



# REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY

FOUR BIG LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC - MARCH 2021

We want to send our acknowledgment and gratitude to every participant and staff involved at all stages in taking their time and effort to contribute to the learning of the wider community and plant seeds of change in people and in the system to enable equitable outcomes.

# Note from our CEO

**Teach For Malaysia** (TFM) is working towards a day where all children in Malaysia have the opportunity to attain an excellent education. We do this by building a movement of leaders who seek to address the root causes of the systemic inequities that hold our society back from realizing this vision. Historically, a child's socio-economic background, the community they were born into, and what society believes about their ability, are often major determinants in the quality of education they receive. The Covid-19 pandemic has played a catalytic role in uncovering these existing deep-rooted inequities and accelerating the widening of gaps in access to education between students from B40 communities and their more wealthy peers. According to a MOE conducted survey of students from 670,000 households- only 6% have access to a personal computer, and as many as 37% of students don't own a device for e-learning. That's at least 1.8 million out of the 4.9 million students in Malaysia who may not have had access to learning through online methods during the MCO. Globally, approximately 1.6 billion children have been out of school at some point in 2020 due to the pandemic, with the World Bank predicting a USD10 trillion loss in income across the lifetimes of students affected by the pandemic. Our priorities during the pandemic have been (1) to ensure that learning does not stop for children across Malaysia, and (2) to be at the forefront of re-imagining the "new normal" for education. However, we know that society is wired to take the path of least resistance, and that path is more likely to revert to doing things the old way. The key determinant to ensuring that we take a different path and "build back better" is leadership.

**Project Brightspots** started off in 2019 as an effort to discover some of the most transformational teaching practices in our classrooms. In response to the pandemic in 2020, we shifted our focus from the classroom to the broader system. We chose to study the **type of leadership** that would enable us **to build back better, and re-imagine the new normal** for education. We identified leaders who gave us hope and inspiration - taking on a transformational journey - willing to re-imagine themselves, their approach to identifying the most pressing needs, and how they mobilized people and resources to enable equitable outcomes in high-need communities. This document articulates the key lessons we have learned from the journeys of these **8 Brightspot leaders**. Despite all the devastating effects of the pandemic, we believe that we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to significantly reshape the world so that it works for all of us, especially the most marginalized. No matter what field you find yourself in, we believe that everyone can play a part in leading towards a more equitable world. We hope that these lessons will encourage and inspire you as you take action.



# WHO ARE THE BRIGHTSPOTS LEADERS WE STUDIED ?



**Alina Amir**

Co-Founder and Business Developer of Arus Academy



**Muhammad Nazmi bin Rosli:**

Teacher in SK Long Sukang, Lawas, Sarawak



**Jinghann Hong**

Teach for Malaysia 2019 Fellow



**John-son Oei**

Entrepreneur, leader of social enterprises under EPIC



**Melissa Gomes**

Co-Founder and CEO, Edvolution Enterprise



**Hazwan Razak:**

Head of Sarawak Multimedia Authority Digital Village



**Heidy Quah**

Co-founder of Refuge for Refugees



**Tan Siew Choo**

Principal, SMK Segambut

**"What is the pandemic teaching us about reimagining who we need to be to enable equitable and sustainable outcomes for ALL children?"**

**OUR FOUR BIG LESSONS**

# BIG LESSON 1

## Humility : Commitment to truly listening to and understanding the needs of the community we

serve

**Alina Amir**, founder of Arus Academy, chose to prioritize student and teacher voice to understand what exactly are the gaps they are facing, and the role Arus academy needs to play in bridging them. Through their student surveys, they were able to understand how they were coping with their well-being as well as the percentage of students with access to the internet and devices. This allowed them to immediately mobilize the available devices at their centers and distribute it to the students in need to ensure learning doesn't stop.

Similarly, they also ran a needs analysis with 1300 teachers on the skills needed to deliver remote learning. This led to Arus curating an open-sourced self-learning online module where teachers go through the phases of identifying the right technology, planning remote lessons, creating engaging material, and running assessments for students.

**Heidy Quah**, head of Refuge for Refugees too had similar bets. Through her intentional community immersions during the pandemic, she and her team realized that the community though were expected to follow SOPs were unable to comprehend the Bahasa Malaysia or English. Thus they sought help from the refugee community to translate content in over four different languages and prepare visual aids every time a new directive is released by the government. They also provided the option of voice messages when receiving the latest updates.

As a school leader, **Puan Tan Siew Choo** chose Maslow's hierarchy over Bloom's Taxonomy. With over 76% of her students from B40 students, Puan Tan prioritized access to essentials before students can engage in learning. Together with her team of teachers, she raised and disbursed RM5700 to high need families.

**"We found a 2-year-old refugee girl on the streets and realized that there was evidence of sexual abuse. Do we bring her to the hospital for a check-up or will she then end up being deported? What puts her at more risk? While the policy states that we should bring her into the clinic, there is no law surrounding the protection of refugees and migrants"**

- Heidy Quah

# BIG LESSON 2

## Ubuntu : Building asset based, close partnerships and a shared vision of serving humanity

Due to SOPs in place, only permitted visitors were allowed to travel into rural areas. **Nazmi**, a teacher at SK Long Sukang, connected with local drivers who were delivering essentials, to help coordinate the delivery of learning materials for his students. "What made these efforts worth it was seeing my students run through the paddy fields seeing the truck and receive the materials."

