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**Singapore:
A Diverse
Educational
Landscape**

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*The ASCD (Singapore) REVIEW
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Manuscripts should be between 2000-2500 words, typewritten (Microsoft Word document) and submitted in the form of a hard copy together with a 3½" inch diskette or CD. Submissions may also be done via e-mail. Photographs would be appreciated. These visuals may also be e-mailed as jpg files. Contributions by regular mail may be addressed to:

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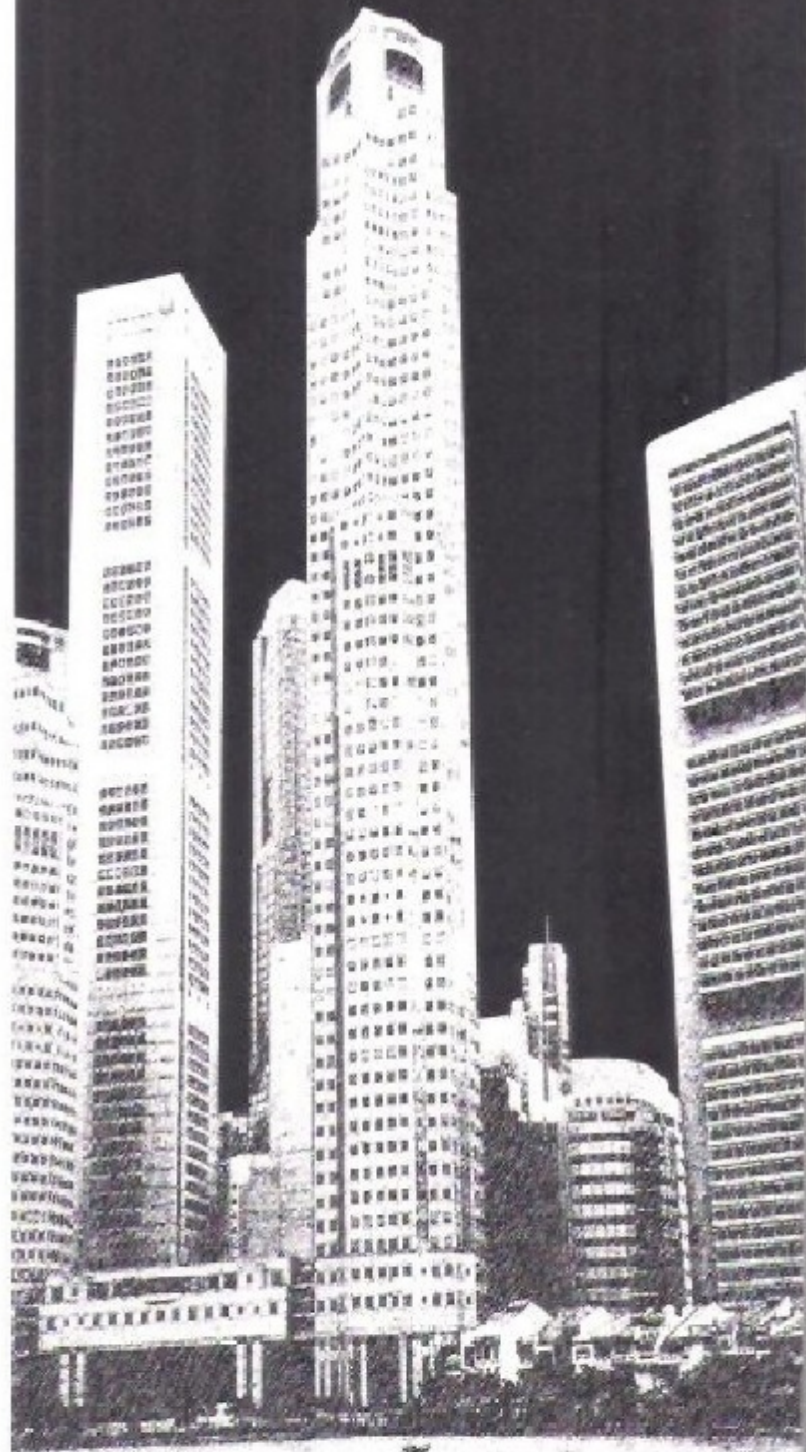
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Vol. 13: Teaching Reading and Writing
Deadline for articles: 30 April 2006

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
(SINGAPORE)



*Singapore:
A Diverse Educational
Landscape*



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Editorial

Exciting changes have been taking place on Singapore's educational landscape. In this issue, we take as our lynch pin, the discussion on catering to the diverse needs of our young people.

How have our schools and educational institutions gone about nurturing and catering to the diverse talents of young Singaporeans? Our contributors have offered us a range of articles which share ideas, projects and programmes from pre-school right up to post secondary levels, including the road less travelled. We also have contributions from a group of beginning teachers and a seasoned teacher who chooses to 'teach and not just deliver' her lessons. Our modest collection is by no means exhaustive but we hope that these articles will still help our readers be more aware of the many avenues open to our children as they navigate their way through the educational system.

The REVIEW is now an annual publication and for our next issue in 2006 we would like to focus on literacy. Reading to learn is a complex skill. Most students who have learnt to read effectively by Primary 2-3 have a very incomplete idea of what reading actually means. Thinking about what you are reading is not the same as simply looking for some bit of information. In our current world of computers, Xboxes and iPods, many students do not enjoy reading or writing – they do not like to read, they only read and write when they have to for school, or worse, they do not read at all! We invite our readers to contribute articles sharing ideas, comments and programmes on the teaching of reading and writing for our next issue of the REVIEW.

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Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education in Diversity: The Singapore Context

Dr Lynn Ang

How often have we heard students and educators invoke Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner and their studies when talking about early childhood education? The answer, I suspect, is all too often, as early years educators have, intentionally or unintentionally, interpreted child development from a single theoretical perspective. What I therefore hope to achieve from this discussion is to stimulate debate about different possibilities of reconceptualising early childhood education, especially in the context of a multicultural and diverse society such as Singapore. In their book *Childhood and Postcolonisation*, Cannella and Viruru (2004) contend that we have to step outside the world of early childhood theories in order to look for different possibilities of understanding children. Indeed, we need to continuously contest, reconceptualise, and rethink what we understand by early childhood education, in order to do justice to the diverse lives of children.

Perhaps a useful starting point of this discussion is an honest appraisal of my own assumptions of how children develop and learn. As an undergraduate, my first vivid introduction to early childhood education was Piaget's stages of development. I was taught that Piaget's developmental theory was the universal paradigm of how children developed, and that all children passed through a series of developmental stages, albeit at their own pace. I also learnt that learning takes place most effectively in a 'child-centred' environment and that children learn best when they are encouraged to be individuals and active in their own learning. After graduation and as a newcomer to the profession, these ideas of child development were invaluable as a dominant frame of reference for my work with children. These theories seemed so right and logical that it did not occur to me to question the philosophies and ideologies from which they originated.





A few years on and working as an academic, I came to recognise the conflicts that arise from these dominant theories, and the tensions that sometimes underpin our own understanding of early childhood education. While there is no disputing the importance of a child-centred curriculum and the vital contribution that Piaget has made to the field, there are nevertheless valid reasons for us to question and contest these theories, which are often regarded as 'universal truths'. These ideas of child centredness and the individual child are very much based on the Western paradigm of developmental psychology, and one of the criticisms is that they do not sufficiently take into account the socio-cultural and diverse context of children and their families. The majority of theorists such as Erikson, Bowlby, Piaget and Skinner, were all also European and American men who wrote from a particular economic, gender and racial position, but yet whose names have become synonymous with child development and universalist notions of the child. There are many different ways in which children develop and learn, but what their studies do not adequately show is the influence of culture, change, and the social environment on the diverse experiences of children.

Early childhood education has therefore long been constrained by its over reliance

on science and developmental psychology, particularly where there has been a need to understand how children develop and learn. Recent developments have seen a movement towards reconceptualising those dominant frames of reference that have informed the field. In the last decade, there have been overt attempts to reject traditional notions of child development. Cannella (1997), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Viruru (2001), Mac Naughton (2005) and Yelland (2005) to name a few, have taken a poststructuralist, even postmodernist stance in challenging the dominant theories of child development. In particular, the tenets of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), which was introduced in the United States in the 1980s for the National Academy of Early Childhood Programmes, have been questioned and challenged for its adoption of developmental psychological theories and for assuming a behaviourist approach to viewing development. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), and Cannella (1997) have taken a socio-cultural critical perspective in challenging the way that DAP has privileged a positivist and universal theory of child development at the expense of a socio-culturally situated one. A critique of DAP is that it fails to take into account the diverse nature and qualities of how children develop in their cultural, social and historical environment. To that extent, DAP, and with it the discourse of child development, needs to be culturally appropriate and localised, and must include a socio-cultural perspective, without which it cannot be applied to children from diverse cultures and childhoods, whose educational experiences, expectations and goals differ and vary.

This critique of the developmental approach becomes all the more poignant when thinking about notions of 'the child' and the concept of 'child centredness'. The child, for instance, is constructed by Western science as an 'independent biological organism' to be observed and studied. Children are seen as intellectually constructing and reconstructing understanding in thought

and reasoning, and maturing according to particular developmental patterns. Such a construction of the developing child is rooted in the science of developmental psychology and the problem as Cannella suggests, lies with the cultural appropriateness of developmentalism, where children who do not meet the milestones of developmentalism are deemed normal or abnormal, competent or incompetent, and in need of adjustment (Cannella, p.33). Similarly, our understanding of the term 'child centred' is problematic because more often than not it is predicated upon an exclusive Western notion of the child as an individual and autonomous being, active in his or her own learning and in constant pursuit of knowledge (Silin, 1995). The term is used frequently by early years professionals to justify their practice of the 'child-centred' curriculum as the ideal way of learning that is considered both natural and appropriate for all children. Yet, as Cannella contends, the concept of 'child-centredness' is a universal pedagogy that is dominated by 'veiled assumptions of democracy, human nature and the circumstances of the human life' (Cannella, p.118). It is conceptually located in the ideology of developmental psychology which reifies the universal child as progressing through predetermined stages of development, and embedded in this theory is the importance of allowing the child choice, autonomy and control over his or her learning. One of the main problems with such a notion of 'child centredness' is that universal and global references are made about children without sufficient regard to the history, context or relations of power that are rooted in the usage of the term. As Cannella asserts, the question of choice, for instance, in a 'child-centred' curriculum, is an illusion, as 'adults actually control the choices that surround children' (Cannella, p.121).

