahiran vokasional. Adakah anda menghantar anak anda untuk belajar kemahiran vokasional? Apakah yang sedang berlaku kepada anak anda sekarang?

自闭症孩子最主要的社会障碍是能够学习职业培训技能。您有送您的自闭症孩子去学习职业培训技能吗? 现在您的孩子情况如何?

7. What skills would you like to see your child learn from vocational training?

Apakah kemahiran-kemahiran yang ingin anda lihat anak anda belajar daripada latihan vokasional?

您希望孩子能够在修职业培训技能中,可以学到什么技巧?

8. How do you think vocational training as a pathway to support your child could work?

Bagaimanakah anda fikir latihan vokasional dapat dilihat sebagai satu laluan untuk menyokong anak anda boleh dijayakan?

您觉得职业培训技能是否是个有效地路径来帮助您的自闭症孩子吗?

9. What vocational training skills are needed by your child?

Apakah latihan kemahiran vokasional yang diperlukan oleh anak anda?

您觉得您的自闭症孩子需要怎样的职业培训技能?

10. Do you think vocational training programmes being offered at school or the NGO are suitable for your child?

Adakah anda fikir program-program latihan vokasional yang ditawarkan di sekolah atau badan bukan kerajaan sesuai untuk anak anda?

您觉得学校与非政府组织团体所提供的职业培训技能适合您的孩子吗?

11. What opportunities are available after your child undergoes vocational training at school or the NGO?

Apa peluang-peluang yang disediakan selepas anak anda mempelajari latihan vokasional di sekolah atau badan bukan kerajaan?

您觉得如果孩子在学校或者非政府组织团体所学习的职业培训技能,他们未来会有怎样的机会?

12. What choices are available for your child to undergo vocational training at school or the NGO?

Apakah pilihan-pilihan yang disediakan untuk anak anda mempelajari latihan vokasional di sekolah atau badan bukan kerajaan?

您的孩子在学校或者非政府组织团体有哪方面的职业培训技能选择?

13. What would you like to see changed in society?

Apakah perubahan-perubahan yang anda ingin lihat dalam masyarakat?

您希望看到社会有什么改善?

14. What opportunities are there for your child to develop vocational skills in the future or after leaving school?

Apakah peluang-peluang yang ada untuk anak-anak anda untuk mengembangkan kemahiran vokasional pada masa hadapan atau selepas tamat persekolahan?

您觉得有什么机会可以帮助您孩子在未来或他离开学校之后扩展职业培训技能?

Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

1. How do you usually spend your day?

Bagaimana anda biasanya menghabiskan hari anda?

你一整天都在做些什么？

2. For example, when you go to a cooking class, what do you do?

Contohnya, jika anda pergi ke kelas memasak, apakah yang anda buat?

你如果上烹饪课, 你会做什么？

3. Who is your friend?

Siapa kawan anda?

谁是你的朋友？

4. Do you go places with your friend? What do you do with your friend?

Adakah anda pergi ke mana-mana tempat dengan kawan anda? Apakah yang anda buat dengan kawan anda?

你有和朋友们一起出去吗？你会和他们做什么？

5. What would you like to see different about your day?

Apakah yang anda hendak lihat perbezaan pada hari anda?

你希望看到生活中有什么不一样？

6. Will you be working?

Adakah anda akan bekerja?

你以后会做工吗？

7. What kind of work will you be doing?

Apakah jenis pekerjaan yang ingin anda lakukan?

你以后想做什么工？

8. What kind of help will you need to achieve the goals for your future you have told me about?

Apakah jenis bantuan yang anda perlukan untuk memenuhi perancangan masa depan yang

anda telah beritahu saya?

为了达到你未来的梦想, 你需要什么帮忙吗?

Appendix H: Photos used to interview participants



washing vegetables



operating factory



arranging books



baking



cooking



gardening