**Hazwan Razak**, Head of Sarawak Multimedia Authority Digital Village, has been busy facilitating the growth of a tech-based community in Sarawak. But during the pandemic, seeing the severe shortage and delay in deliveries of PPE needed for our front liners, he transformed his job scope to address these gaps while leveraging the assets of people from the community. He identifies grassroots champions with expertise in technology, logistics etc. He communicated a shared vision of serving the frontliners with deep empathy and a strong sense of urgency. Hence while he had to navigate conflicts in managing various approaches shared by stakeholders, he emphasized the larger purpose of coming together as a community and respond by keeping that at the core. He guided the distribution of labor across the champions, for example, the technology team managed 3D printing PPEs and medical supply, while the local members provided data on high need families or individuals.

**"People can be moved to take action when they understand what is at stake. There is a desire to do good and to take effect in each one of us. You are doing this because you believe you have the power to drive change."**

**- Hazwan Razak**

# BIG LESSON 3

## Agency: Enabling capacity in both students and schools to be independent in driving their present and leading their own future

A huge number of students particularly those from marginalized communities unable to continue learning during the school closure have proved that the banking model of education, where the role of the teacher is to deposit information, is flawed, ineffective, and perpetuates inequity. **Jinghann**, a 2019 Teach for Malaysia Fellow noticed something similar.

Knowing the school closures most likely may be a reality for a while, Jinghann decided to develop skills of self-directed learning in students. Hence, along with five other Fellows, Jinghann facilitated a workshop series for students from five different schools across KL and Selangor where they learned about self-learning strategies like time management, habit building, skimming, and scanning, etc. Jinghann also facilitated sessions on conscious leadership with students from Closing the Gap.

**Melissa**, co-Founder, and CEO, Edvolution Enterprise, who worked with 22 schools across Perlis and Penang, was keen on addressing the lack of sense of urgency as well as preparedness in schools to navigate school closures and distance learning. She championed a school crisis management plan that would aid schools to consider how to operate during the pandemic. It centred around four core components: welfare, communication with family, teaching and learning, and smooth operation of the school. This framework allowed school leaders to not be dependent on higher authority on responding to the crisis and be able to take action contextual to the school's own needs.

**“Students lack self-leadership to excel to their full potential. This is a problem particularly under MCO conditions because students have freedom and flexibility to study but may not know how to purposefully [ pursue their own learning ]”. The moment I leave, all existing systems will fall back, whatever kind of leader you are, what are you doing that will ensure [ sustainability in student outcomes ]**

**- Jinghann**



# BIG LESSON 4

## Creativity : Reimagining the role of technology in accelerating the reach and service to high need communities

**Johnson**, Entrepreneur, head of social enterprises under EPIC, saw the restriction around physical gatherings that affected their core volunteering work as an opportunity to revive his brainchild tech platform, Sedunia in continuing EPIC's efforts to serve the Orang Asli community. Sedunia Match, one of the features of the platform allowed individuals with specific skill sets or assets to groups in need of the same. They also leveraged the platform to coordinate effort and impact across multiple parties like the Government, NGOs, and the communities themselves involved in serving hundreds of Orang Asli villages. This initiative strengthened EPIC's relationship with the government, enabling the two parties to share data and resources to dispatch help or fill in data gaps as they move along.

**Alina Amir**, the founder of Arus Academy, shares "the best technology for teachers impact is not the highest quality technology but the one that reaches the most amount of students." This mindset allowed Arus academy to be bold in exploring new approaches in reaching out to their beneficiaries, like hosting webinars on YouTube and Facebook, building Telegram bots, and recording YouTube tutorial series. Beyond this, they also curated long-term coaching sessions for teachers to build remote learning resources for teaching and learning. The support provided by Arus impacted even teachers in remote areas of Perlis, Kedah, and Sabah.

**"Success is when opportunity meets preparation"**

**- Johnson**

# ENGAGE YOURSELF IN DEEPER LEARNING

In the next page, we invite you to explore the case studies and short video interviews of our Brightspot Leaders, where you can deep dive into the following questions :

1. **Current Reality:** What evidences of inequities are you seeing our students and communities face through the pandemic?
2. **Response:** How is the Brightspot leader enabling equitable and sustainable outcomes for our students and/or communities?
3. **Leadership:** What do you notice the Brightspot leader say, do and believe that is enabling these outcomes?
4. **Learning:** What new insights are you gaining about the leadership we need to define a new normal for our students and communities that is equitable and sustainable?

# BRIGHTSPOTS CASE STUDIES and VIDEO INTERVIEWS



**Alina Amir : Embracing the digital, post-pandemic**



**Muhammad Nazmi bin Rosli: Towards an equitable future for rural students**



**Jinghann Hong : The intrinsic nature of teaching practices enables students to be agents of their own learning**



**John-son Oei: Sustainable empowerment of marginalised communities**



**Melissa Gomes : Transforming leaders to empower students**



**Hazwan Razak: Mobilising grassroots champions towards equitable change**



**Heidi Quah - Ensuring the voices of refugees are heard through collaborative efforts**



**Tan Siew Choo: Commitment to improving access to learning for her socioeconomically disadvantaged students**