The concept of child-centredness and child development therefore remains problematic. In a multicultural and diverse society such as Singapore, it is important that early years educators reconceptualise these concepts critically, when thinking

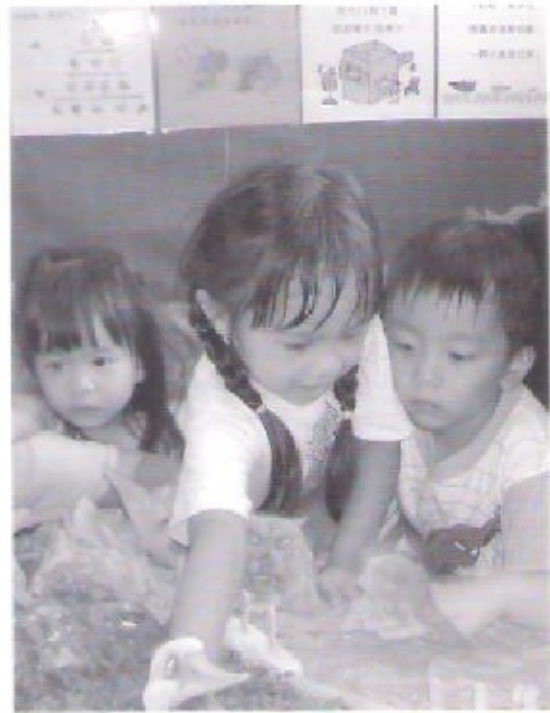
about their own assumptions and practice of the curriculum. Practitioners and educators must ask themselves important questions: 'what do we really understand by the term child-centred?', 'whose knowledge are we using as a yardstick to teach the children?', 'what purpose is being served when we talk about a child-centred curriculum?', 'does such a curriculum really serve the interests of the child?' and 'what place, if any, is there for theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky in the Singapore context?'. Singapore is multicultural and modern society with a unique blend of Asian and Confucianist values. It is therefore important that the country's history, values and culture are taken into account when providing an appropriate curriculum for the children. The issue is not just about how early childhood education can or cannot be applied to the Singapore context, but how, despite deviating in some ways from the dominant theories and models, the examples of practice that is taking place in Singapore offers a new and different depiction of how children develop and learn. Perhaps only then can we begin to understand how children develop, in their own lifeworlds, and historical and cultural orientations.



A vignette from Singapore

Perhaps an account of my recent visit to Singapore will further illustrate my point about the importance of reconceptualising early childhood education, especially in the context of the country's diversity. The setting I visited was a private day nursery which catered for children before primary school age, from 3 months - 6 years. The most vivid impression from my visit was the setting's curriculum for its oldest group of children, who at 5-6 years old, were in their final year of nursery. As part of the daily routine for this group of children, some time was set aside for simulation in a school environment. The phrase 'copying from the board' was used to describe the main activity for the children, which involved literally copying letters or numbers off the board. As part of the simulation, the room was recreated as a typical classroom to give the children a sense of 'being in school'. The chairs and tables were laid out in rows, with a whiteboard mounted at the front of the room. For an hour or so each day, the children are taught the alphabets or numbers in the classroom, facilitated by a teacher who coaches them in literacy and numeracy. The teacher directs the children in their learning and sets the children tasks. Apart from copying from the board, other activities included playing games, singing and sharing. The rationale behind this, the manager explained, is to simulate the environment of a primary school and to help the children ease their transition from nursery to school. The children are provided opportunities to explore what school is about, and to engage and interact with each other. Thus, for an hour each day, in that one moment, the 'real life' of school became a part of the children's lived experience in the nursery.

This brief anecdote presents an interesting illustration of how the concept of early childhood education is being (re)constructed and (re)negotiated within a different discourse and in a different temporality. From a developmentally appropriate perspective, activities such as



sitting in rows, direct teaching, and certainly 'copying from the board' seemed incorrect. They seemed to contradict the child-centred pedagogy of child initiated learning, of allowing the children choice of activities, and of the child being in charge of his or her own learning. Relying on my Western early childhood training, my immediate response from that visit was that the setting was not 'child centred' enough, its curriculum too teacher-directed, and the children deprived of choice and opportunity to explore and experiment. However, on reflection, I realised that my view was dominated by Western notions of what constituted learning, child-centredness and child development. It highlighted the privileging and naturalising effect of dominant discourses of child development that often work at a subliminal level. The setting showed an alternative perspective of what it means to offer a 'developmentally appropriate' curriculum, and one in which the children develop and learn, albeit in a manner different from what one might expect. The curriculum for the children was as much for their academic learning as it is for their emotional and social preparation for their progression in the education system. The setting was operating within its own discourse of how children should

develop and learn, whilst at the same time maintaining a vibrant, caring and challenging environment. Being in the classroom and copying from the board was just one aspect of their daily routine in the nursery. The children also participated in other tasks and activities such as playing games, singing, drawing, washing and eating. Many of the children seemed to enjoy what they were doing, and most importantly, what struck me was the healthy level of noise I encountered while I was at the nursery. The children were interacting, laughing, chatting and seemed enthusiastic and comfortable in their surroundings, which made it difficult to regard their curriculum as inappropriate. In fact, it made 'copying from the board' seem logical in the context of the setting as it was part of the curriculum and lived experience of the children.


It is not my intention to make a judgement on the practice that takes place in the setting, but what this vignette serves to illustrate is my point about how dominant discourses of child development can lead us to see what is lacking in a situation and not what is present. The practice of the setting highlights the effects and realities of early childhood education in Singapore, where academic achievements are highly valued by society and it is commonly perceived that assimilation into a formal structure of learning at an early age plays a vital role in children's future success in schooling. Hence, it is not unusual to find that part of early education in Singapore is to prepare children for their transition to primary school and the rigors of the education system. It is noteworthy that in the case of the nursery, these educational expectations and cultural values were taken into consideration while at the same time a positive and caring environment for the children was maintained.

Perhaps it is time then, to reconceptualise early childhood education in Singapore, to challenge dominant theories and discourses, and question their appropriateness or inappropriateness for

the Singapore context. The scope of this paper is consciously limited in the way that it does not assume to offer a more in-depth account of preschool education in Singapore. However, what it does hopefully offer is a starting point for reconceptualising and relocating early childhood education in the social and cultural context of a society. Ultimately, the strive to re-examine the way we think about and theorise child development is to advocate a legitimate space for children, and empower all those who work with them. This task of reconceptualising early childhood has therefore challenging ramifications for early childhood professionals. We need to recognise and include the diverse cultures and cultural expectations of children as much as we explore and challenge them. More importantly, we need to problematise universalist discourses of early childhood education, in search for the complex and diverse lived experiences of children. As Yelland suggests, 'early childhood educators must look beyond the boundaries of the ties, and ask questions about their practice' (Yelland 2005, p.7). The quest for practitioners and all those involved in working with children then, is to challenge and contest the very canon that have dominated ideas of early childhood education.

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Innovative Leadership for a New Future

David Ng & Veronica Ng

Introduction

In this new millennium, nations will face significant challenges that will threaten their economy. Ever-increasing competition, demand for innovative products, the continuing need for global expansion, and rigorous bottom-line performance requirements will require knowledgeable, adaptable and innovative knowledge workers. Nations therefore will be forced to rethink how they should develop and educate their human resources in order to meet the challenges posed by the fast-

paced changing world. The first line action of nations will be to rethink and redefine how schools must be reformed to produce a critical mass of knowledge workers ready for the new future.

School reform and success depends on the strong leadership of top management and staff alike. School leaders must possess an appropriate balance of skills, competencies and capabilities that must be aligned to the changing context and needs of the nation. They need to think about work and working in a different way, to work "outside the box",





of seeing, thinking and understanding how innovation and creativity works.

which calls for high levels of cognitive and interpersonal skill. Because they now lead

and manage in a dynamic and competitive era, school leaders also need to become more flexible and innovative in their day-to-day work.

In this paper, we discuss a new framework of leadership that will require school leaders to adopt new and innovative roles in leading and managing schools. This view of innovative leadership for school reform and success looks at how leaders think and not just on what and how they perform.

Importance of Innovation and Knowledge Creation

Innovation, ideas and creativity occur not in the formal but in the informal organization. The informal organization is a labyrinth of webs or maps which form the relationships and inter-relationships that leaders and their teams have with others in the organization and other external stakeholders. These relationships though not formally charted are powerful and important.

It is within this network that people will create and destroy, will reproduce and innovate, will excite and neglect. Furthermore, the failure to recognize the importance of this network and its creative potential will cause the organization to remain in status quo.

If creativity, innovation and ideas are indeed generated through this network, then it is important for leaders to understand it better. Moreover, it is important for them to attempt to make sense of this complexity for their own well-being, as well as for sound organizational and educational reasons. It is also vital for leaders to have a new way

Knowledge represents the ephemeral world, the world of ideas, processes and change. Therefore the survival and competitiveness of an organization depends on its ability to create new knowledge. It is a reality that organizations cannot survive by following some blueprint. Instead, the potential for, but not the guarantee of, survival is created by the capacity to produce innovation. This is controlled by the process of spontaneous self-organisation and renewal.

Stacey (2001) argues that the creation of new knowledge, and thereby the process of organizational change itself, is to be viewed as a self-organized process of communicative interactions between individuals in the organization.

Investments in knowledge are different in different types of organizations. While the ability of an organization to effectively deal with new knowledge is limited by a variety of constraints, the leverage which can be obtained from such knowledge gives rise to the potential for increasing returns. Characteristics such as going back to competencies and tested knowledge, non-challenging of assumptions and ideas, and highly structured bureaucratic structures will inhibit the ability of the organization to create new knowledge. Leaders must minimize or remove the constraints on their ability to generate and create new knowledge in order for them to have breakthroughs.

Dispositions/Thinking of an Innovative Leader

1. Multiple perspectives

The concept of multiple perspectives includes the ability to see, understand and think in different depths, breadths, focuses, angles, and timelines. The innovation journey will only be meaningful when leaders and staff are able to see beyond the

obvious and to think beyond the accepted assumptions.

In addition, the benefits of innovation should be viewed from the end-user perspective. The most excellent idea and innovation will only be as useful as how the end user perceive the innovation as of value to him or her. Therefore it is important for the leader to take into consideration the end users' perspectives to view an innovative idea.

There are many ways of seeing and thinking and there are different depths and breadths as well. The perspective of a ten year-old student will provide a different depth and breadth from that of the principal for example. Often, when we take only the adults' perspective, we lose a most valuable opportunity to see how the end user views new ideas and innovative practices. Students are helpless to a certain extent because their views and perspectives are often not sought. However, it is precisely when the more helpless they are, the more instructive are the examples they furnish us for innovative ideas.

The perspective of time-line is seen in the analogy of a picture seen in the morning and that in the evening. The picture will be different because of changing lights and conditions. In looking at a context, different perspectives will require taking into consideration the time-line of the context. Newcomers to the organization will see a different perspective compared to staff who have been in the organization for a long time. These new staff might be able to discern relatively easier the norms and culture that are based on old assumptions. It is precisely the challenging of such assumptions and norms that innovation can begin. Therefore, it is important for the leader

to invite people or get new staff to share their perspectives of what they see, hear, smell, or think about the school.

2. Redefining Rules/Structures

Rules and procedures are there to promote responsiveness and efficiency directly and also to enhance accountability. However, their effects are also limited in important ways. The specificity of proposed rules confines input and discussions to the merits of a particular option, rather than to the more basic issues of defining the problem and identifying alternative solutions. In circumstances when the problem need to be redefined and therefore will need different rules to be applied, disincentive to move into such discussion will cause the limitations for innovation.

In general, the process of developing a proposed rule that provides a justified course of action lasts only for an average of three years in the midst of constant change. In practice, many organizations have realized that there are many 'dumb' rules that are there and have been there for a long time. When questioned, staff could only say, "That's the way we have been doing things all along." When staff are not able to give rationale or reasons for such rules, then it is time for the rule to be reexamined and it might just be a 'dump' rule that people abide by but limits their choices and alternative solutions.

The innovative leader must be willing to let chaos and self-organizing to take place in dealing with a new situation or to generate new ways of doing things. It means not letting present rules restrict and constraint staff from their exploration and discussions. This initial chaos is much needed in the innovation process because present rules often restrict staff actions and thinking.



We have often heard of the phrase 'structures drive behaviour.' In innovation, it is also true that behaviour drives structures. In other words, the innovative leader must allow changing needs and practices in the innovation process to determine the type of structures in the organization. Employing a professional structure may work most of the time but it is not ideal when dealing with a new situation where the professional expertise in that department or group is not sufficient to deal with the new situation. This is often the case in new initiatives which require new thinking, new ideas, and innovative ideas that do not fall nicely within the professional know-how of the department or group. Thus as an example, moving into an ad-hoc structure may be more useful to generate innovative ideas as members from different disciplines and experiences come together.

As a trainer I have often played an activity where I give specific rules to participants to obey in order to achieve a goal. Almost all the time, participants will be dutifully obeying the rules and never question the rules. As a result, they often stumble and take a much longer time to achieve their goals. The same analogy is applied to staff who deal with new situations and new challenges which call for innovative ideas. They often are restricted by fixed structures and fixed rules. The innovative leader must be willing to redefine the rules, change the structures if necessary in order to allow innovation to take place.

3. Progressive seeing

The process of innovation is never static nor a once-off product. It is a process of experimentation and review as we move into a better product, process, system or idea. Therefore, the innovative leader must see things in progression and in ongoing perspective. Using the analogy of viewing a picture, the eye moves along the painting surface and continually change the perspective vantage point as opposed to seeing a static view of the picture. We ourselves, as humans, have become a form

in movement. People see us in a more complete picture if they see us in actions in different contexts and facing different situations.

It is interesting to note that a Chinese poem derives its meaning not only from the words of the text but from their dispositions on the page and the rhythmic and textual quality of the calligraphy. Innovative ideas will only be meaningful if seen in progression and relation to the context of the organization, the people, the usefulness both present and in the near future. In other words, the innovative leader must never be satisfied with a complete innovative idea because there is no completion and no perfect innovative idea. All innovations will go through progressive experimentation and refining.

As the innovative leader steps back to view an innovative idea, the process of beholding must take place at different times and over time. This is progressive seeing as the process of creating a new idea takes place. Creation is an ongoing process that requires new knowledge gained as a result of learning from the past and the present. There is no straight line in nature and there is no straight process in innovation and the leader must be willing to adapt strategies and plans as perspective change and/or opportunities are encountered.

The practice of progressive seeing stems from a deeper understanding and thinking of the 'what ifs'; 'what about'; and 'what's next.' It is not a static thinking where no continuous review is done. The innovative leader must continuously review and see the past, present and the future in his mind.

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“Is that a ‘Basketball’ School?” A Cautionary Note on the Development of So-Called Niche Areas in Singapore Schools

Jonathan W.P. Goh

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a discussion on niches in an educational context. The author cautions school leaders on the emphasis of developing areas of specialization, or ‘niche areas’ which are very specific in focus and may be in the areas of sports, arts or a subject area in the curriculum. Should basketball be considered a ‘niche area’ for schools? Or is it just another ‘product’ offered by the school? Does a basketball ‘niche’ necessarily reflect the needs of the intended market, that is, the students and their parents? Can a basketball ‘niche’ attract majority of the potential students or just a small handful? What implications would it have on the school’s resource allocation if they have chosen such a focus? Does a basketball ‘niche’ really help parents and students make better informed choices about schools? The author attempts to answer these questions in this article.

Introduction

As the new millennium progresses, the educational climate continues to evolve into one that is becoming progressively complex yet exciting at the same time. Owing to easier access to information and exposure to a wider range of educational services, students and their parents are becoming

more sophisticated and expect more in relation to their educational experiences. Gone are the days when education is seen as public service to a homogeneous group of customers. As a result, diversity in offerings may very well represent the key to a school’s success, future growth and possibly competitive advantage in the education industry.

Addressing these challenges, the Ministry of Education (MOE hereafter) continues to move Singapore’s education to a paradigm that is ability-driven. The changes and refinements made to our educational system are generally focused on creating better opportunities and flexibility in terms of school choice and admissions (Shanmugaratnam, 2005a). One such refinement is the *Niche Area Scheme* for autonomous schools in 2001. The aim of this scheme is to encourage schools to develop niche areas to nurture the talents and abilities of their students. These niche

areas could be in sports, culture and the arts, or a subject area in the curriculum. It is hoped that once the scheme is fully implemented, it will provide variety and distinctiveness to our school system, and give students the opportunity to excel in areas where they have special talents or abilities (Teo, 2000a & b). In so doing, schools can extend their admission policies for students with special talent and ability in the school’s chosen niche. In



a recent press release, the MOE (2005a) approved 43 secondary schools to offer discretionary places in January 2006 under the Direct School Admissions – Secondary (DSA-Sec) Exercise for schools with approved niche programs.

Several independent secondary schools with stronger emphasis in specific areas have been set up to offer a wider range of educational choices for students (Shanmugaratnam, 2005b). For example, the Singapore Sports School was opened in 2004 to cater for students with the desire to develop their sporting talents professionally as well as academic performance. This year marked the opening of the NUS High School of Mathematics and Science promising a stimulating environment for students with exceptional aptitude and interest in mathematics and science. Soon, we will also witness the opening of the Arts School catering to students with talents in the arts.

Primary schools have also started to focus on distinct strengths in diverse areas such as new teaching approaches or pedagogies (e.g., human dynamics or infusing information technology into teaching and learning), aesthetics (e.g., calligraphy or art), and character development (e.g., rugged outdoor activities). The schools awarded with additional funds from the MOE can employ additional staff or instructors, train teachers in the niche area, make minor infrastructural improvements to the school, or purchase relevant materials. In fact, 16 primary schools were recently awarded additional resources of up to \$100,000 per year to develop their own special strengths under the Program for School-based excellence (PSE) (Ministry of Education, 2005b).

Extending niche theory ... to marketing ... to schools?

In response to the MOE's directive to focus in areas of excellence, mainstream



schools have begun developing specific 'niche area(s)' subject to the MOE's approval (Ministry of Education 2005c). Let us begin the discussion on developing niches by first examining the definition of 'niche' and its use in understanding markets.

According to the Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English dictionary (2003), a **niche** is:

"A hollow area in the wall which has been made to hold a statue or a natural hollow part in a hill or a cliff"

It also provides definitions for 'niche in a market' and 'niche marketing':

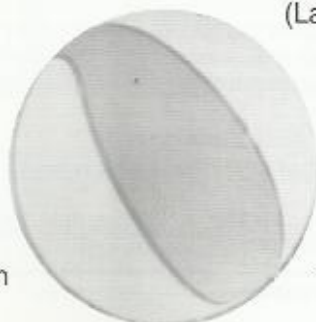
"A **niche in a market** is a specific area of marketing which has its own particular requirements, customers and products."

"**Niche marketing** is the practice of dividing the market into specialized areas for which particular products are made. A niche market is one of these specialized areas."

Marketing scholars (e.g., Freeman & Boeker, 1984; Lambkin & Day, 1989) have long advocated the use of ecology or biological theories in marketing in order to study and understand markets. According to Lambkin and Day (1989),

In ecological terms, each unique combination of resources and competitive conditions that is adequate to support any one type of organization is defined as a niche. However, a single resource space (market) typically contains several overlapping niches, competition is likely to alter the extent to which individual organization forms can proliferate in their chosen niches. (Lambkin & Day, 1989, p.11)

In order to capture this competitive process, ecologists distinguish between *fundamental niches* and *realized niches* (Freeman & Boeker, 1984; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The *fundamental niche* refers to the



size of the potential niche available to any new category of competitors. In other words, the *fundamental niche* in ecology is analogous to what marketers refer to as market segments. Essentially, a market segment consists of a group of consumers who have a similar set of wants.

The *realized niche*, on the other hand, describes the size of the segment that is actually available once competitors have secured a certain amount of that segment. In marketing terms, the realized niche is a more specific and smaller market consisting of a small group of customers with similar characteristics or needs (Hooley & Saunders, 1993; Keegan, Moriarty, and Duncan 1992; Kotler 2003; Stanton, Etzel & Walker, 1991).

Difference between Segments and Niches of a Market

Niches. In almost every industry including the education sector, there are organizations specializing in serving market niches. Instead of attempting to pursue the entire market, these organizations should focus on target segments, or a niche which is a segment within a segment. According to Kotler (2003), an attractive niche

market is characterized by (1) customers in the niche having a distinct set of needs; (2) customers willing to 'pay' a premium to the organization that best satisfies their needs; (3) the niche is not likely to attract other competing organizations; (4) the nicher gains certain economies through specialization; and (5) the niche has size, profit and growth potential.

It is evident that the key to nichemanship is specialization. This notion of specialization emphasizes the distinctive competencies an organization needs to possess to pursue niche markets. The niche market is generally small and does not attract many organizations similar in size and resources to compete for it (Debruyne & Reibstein, 2005). The key to their success is their ability to match technology with specific customer requirements. However, over time, niche markets that are not attractive today may become viable for competing organizations as marketing efficiency improves and changes in consumption patterns occur (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991, McKenna, 1988).

Market Segments. A market of customers is not homogenous with similar tastes and preferences, needs, motivations and

Table 1: Bases for Segmentation Consumer markets

Bases of Segmentation	Descriptions (with examples pertinent to schools)
Demographic	Involves dividing the market into groups based on age, gender, family size, family life cycle, income, occupation, education, religion, race and nationality.
Psychographic	Involves dividing the market into groups based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social class • Lifestyle (e.g., hi-technology based environment) • Personality characteristics (e.g., independence).
Geographic	Involves dividing the market into groups based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Region (NB. Location and Region factors are particularly important for 'neighborhood schools') • Density.
Behavioristic	Involves dividing the market into groups based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits sought (e.g., leadership or critical thinkers) • Usage rate (e.g., light, moderate or heavy consumers – students abilities to learn) • Loyalty status (through strong alumni) • Stage of readiness (i.e., the unaware, aware only, knowledgeable and desirous) • Attitude (e.g., enthusiast, indifferent, negative, and hostile towards various types of learning and school culture).

Source: Adapted from Kotler (2003) and McCarthy et al. (1994)

demands. A more realistic perspective is that a market is made up of smaller segments of customers. Market segmentation is thus the process of dividing the total market into several relatively homogenous groups or segments. Careful identification of these segments is critical as these perceptions of segments will help the organization focus its marketing strategy and business capabilities on the requirements of this group of customers (Coles & Culley, 1986; McCarthy, Perreault, Quester, Wilkinson, & Lee, 1994). Therefore, to identify these segments more meaningfully, there are numerous sets of variables a marketer can use. The marketer can identify these segments by classifying consumers demographically, geographically, psychographically or behavioristically. Table 1 provides a more detailed explanation of these bases for market segmentation strategies.



“What kind of biker are you?” – An illustration

To illustrate the difference between market segments and niches, let us consider the bicycle riders market. Figure 1 depicts the general segments of bicycle riders. Clearly, the market of riders is not homogeneous, and each segment of riders has different profiles and requirements for their bicycle riding experience. In view of the varied riding

requirements, it is no surprise that bicycle manufacturers only focus on one or a few markets to serve. These groups of riders constitute different segments and not niches. Recall that a niche is defined as a segment within a segment (Kotler 2003). So are there sub-segments within these segments? In other words, are there riders with very specialized needs within each segment that are currently not satisfied by the existing bicycles? Three excellent examples of niches include tandems (double-seat and peddle bicycles) within the leisure and recreation riders segment, tricycles with storage within the transportation riders segment, and ‘reclined-

Figure 1: Market grid diagram with segments of bicycle riders

Segment 1: Professional and Sport Enthusiasts	Segment 2: Exercisers	Segment 3: Leisure and Recreation
Segment 4: Extreme Sports and Stunt Riders	Segment 5: Environmentalists	Segment 6: Kiddy Riders
Segment 7: Off-road Adventure Riders	Segment 8: Transportation Riders	

Adapted from McCarthy et al. (1994, p. 47)

peddled' bicycles for professional and sport enthusiasts segment.

"To niche or not to niche" - Where do we go from here?

A quick survey of participants in leadership courses at the National Institute of Education (NIE) indicates that a considerable number of leaders understand the MOE's push for the development of niche areas to be very focused in areas such as robotics, basketball, performing arts, uniform groups and information technology. School leaders need to be cautious that developing specialization(s) in certain product offering(s) such as these does not necessarily reflect the needs of the intended potential students and their parents. Clearly, schools are channeling resources into the development of these so-called niche areas which may lead to what marketers call 'product orientated approach'. A product-oriented organization presumes that its major task is to offer programs that it believes are good for their customers without a clear understanding of the needs and wants of their customers. Apart from resource allocation issues, school leaders should justify how these so-called niche programs are aligned with the school vision and mission, and ultimately contribute to the school's brand. Obviously, this can be difficult to achieve if a school decides its niche area to be 'basketball'.



On the other hand, the MOE's decision to encourage the development of 'specialist schools,' such as the Singapore Sports School is certainly consistent with the concepts advocated in niche marketing. This is because students with genuine interests in developing themselves professionally in a particular sport may not be fully satisfied by the training and coaching they would receive in mainstream secondary schools. Besides, the facilities in most secondary schools cannot compare with the S\$75

million Singapore Sport School state-of-the-art facilities, and professional coaching and expertise in the various sports. Clearly, this group of students with unique needs in sports talent development constitutes a niche market in Singapore's education. More importantly, this niche market forms the basis of the school's vision and mission and this focus will drive the corporate, business as well as marketing strategies of the school.

The way ahead - segmenting your market and marketing orientation

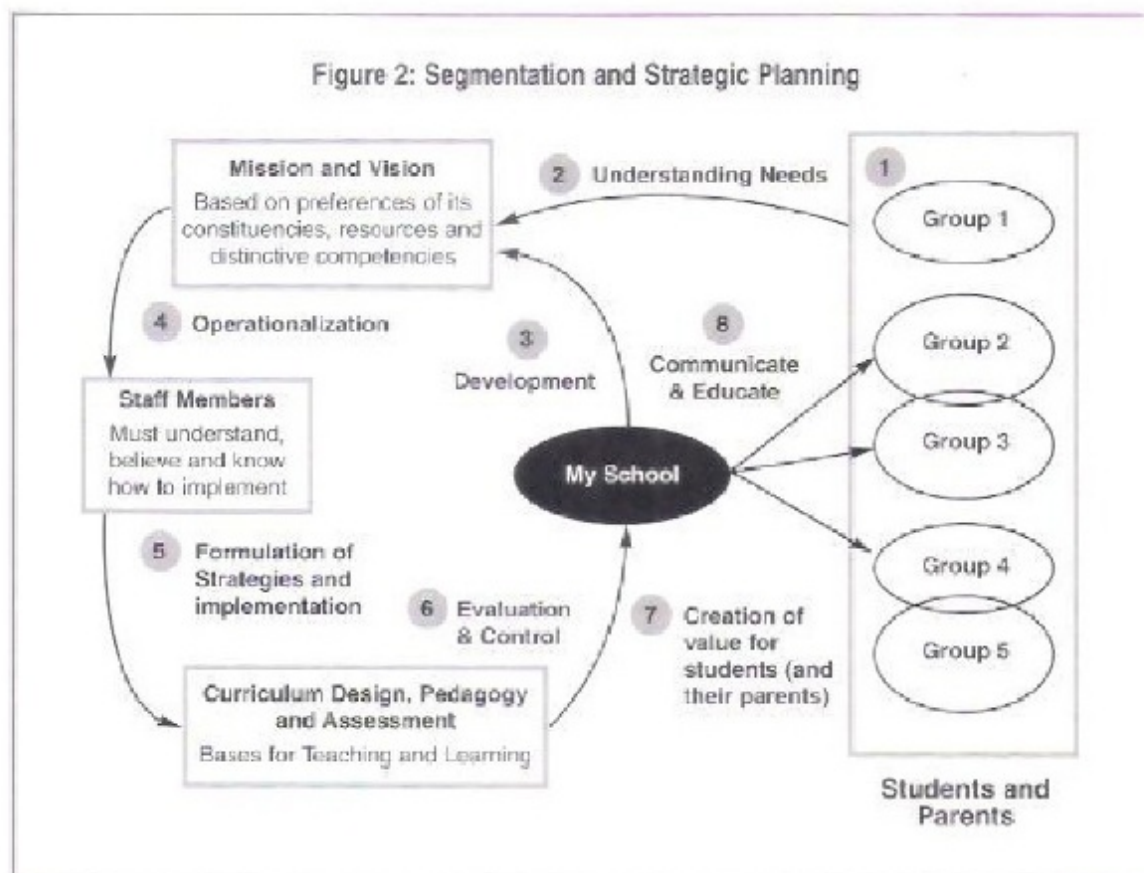
The news for mainstream schools is sufficiently clear - they cannot be focusing on niche marketing. Instead a marketing oriented approach should be adopted. In other words schools "must know their markets; attract sufficient resources; convert these resources into appropriate programs, services, and ideas; and effectively distribute them to various consuming publics" (Kotler & Fox, 1985, p.7). They can do this by efficient market segmentation and creating value for their customers in terms of the educational experience. It is only then can schools decide which segment(s) to target or focus on. The principles of segmentation and market targeting are certainly embedded in the quote by then Education Minister, RADM Teo Chee Hean. Clearly, the focus was for a school-wide approach rather than a small group of students:

The school will be able to draw together a critical mass of students and develop the necessary staff and programmes that can fully develop the interest and ability of these students in this special area. Students with the same interests or talents will have classmates and school-mates, and well qualified staff and facilities, to stimulate and spur them on to higher levels of achievement. (Teo, 2000a, point 23)

However, it does not mean that an educational institution has to dispense with its



Figure 2: Segmentation and Strategic Planning



mission and competitive advantaged competencies to provide whatever the 'customers' want, or what educational programs that are popular or in fad at the moment. Rather the school should identify customers who are interested and would value its service offerings, and then develop these offerings based on their competencies to make them attractive. Figure 2 depicts these key considerations:

1. Effectively segment the market to identify groups of students and parents;
2. Understand their needs, preferences and aspirations;
3. The school should develop its mission and vision based on (1), (2) and their competencies and resources. Here 'resources' could include physical, informational, legal, financial, human, relational and organizational;
4. The mission and vision must be operationalized in the school's context. That is, what are the key principles and values which form an overarching theme for the school. Cases in point include Hougang Primary School's *Outdoor Education* or Rivervale Primary School's *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* as themes for their respective schools. So regardless of instructional programs or co-curricular activities, the critical skills are being emphasized by the teachers. Therefore, it is crucial that staff members understand, believe and know how they can contribute to the school's mission and vision in their interactions with students;
5. Understanding and believing in the mission and vision is not sufficient. The staff members must also know how to strategically implement or infuse these key principles and values in their work with students – namely, curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment;
6. Following successful formulation of strategies and implementation, the school must measure and evaluate performance so as to determine if the objectives are achieved;
7. As a result of the school's understanding of its strengths and their students' needs, it can create value for the students. Here 'perceived value' does not only include functional value (i.e.,

utilitarian and physical performance) but also emotional (e.g., pride), epistemic (e.g., inquiry and discovery of new knowledge) and social values (e.g., sense of belonging) from the educational experience in a particular school;

8. Finally, the school must communicate or educate the key stakeholders on the quality of the offerings (e.g., programs and services) as well as the central educational theme of the school.

Conclusion

In support of the MOE's call to create better opportunities and flexibility in terms of school choice and admissions, schools have begun to develop distinctive areas of competencies or excellence (Shanmugaratnam, 2005b). A cautionary note is necessary when a school chooses to focus narrowly on a particular 'niche area' (e.g., shooting, dance, basketball or life sciences). As noted earlier, such specializations may not necessarily reflect the needs of the intended students and parents. Besides, the school may want to focus on a broader theme (such as, Hougang Primary School's Outdoor Education thematic approach) which can 'direct' them in their endeavor and communication with the public. In so doing, the school can better manage their resources and attract a greater segment of students interested in the type of education offered by the school. In many ways, this is consistent with the MOE's call for mass customization (and the marketing literature). It would certainly help schools to build stronger brands, and parents and students to make better informed choices.

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An Ability Driven Education in Singapore

Dr Charlene Tan

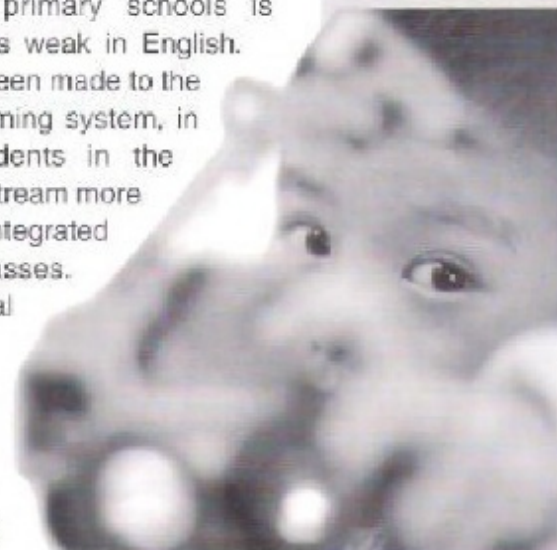
An Ability Driven Education (ADE) represents a paradigm change in the education framework adopted by the government in Singapore. There has been three phases in the history of education in Singapore. The first phase was "survival" phase when the aim was to produce trained workers in the early years of Singapore's independence and industrialization. The next phase, "efficiency" phase, fine-tuned the system through measures such as streaming in order to produce skilled workers for the economy in the most efficient way. In other words, the government projected the manpower demands in various sectors of the economy and train people to fit into jobs in those sectors. The current paradigm, ADE, aims to equip and prepare students to meet the challenges in a knowledge economy by taking into consideration their individual abilities and talents.

An ADE aims to identify and develop the talents and abilities of every child to the maximum. These talents and abilities are harnessed by inculcating in the students national values and social instincts so that they will be committed to the nation and will actively contribute their talents for the good of the society. The emphasis is on a diversity of talents, be it in intellect, the arts, sports, or community endeavours. While the Ministry of Education aims to help every child find his or her own talents and abilities, it recognises at the same time that it is unable to tailor its educational programmes for every individual. So mass customisation is adopted to cater to

groups of students with similar needs and abilities.

This is achieved in two ways: greater flexibility and choice in the educational programmes, and greater autonomy at the school level which will allow a greater variety of programmes across the schools. The former is seen in the different types of schools and programmes available in Singapore. There are schools that offer an Integrated Programme (IP) where students bypass the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examinations and head straight for the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examinations or the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, specialised independent schools in sports, the arts, and science and mathematics.

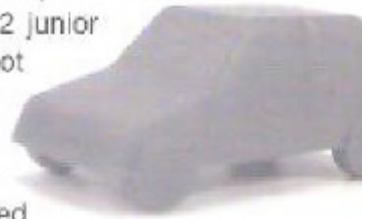
Besides programmes for students with a range of aptitudes and abilities, there are also programmes for students who need more support. For example, the "B" syllabus of the Mother Tongue Language is open to secondary one students weaker in the subject, and the Learning Support Programme in all primary schools is designed for students weak in English. Changes have also been made to the primary school streaming system, in order to allow students in the slowest-paced EM3 stream more opportunities to be integrated into mainstream classes. Students in the Normal stream in secondary schools will be allowed to take more subjects and will be given more opportunities to be



transferred from the slowest-paced Normal (Technical) stream to the Normal (Academic) stream. The annual ranking of secondary schools in raw numerical sequence has been replaced with attainment banding in order to present a broader picture of the schools' performance in academic and non-academic domains. More weight is given to co-curricular activities where traits like resilience, team spirit and resourcefulness are inculcated in the students.

The Education Ministry also acknowledges the need for a judicious mix of national policies and local adaptation. Flexibility and autonomy will be given to school principals to admit more students based on the criteria laid down by the schools. This may include both academic and non-academic standards such as artistic or sporting talent. At one end of the spectrum, schools and junior colleges that offer an IP will have full discretion in admitting students. Independent schools and autonomous schools, which already have some discretion in admitting students, will be able to offer more places to students of their choice from 2006 onwards

– 20 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The 12 junior colleges that do not offer an IP may admit up to 10 per cent of their student intake based on their individually determined criteria. Mainstream secondary schools will be allowed to develop niches of excellence and to admit up to 5 per cent of their secondary one enrolment based on their individual discretion. School leaders are also given more power to manage their resources as they mass customise their programmes to meet the objectives of an Ability Driven Education. Through a comprehensive swathe of programmes, the MOE hopes to reduce the emphasis on examinations and focus on a holistic education. The above reforms are consonant with a 2003 survey of over 1,400 students, parents and educators that reveals that over 90 per cent of parents supported a more holistic representation of school achievement and a broader definition of success for schools.



Implications for Key Stakeholders in Education

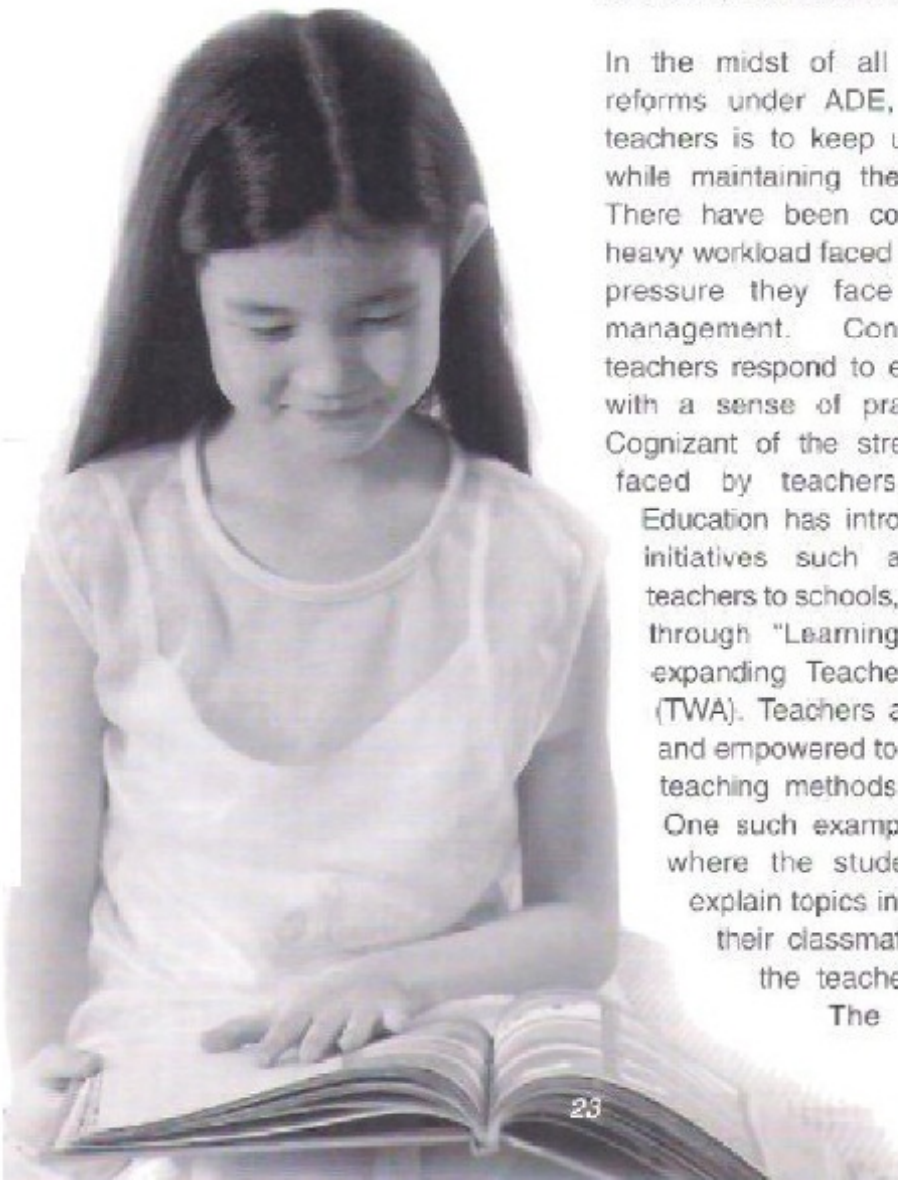
What are some implications of an ADE for key stakeholders in education – principals, teachers, parents and students? There is a need to balance our educational ideals with pragmatic considerations to achieve what is best for our pupils in order to achieve. In other words, an equilibrium is needed between individual and community interests.

Principals are in the forefront of ADE as they are now given more autonomy to spend their resources, develop their niche areas, and market their schools to their potential students and parents. Mrs Carmee Lim, former principal of Raffles Girls' School and executive director of the Academy of Principals says: "Results are just one snapshot of life. Each school should put up its own target for its students, ultimately promoting the

enjoyment of whatever they choose to do" (*Today*, 18 March 2004). The practical challenge is to balance the needs of the school and the needs of individual students. For example, how can a school which decides to drop a co-curricular activity like Track-and-Field in order to concentrate on a niche sport like badminton, cater to the needs of students talented in the former sport? One suggestion is for schools to explore ways to encourage student initiative and work with the community. Under the new policy initiative, students can earn up to two CCA points if they start a new co-curricular activity, an ad hoc activity or a one-off event requiring students to put in at least eight hours. For example, two students from one secondary school which does not offer soccer succeeded in organising a two-day soccer match in school for their schoolmates. In another school, the students offered to act as guides at the Singapore Science Centre for younger children (*The Straits Times*, 8 Nov 2004).

In the midst of all these educational reforms under ADE, the challenge for teachers is to keep up with the reforms while maintaining the passion to teach. There have been complaints about the heavy workload faced by teachers and the pressure they face from the school management. Consequently, some teachers respond to educational changes with a sense of pragmatic scepticism. Cognizant of the stress and constraints faced by teachers, the Ministry of Education has introduced a number of initiatives such as providing more teachers to schools, developing teachers through "Learning Framework", and expanding Teacher Work Attachment (TWA). Teachers are now encouraged and empowered to introduce innovative teaching methods in the classrooms. One such example is peer teaching where the students take turns to explain topics in different subjects to their classmates with the help of the teacher as the facilitator.

The success of this



teaching method is seen in these classes outperforming the rest during the end-of-year exams (*The Straits Times*, 16 December 2004). Of course, in the process of sourcing for and introducing novel pedagogical methods for teaching, teachers need to adapt the methods to suit the local cultural context. Through communicative activities which are interactive, enjoyable and educational, students will not only enjoy learning, but perform better in that subject. This is essential as a recent study has shown that three in four students attribute their good results in Mathematics and Science to the fact that they enjoy learning these two subjects (*The Straits Times*, 15 Dec 2004).

Apart from principals and teachers, parents play a key role in supporting the initiatives under ADE by collaborating with the school. The marketisation of education in Singapore means that parents are given more options to decide on the kind of education they want their children to receive. For example, the latest change to the bilingual policy where learning is flexible and customised allows parents to choose how much English and Mandarin they want their children to learn in schools. But given the examination-oriented culture in Singapore where parents put a lot of pressure on their children to excel in their studies, how much room are parents willing to give to help their children achieve their individual aspirations? Many pragmatic parents would prefer their children to be lawyers, doctors and accountants rather than artists, ballet dancers and poets. How can parents themselves respect and encourage the diverse talents in their children, especially talents in the non-academic aspects? Students in Singapore are also a pragmatic lot. A recent survey reveals that the most popular educational aspiration cited by students was to complete an university education. But increasingly, more young people regret spending too much time and energy on academic subjects that help them to ace their examinations but which have not helped them to appreciate life. A typical

view is expressed by a young Singaporean who argued that there is an over-emphasis on Mathematics and Science. Questioning the functionalist approach to education, he alluded to the intrinsic worth of education: "Are we learning a lot more than necessary for science and maths? ... Education is about preparation for life, not just to pass exams. It is nice to top the world in maths and science but, as we all know, we have only so much time; we need to distribute our learning more evenly, to other fields that will be crucial in our later years. This will enable us to have a culture too and not merely be walking computers" (*The Straits Times*, 17 Dec 2004). Given the changing social norms and external influences due to globalisation, parents and other stakeholders in education need to accept the fact that they may no longer impose their expectations on their children. Through mutual understanding, open-hearted interaction and constant dialogue, all the key stakeholders of education need to decide on what is really best for the country and its critical resource – its children and youth.

Note

Some materials in this article are adapted from my article "Driven by Pragmatism: Issues and Challenges in an Ability-Driven Education" in J. Tan & P.T. Ng (eds.) *Shaping Singapore's Future: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (Singapore: Prentice-Hall, 2005), pp. 5-21.



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The Route Less Travelled: From School To ITE To Polytechnic To University

Lena Koh and Dr Ricky Tam

Introduction

"We must have an education system which offers first-class education to all and not just an elite few at the top"...Singapore wants many different models and paths to success....Even if people flunk out of school, they should get many second chances to make a comeback... "We are aiming for a mountain range, not a pinnacle. We want many routes up, many ways to succeed."

*PM Lee Hsien Loang
The Straits Times, 22 Aug 2005*

One of the main points in PM Lee's National Day Rally Speech this year threw light on the nation's bid to build a strong Singapore workforce. It is one which is skilled at the various levels so as to cope with the dynamic challenges present in today's vibrant global economy. To keep up with the rapid changes, Singapore will thrive on providing first-class education that seeks to expand the educational opportunities to all her citizens. Polytechnics will be exploring running joint-degree programmes with foreign universities in niche areas. For ITE, its 5-year plan to be a global leader in technical education will see its existing 10 campuses being consolidated into 3 main campuses eventually. Operating as 'One ITE system, Three Colleges', it offers a broader curriculum, wider choice of quality courses and a vibrant campus-learning environment to cater to students' learning needs.

Background

Being a meritocratic society that places much emphasis on the paper chase, many, if given a choice, would strive to do their very best to attain the highest qualification

in the shortest time and carve a bright future for themselves. However, PM Lee recognizes and acknowledges that all individuals follow a different pace of learning, and no capable or diligent student should be deprived of the opportunity to learn and upgrade.

As such, his call for the various educational institutions to provide a higher level of learning platform so as to create more opportunities for Singapore's citizens to avail themselves to lifelong learning is not only timely but also vital. This is especially so given our small population and the need for our citizens to cope with the competitions and threats of the ever-changing world.

However, being immersed in a highly competitive society, being 'fast' is important and time is the critical factor – one has to quickly complete his course of studies in the shortest time possible to prove his skills and acumen for the workforce. It denotes success in a certain way and is perceived as such by our society. Those who are successful are considered to be the elite few while many, when measured against them, do not make the 'mark'.

To inspire the latter group of people and assure them that 'second chances' would be extended to as many levels of the education system as possible, PM Lee highlighted the success story of a former school drop-out who later made it good in life. It all started when he decided to re-enter the education system through ITE. This student 'took a different, albeit more circuitous, route to success' (*The Straits Times*, 23 August 2005). In PM Lee's view, such a case can be applied to others. In this paper, we highlight three successful "ITE-Polytechnic-University" cases. Based on



Name Mr. Eric Chen Boon Khai

Age 31 years old

Qualifications

- Nitec in Electronics Certification from ITE Bedok (now ITE College Central, Bedok campus)
- Diploma in Electronics & Computer Engineering from Ngee Ann Polytechnic
- First Class Honours Degree in Electrical & Electronic Engineering from the University of Edinburgh, UK
- Masters in Science and Post-graduate Diploma from the Imperial College, UK

Present Occupation

Head/Planning at ITE College Central (MacPherson Campus)

their stories, some generalizations that can prove instructive include: the willingness to take the longer route if it suits one's learning style better, the ability to learn from past failure and treat the failure as an opportunity for personal growth/reflection, and the inner confidence that allows one to hold one's own in the face of social stigma. Other generalizations include: appreciation for one's background and the help of those instrumental for one's success, and the power of role models in serving as inspiration.

The Route Less Travelled – ITE-Polytechnic-University

Mr. Eric Chen, Mr. Sairin Bin Sani and Mr.

Lye Ray Sen (refer to appendices for their profiles) are three young men with many similarities in their life's trials and tribulations. They had once faced the dilemma of either re-taking their 'O' levels or to take a course in ITE. The three independently decided on the latter. Although conscious of other people's negative perception of the longer route at that time, these young men resolutely remained steadfast in their decision to complete their course of study in ITE. They did well in ITE, achieving the Certificate of Merit award. Next, they progressed to the different polytechnics, and later, the Universities to pursue their interest and field of study. They have taken the 'less travelled' route. Hard though this path may be, all three recounted their success and attributed it to ITE. It was, for them, the turning point in life.

ITE – An Institution of Choice

1. A Flexible, Practical and Relevant Curriculum

PM Lee shared in his National Day Rally Speech on 21 August that he had asked the Minister of Education, Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, "Do ITE students enjoy ITE? Do they enjoy school? Is it the same?" The minister replied that it was not the same. PM then asked the students too and the students affirmed that, for learners like them, ITE is much better as it is more hands on. This, to the PM, was an indication that there are lessons to be gleaned from the success of ITE curriculum and approach.

The above observation was further affirmed by the three successful ITE graduates. Eric, Sairin and Ray Sen concurred that ITE has provided a good foundation for them to do well in their subsequent studies in the polytechnics and universities.

Ray Sen noted, "ITE is especially good for 'late-bloomers' who need the extra two years to build a good foundation for their rudimentary skills and knowledge. This

proves to benefit the ITE graduates greatly especially when they progress to Polytechnic. They are able to adapt faster than their peers who are secondary school-leavers." For many former ITE students, their self-esteem is often boosted at the polytechnics when they are able to keep up with or even do better than the 'O' level holders.

Sharing similar sentiments, Eric Chen said, "Those who are more technically inclined would find it more meaningful to learn and study in ITE. ITE's curriculum enables them to appreciate the theoretical knowledge learnt better as it would be linked to the practical workshop sessions when the knowledge is applied and skills acquired." For Sairin Bin Sani, he felt that ITE accommodates the learner's pace of learning and allows the individual to discover his strengths and potential. The project-based learning activities and the long laboratory/workshop sessions hone the learner's skills and encourage much exploration and development of analytical skills. "ITE's comprehensive training focuses on imparting the skills that are demanded by the industries. Students are made to see the relevance and application of their skills and knowledge to their future work or career. This spurs them on to do better."

It certainly seems like the adoption of more 'hands-on' learning activities is one of the most well-appreciated features of ITE. The teaching pedagogy adopted by ITE is very much in alignment with the nation's promotion of the 'Teach Less, Learn More' philosophy. Indeed, ITE College Brand of Education aims to nurture all ITE students into "Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on" graduates. Students can benefit from their:

- **"Hands-on"** training which equips them with the knowledge and skills-set required on the job
- **"Minds-on"** learning which nurtures creative and independent thinking and the ability to adapt
- **"Hearts-on"** learning which develops



Name Mr. Lye Ray Sen

Age 33 years old

Qualifications

- Higher Nitec in Electronics Engineering from Singapore Technical Institute (now ITE College Central, Tampines campus)
- Diploma in Electronics, Computer & Communications Engineering from Nanyang Polytechnic
- First Class Honours Bachelor of Engineering Degree in Electrical & Electronics Engineering from the University of Newcastle, UK
- MBA in Infocommunication from the University of Adelaide, Australia

Present Occupation

Director and co-owner of Discovery Studios, a recording company.

"complete" ITE students with values towards self, others and the community

Each ITE College also provides students with more options for cross-level and multi-disciplinary learning. Each will develop its niche areas and specialisations to promote innovation and diversification, to realize ITE's vision in being **A Global Leader in Technical Education.**

2. A Nurturing and Caring Environment

The three outstanding young men have rightly applied the meaning of a Chinese idiom "yin shui si yuan" (meaning to know



Name Mr. Sairin Bin Sani

Age 27 years old

Qualifications

- Nitec in Automotive Technology Certification from ITE Balestier (now ITE College West, Balestier campus)
- Diploma in Mechanical Engineering from Singapore Polytechnic
- First-Class Honours Degree in Mechanical & Production Engineering from the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore

Present Occupation

Serving National Service. Intends to pursue a career in the aeronautical industry.

"Don't solder like that. When you go into the industry, don't say you are from ITE." – Ray

"ITE teachers treat us more like adults, allowing more freedom and flexibility in learning. They encourage us to explore our ideas and learn from our mistakes. They discipline us in our skills training, nurture our enthusiasm for learning and motivate us to do better." – Sairin Bin Sani

With inspiring educators, ITE further reinforces its stalwart pillar – a Student Care Framework that includes its Guidance and Motivational Programmes. This comprehensive framework orientates new students to forge a strong identity and sense of belonging once they join the institution. Noting its merit, Eric Chen said, "Recognizing the learner's needs, this framework even ensures that there is a good mix of students with different capabilities within a class to promote effective learning."

All in all, Ray Sen exemplifies the ITE education system as one that "teaches the learners to work hard and yet work smart." This makes ITE students "rather street smart." And this savviness is precisely one of the much-touted traits in the New Economy. Indeed, traits like the ability to see the big picture and to thrive in uncertain conditions where the only constant is change are what today's graduates need to adapt in a globalised economy.

3. The Winning Attitude

Eric, Ray Sen and Sairin did not do well in their secondary school days. Like many young adolescents, these active teenagers wanted to enjoy their teenage years and did not place much importance on their studies. Fate dealt a blow on them when they realized they could not continue with the 'normal' path in education. They, however, do not quit easily. Each shares here below their unique and poignant story.

"I chose to deviate from the normal stream of education when I was in secondary three

the source of your goodness). In interviews, they never fail to attribute their success to their ITE lecturers and the ITE system in general. Sample below some of their views:

"Our ITE lecturers are caring teachers who view their students without any bias. Instead, they treat every student as individuals with potential, waiting to be discovered and strengthened." – Eric Chen.

"Our ITE lecturers take a lot of pain, time and effort in nurturing, disciplining and motivating the students. They instil pride in what we do. I remember once how my lecturer impressed upon me then when I did a piece of shoddy work and machined a metal piece not to specifications. He said,

because I did not want to conform – I had a rebellious streak in me back then. I went on to work part-time as a waiter for two years and that was when I realized that no matter how hard I worked, I will not go very far ahead in terms of my meager income. ***I wanted to do well for my future.*** The 'school of hard-knocks' made me realize that I had to work within the system to be termed as 'successful' as I was conscious of how society perceived me as a 'lost cause' then.

Success means a lot to me. If given a choice, I would still choose to go through the slow and steady route as it has brought me to what I am today...I am not an aimless person. In fact, I have identified ITE as my turning point because I learnt in ITE that I must set concrete goals. All individuals should have goals in life!

Eric Chen is so appreciative of his alma mater that upon his return from his Masters in Science & Post-graduate Diploma studies at Imperial College in UK, he opted to return to ITE and contribute to its vision to be a global leader in technical education. He is now presently serving as the Head/Planning with ITE College Central.

Similarly, for Ray Sen, an enterprising entrepreneur and co-owner of the recording company 'Discovery Studio', being confident about one's future is a priority in his life. But it was also his confidence that caused him to slacken in his 'O' level studies. Learning from his mistake, he then decided to pursue his study in ITE to redeem himself. To motivate him, his father once shared with him the success story of an ITE graduate who did well in the University of Sheffield. This set him thinking "If he can do it, so can I!", he told himself. He has never looked back since. In ITE's nurturing environment, Ray Sen renewed his confidence and earned himself the Certificate of Merit that paved the way for a Polytechnic Diploma, a Bachelor of Engineering (First Class Honours) and an MBA in Infocommunication. Ray Sen said,

"You must believe that your dream will come true!"

Sairin Sani admitted disliking school and studies – the trait of a typical student disinterested in everything around him. As a result, he did badly in secondary school and was a disappointment to his parents. Though he could have repeated his 'O' levels, he chose to pursue his study in ITE because he wanted to start anew. "There was only one choice but I wanted to make good use of my choice," he recalled. Sairin has more than exceeded his own goal. This year, he made news when he obtained a First Class Honours Degree in Mechanical and Production Engineering from Nanyang Technological University. Putting his experiences and achievements in perspective, he said, "I had a friend who decided on repeating his 'O' levels. He did not believe in ITE education. He had to re-take his exams 3 times before he finally cleared them. He eventually took an even longer route.... The lesson learnt here is that you need to find your own interests, what you like to do,... and to know that if you fail once, it doesn't mean that you will fail all the time.... ***I want to do the best in what I do; I would never entertain the thought that "I can't do it."***"

Conclusion

In the past, many may eschew the 'longer scenic route' but the success stories of these three young men should inspire many. Their learning points in life could be applied to our young nowadays who may not be academically inclined but who seek to realize their potential through a steady pace of learning. As aptly summed up by Sairin Sani "*Jauh perjalanan luas pemandangan*" (meaning a longer route offers a wider view/broader perspective of life). The 'longer scenic route' may just be the right answer for those who know what they want in life – eventually.

✉ Ms Lena Koh is the Acting Course Manager of Lifeskills Department in ITE College Central. Dr. Ricky Tam is the Principal of ITE College Central.

Reflecting on a New Feature in the Landscape: Integrated Programmes

Trivina Kang

Why Integrated Programmes?

During his address at the 5th Appointment Ceremony of Principals on 30 Dec 2002, then Minister of Education, Rear Admiral Teo Chee Hean announced the introduction of Integrated Programmes (IP) in the Raffles and Hwa Chong families of schools, National Junior College and Anglo Chinese Secondary (Independent). Since the Committee¹ to review Junior College and Upper Secondary Education was established in April 2002, there had been much discussion about the need to diversify the upper secondary landscape and create intellectual space for the best and brightest in each cohort. However, the policy decision to allow a select group of students to skip the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level Examinations (GCE "O" Levels) in order to facilitate a seamless educational experience from Secondary 3 to JC2 was an extremely bold one. It effectively eliminated the role the GCE "O" Levels had played for years – to serve as a gatekeeper standardized examination that would determine post-secondary opportunities and pathways for Singapore students. In other words, it sent the signal that even without taking the "O" Levels; some students would be guaranteed a junior college education by virtue of being selected for the IP.



The rationale is that without the pressure of preparing for this highstake examination, such "through-train" education will "add value to the education of the IP students by developing their capacities for creative and critical thinking...to provide them with opportunities to develop intellectual curiosity and ensure that they acquire a broad based education" (Ministry of Education 2002: 56). Since IP students are meant to be in the top 5-10% of each cohort and expected to perform well in the "O" Levels and will be university bound, it was argued that the "O" Level examination would not serve its sorting purposes for this group. It was thus better to let them focus on learning rather than preparing for the "O" Levels, followed by the "A" Levels two years later.

1. The committee made two key recommendations that they believed would further develop Singapore's best students. Namely, have a broader and more flexible curriculum and provide a more diverse education landscape. The first recommendation has taken shape in terms of a revised junior college (JC) curriculum that will be rolled out in 2006. This will be oriented towards developing thinking skills, and will engage students in greater breadth of learning. The revised curriculum will provide flexibility for students to study subjects at two levels - Higher 1 (H1) and Higher 2 (H2) so that students can decide on the scope of content of a subject they wish to take. To encourage breadth of knowledge, students will be required to study at least one subject outside of their main area of specialization. In addition, students with exceptional strengths in a particular subject can pursue it at a higher level or in greater depth than the regular H2 curriculum, at the H3 level. The second recommendation encompasses a range of new programmes including the Integrated Programme (IP) which seek to provide a seamless Upper Secondary and Junior College (JC) education, specialized schools to cater to students with exceptional talents in sports, the arts, math and science and privately-run and funded schools. Schools would also be allowed to adopt alternative curricula and prepare students for internationally recognized qualifications.

However, the IP is not just about allowing a group of students to skip the "O" Levels. Rather, seen more broadly, the IP is yet another example of how Ministry of Education (MOE) is customizing the *Thinking Schools Learning Nation* (TSLN) initiative for the best students in Singapore "to ensure that education in Singapore remains relevant to the shifting demands of the knowledge age and that our students are well-prepared for future challenges" (Ministry of Education, 2002:19). As the Minister of Education, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam has pointed out, Singapore must not rest on its laurels for the world is changing and "we will not succeed if we produce young Singaporeans who are too regular, or too much of the same mould...We need Singaporeans with different talents and different ways of thinking, willing to test ideas and approaches off each other, and with people from around the world who will be part of what defines Singapore." (The Straits Times, 7 March 2004).

Singapore's education system is committed to ensuring that all students have critical thinking skills, life long learning passion and commitment to the nation. Current initiatives like Innovation and Enterprise (2003) and National Education (1997) are geared to promote such skills/values across the student population. However, there is acknowledgement that the intellectual elite, the best and the brightest in Singapore especially need to be nurtured to be "leaders, innovators and citizens of tomorrow" (Ministry of Education 2002:11). The IP is designed for this particular group of students, by providing them opportunities that other students would not have. Namely a less structured and less examination driven upper secondary education that is intended to let them experience a greater breadth in academic and non academic curriculum. It is envisioned that such an education would spur them to be among other things, independent and critical thinkers, passionate about their pursuits

and innovators that would spearhead Singapore's economy in the future.

What do Integrated Programmes look like?

On 1 Jan 2004, eight schools: Raffles Institution (RI), Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) (RGSS), Raffles Junior College (RJC), The Chinese High School² (TCHS), Nanyang Girls' School (NYGH), Hwa Chong Junior College (HCJC), National Junior College (NJC) and Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) (ACS (I)) embarked as pioneer IP schools. They were joined on 1 Jan 2005 by Temasek Junior College (TJC), Victoria Junior College (VJC) and Dunman High School (DHS) bringing the total number of IP schools to eleven.

Although all the above schools are frequently referred to as the "IP" schools, it has to be emphasized that it is not one singular common Integrated Programme as such, but rather different versions of "Integrated Programmes" are currently offered.

The "Family of Schools" Model

The Raffles Programme (involving RI, RGSS, RJC) and Hwa Chong Programme (involving HCI and NYGH) are distinctive in the coupling of a secondary school with an affiliated junior college to provide a six year programme from Secondary 1 to Junior College Year 2 (JC2). In other words, students who are admitted into Secondary 1 from 2004 onwards will be assured of a place all the way through and a spot in either RJC or the HCI's junior college programme.

In an effort to cater to their existing students, RGSS, RI and the former TCHS have allowed students who were in Secondary 1 and 2 in 2003 to opt for the IP. In addition, students who are not from these schools can also enter the Raffles Programme at Secondary 3 as RGSS will take in about 35 extra students and RI will

2. On 1 Jan 2005, Chinese High School and Hwa Chong Junior College were merged and renamed Hwa Chong Institution (HCI).

take in 70 students. The Hwa Chong Programme will take also in Secondary 3 IP students from NYGH.

The "High School" Model

Junior colleges like National, Temasek and Victoria are also offering the Integrated Programme but it is to a select group of Secondary 3 students that they admit over and above their usual cohort of junior college students. In a model similar to the High School model; students will spend four years in the junior college environment instead of two and will be exposed to an integrated curriculum that seeks to encourage critical thinking and creativity through problem based learning.

The "Extended Secondary School" Model

ACS (I) and DHS are similar in that they seek to cater for a select group of their students for a full six years. However, at the end of six years, students from ACS (I) will be sitting for the Swiss International Baccalaureate (IB), while those in Dunman High School Academy will be sitting for the A-Level Examinations as well as the Hanyu Shuiping Kao Shi³. The programmes are also different in that the ACS (I) model is technically a 4 year programme beginning in Secondary 3 with a 2 year pre-IB programme followed by a 2 year IB programme. In other words, not all ACS (I) students are automatically eligible for

the IP since the selection is only made at the end of Secondary 2.

Although not included as part of the IP, specialized independent schools like the National University of Singapore Maths

and Science High School, the Singapore Sports School, the soon to be opened Specialized School for the Arts, as well as privately funded schools like Anglo Chinese School (International) and Hwa Chong International are also part of a sea change that is occurring to the Upper Secondary and Junior college education landscape. Together, they provide a wider array of education choices for students and parents.

What does all this mean?

For Parents

Such diversity of IP options, before the PSLE, after the PSLE and even later on in secondary school requires that parents need to more aware of the options available for their children. For example, IP schools now have the flexibility to engage in direct admission of students, and the IP secondary schools admitted up to 50% of their 2005 Secondary 1 students through the Direct School Admission Exercise, before the central posting exercise held after the PSLE results were released. A parent who is interested in sending his/her child to an IP school but is unaware of this would effectively miss out on the opportunities of direct admissions. For parents who would like their children to enter the IP schools mid-stream at Secondary 3 level, they need be aware of the requirement and schedules for reasoning tests, interviews, portfolios as well as references from their teachers. These tests as well as the selection trials and camps, that specialized schools like the sports schools and the NUS High Schools may require, are held at different parts of the school year. Thus parents who are interested in having their children considered for these programmes would need to keep abreast of datelines and admission criteria. In short, in order to take full advantage of this diversification of the educational landscape, parents need to be



3. The Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi, also known as HSK, or the Chinese Proficiency Test, is the national standardized test of Chinese as a foreign language, as recognized by the People's Republic of China and numerous countries worldwide. Established in Beijing in 1988, the HSK is widely recognized as the most comprehensive of Chinese language proficiency tests.

informed of the full range of opportunities available for their children. The empirical question is whether parents who are less educated or less familiar with increasingly complex educational choices will be aware of the wider range of choices available.

In today's diverse and ever changing educational environment, the payout from having informed parents is probably even higher than it was in the past. One reason for this is the tighter coupling between secondary and post-secondary education. Secondary school choices can benefit students in tangible longer-term ways. For example, from 2004, talented HCI students can enroll for two first-year courses at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) over a four month semester. If they pass, credits obtained will allow them to skip courses and graduate earlier if they continue their studies at NTU. Such exposure would also allow such junior college students an opportunity to meet university faculty even before they enter university. With the greater autonomy given to universities to select "exceptional talent" for university admission (Ministry of Education, 2004) such interaction prior to admission could be advantageous for these students.

As admission to the IP is done at either Secondary 1 or 3, parents play an extremely critical role in making decisions because students may not be mature enough. Thus, in order to ensure that the best and most talented students are channeled to the IP, it is necessary to ensure that parents from different demographic backgrounds are given adequate information to make their selections. My concern is that not all parents are given the same amount of information and to some extent, IP schools in their marketing exercise of open houses etc reinforce this. For example, VJC, for example, took out a \$20,000 half-page advertisement in The Straits Times on July 5 2004 aimed at parents. The NUS High School also placed three advertisements in The Straits Times and Streets in May 2004.

What is interesting is that these are all English newspapers, suggesting to me that consciously or unconsciously, schools are marketing their programmes at particular types of parents – namely the English speaking parents.

For Teachers

The recent changes in the upper secondary and junior college arena have been extensive. Teachers in junior college IP schools will probably face the most challenges because not only do they have to adapt to teaching the IP curriculum with its varied pedagogy and assessment modes, they would also have to prepare for the implementation of the new Singapore-Cambridge "A" Level curriculum in 2006. For example, Philosophy, a subject that has been traditionally taught at the tertiary level, has now been introduced in many IP schools, while project and portfolio work are now key components of the IP students' learning experience. The increased demands on teachers in IP schools are not confined to effective delivery of the curriculum. For example, junior college teachers, accustomed to dealing with 17 and 18 year olds, will now have to deal with 14 and 15 year olds and manage their relationship with their older school mates in common spheres like co-curricular activities (CCA).

Teachers in the IP in secondary schools also have to learn quickly. For example, teachers in ACS (I) have been trained intensively to get ready for mounting the Swiss IB, having had no prior experience in this area. However, unlike their counterparts in HCI, at least they would not have additional co-educational issues the former might encounter when NYGH students join the IP in Secondary 3.

Teachers involved in the IP are responsible for delivering a programme that distinguishes itself from mainstream programmes through its effectiveness for student learning and its cognitive coherence. Yet, at the end of four or six years, these teachers are ultimately

responsible for ensuring that their students perform well at the GCE "A" Levels. It is an important empirical question how teachers will be able to balance the need to prepare students for a high stakes examination and their use of creative and learner-centred techniques.

On a more macro level, such changes to the educational landscape may lead to movement of teachers across school types; with a possible influx of teachers towards such new programmes. IP and specialized schools may appear attractive due to smaller class sizes and opportunities to work with bright and motivated students who are in the top 5-10 percent of their cohort. Since most of the students in these programmes are likely to be from the Gifted and Express stream, teachers will also face a more homogeneous cohort of students. In the light of these possible advantages, it would be interesting to see if there will any change in transfer patterns among the teachers in Singapore.

Concluding Thoughts

There is no doubt that the best minds in each cohort are found in the IP schools. When the 2004 "O" Level results were released, 20 of the 21 students who posted 10 A1 scores came from either RGSS or RI. The other student was from DHS, another IP school. If the best and brightest of each cohort flock towards the IP schools and remain there for up to six years, the possibility for nurturing their cognitive growth and development is immense. If such schools are able to unleash creativity and spirit of enquiry in their students, these students would be well placed to contribute enormously to Singapore's future economic success. With the longer duration spent with IP school-mates, these students will also be able to forge stronger school and social identities as well as build stronger peer networks. This would bode well for the creation of a new generation of future leaders. However, precisely because these students are educated in such a unique context, they need to be carefully nurtured

such that they realize their rights but also social and civic responsibilities. They need to realize that their friends and school are not representative of students in their cohort or society in general and opportunities must be provided for them to be exposed to other students in their cohort.

It is likely that the IP schools will further distinguish themselves from the other secondary schools in the future. For example, even though they are no longer included in the school banding league tables, these schools were winners of various prestigious achievement awards presented at the MOE Work Plan seminar in 2004. For example, ACS (I) and RI both won the School Excellence Award and School Distinction Award, while DHS, RGSS and NYGH won the School Distinction awards together with a series of Best Practices and Sustained Achievement Awards.

However, what is crucial is that even as IP schools take the lead to bring Singapore closer towards the vision of TSLN, what is even more important is that non-IP schools, *who are* responsible for majority of each cohort, constantly adapt and learn from them in order to develop and provide quality education for *all* students. Only then can we truly say that we have a diverse educational landscape in Singapore that maximizes the potential of all our students.

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Operation CARE – Every Child Counts at Jin Tai Secondary

Noorismawaty Ismail

*“Intelligence plus character
- that is the goal of true education.”*

Martin Luther King Jnr, cited by Lynch 2003

Introduction

Our Minister, Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, once said, “An outstanding teacher shows care for his students.” CARE, is perhaps the most important quality. Whenever students are asked about what qualities they deem important in a good teacher, CARE is often the response given. Students remember most the teacher who cared for them, who bolstered their self-image, who took time to be a friend, a mentor and a guardian, while all the time making sure that they master useful skills and knowledge. Teachers’ opinions of their students shape their behaviour and life. If teachers care to encourage students and let them know there is something good in them, they will stretch and reach the potential they have. A teacher who cares will be ready to go that extra mile for his students. Love for the students will fire his passion for teaching. It is this quality of care that will leave the strongest impression on our students.

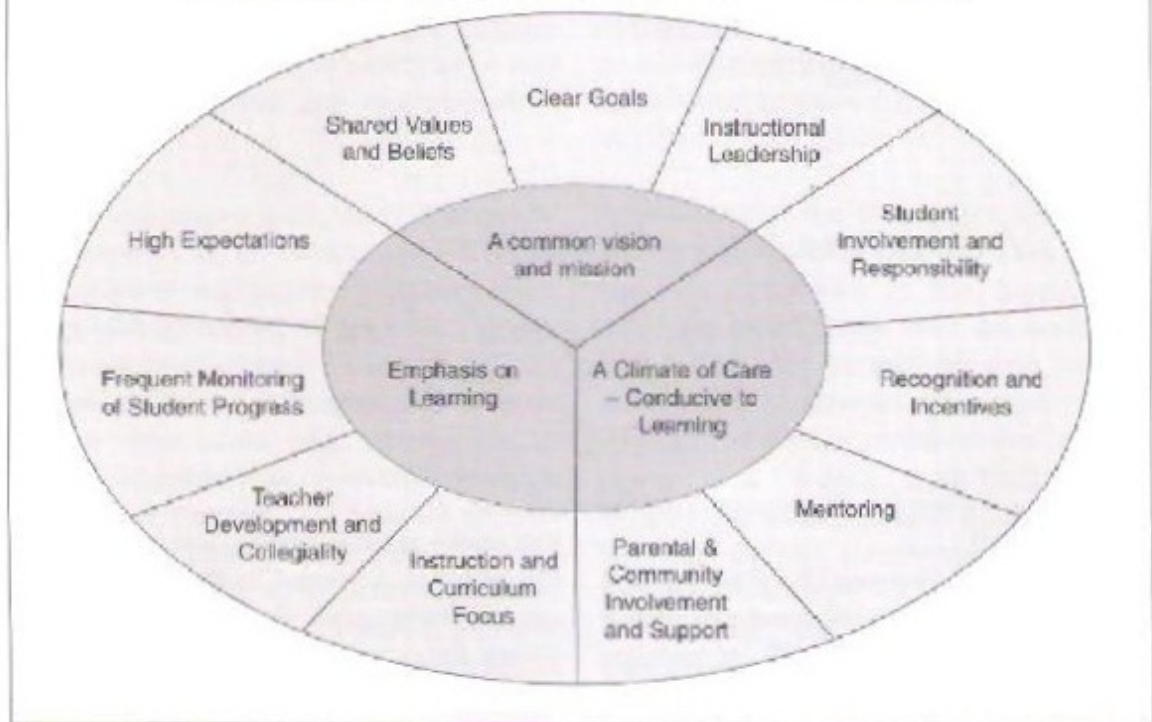
In JTSS, we have a vision of a learning and caring community

that seeks to bring out the best in everyone. We possess a mission to develop in pupils responsibility and respect for self and others through innovative, learner-centred programmes in a caring school environment. The caring environment refers to the heart-ware of effective and nurturing teachers who are able to give not only the guidance but also the impetus to learning. We also believe that all of us at Jin Tai, both students and staff, are to engage in the pursuit of life-long learning and improvement. To do so, our programmes are not only challenging but also able to instill in our students academic excellence, responsibility, respect for self and respect for others.



Reaching out to the elderly

Figure 1 Framework for a Holistic Education in JTSS
(Adapted from Effective Schools Task Force, Halton Board of Education)



By showing care, we hope to instill in our students a sense of confidence in their abilities and potential. This in turn will spur them to persevere in the face of difficulties and be willing to rise to challenges ahead. Through our character development programme and values education, we aim to imbue in our students a sense of moral courage and personal responsibility. They must learn to respect others and show civic consciousness and awareness of their behaviour as responsible citizens.

In this environment of care and concern, the school seeks to provide a holistic education which encompass and integrate multiple layers of meaning and experience in our curriculum and programmes. We consider every child as more than a future employee; every person's intelligence and abilities are far more complex than his or her scores on tests and examinations. Thus, our endeavours at creating a holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. (See Fig.1)

A Climate of Care – Conducive to Learning

1 Student Involvement & Responsibility

❖ Values Education

The objectives of Values Education are to help students achieve personal and interpersonal effectiveness right from Secondary One and instill in them the value of communication with their parents and siblings. We also explored study skills and techniques with students to achieve better results. In addition, we hope to raise students' Emotional Quotient and the ability to control their emotions better. Thus, the following programmes have been put in place:

- Secondary One: 8 Highly Effective Habits for Teenagers
- Secondary Two: Effective School & Home Etiquette and Communication
- Secondary Three: Effective Study Skills
- Secondary Four (Normal): Self & Anger Management and Conflict Resolution, Effective EQ, AQ and Effective Teenage Relationship

- Secondary Four (Express) & Five (Normal): Social Etiquette & Mannerism, Careers, Study Tips for 'O' level

❖ *Community Involvement Programme (CIP)*

To instill in pupils a sense of compassion and caring, we have developed a whole-school approach towards CIP. All students aim to achieve a minimum of 6 CIP hours and this is carried out through a variety of programmes like flag-days, fund-raising and old newspaper collection. The school has also adopted several blocks in the vicinity and in Bukit Merah, providing needy residents with foodstuff and even entertaining and cleaning the homes of the senior citizens. We also took part in the President's Challenge to raise our students' awareness of the role they can play in helping the needy. These activities have helped us to develop morally upright individuals who can contribute to the society. The CIP also complements the formal curriculum in achieving the Desired Outcomes of Education.

❖ *Arts Education*

Arts through Assembly/ Pastoral Care lessons are introduced to cultivate in pupils an appreciation for theatre, music and dance, and to encourage student participation in drama, music and dance. Since 2000, we have introduced performing arts during Assembly, under the NAC Arts Education Programme. In addition, students attend public performances on musicals and plays. They participate in the SYF, dance and drama competitions and also stage plays during school assemblies. At the Singapore Youth Festival this year, our dance groups won 1 Silver (Chinese and Western Dance) and 3 Bronze (Concert Band, Malay Dance & Indian Dance) awards. The school provides many opportunities for our students to nurture their talents in the arts, especially in the

area of performing arts. The Talentime competitions have encouraged many budding musicians and singers to showcase their talents. The group 3-Dash-1 which won first place in the School of Rock Competition is made up of 3 ex-Jin Taians whose talent in music had been nurtured in the school. They had performed in school concerts and even held one to raise funds for the needy.

❖ *Co-Curricular Activities*

Our niche area is the Uniformed Groups made up of the National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC), St. John Ambulance Brigade (SJAB) and the Rusa Scouts. In the uniformed groups, the values of discipline and teamwork are inculcated through the programmes in the respective groups. Being in the uniformed groups is also an opportunity for students to develop their leadership skills. Their resilience and ruggedness are also nurtured through adventure camps and activities like the Outward Bound School. A rigorous and comprehensive programme, the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA), is also introduced to our uniformed group cadets so that they develop holistically and become well rounded individuals. The achievements in our co-curricular activities in the last 3 years are as tabulated.



Fund-raising in school

Figure 2 CCA Achievements 2003-2005

ACTIVITIES	2005	2004	2003
Chinese & Western Dance (SYF)	Silver		Gold
Concert Band (SYF)	Bronze	No competition	Bronze
International Dance (SYF)	(no participation)		Silver
Malay Dance (SYF)	Bronze		Bronze
Indian Dance (SYF)	Bronze		Certificate of Participation
Gymnastics ('C' Division in National Gymnastics Championship)	Cavan Chan (Individual) • 1st in High Bar • 2nd in Pommel Horse • 3rd in Parallel Bar • 2nd in Overall	unplaced	3rd
NCC (Best Unit Award)		Bronze	Bronze
NPCC		Bronze	Silver
Scouts (Frank Sand's Award)	Results only available in 2006	Bronze	Bronze
St John Ambulance Brigade (Corps Achievement Award)		Bronze	Bronze
Soccer ('B' Boys in Zone Championship)	2 boys received South Zone Colours Award	3rd	2nd
Soccer ('C' Boys in Zone Championship)	Qualified for National League 1 championship	unplaced	3rd
Volleyball ('B' Girls in Zone Championship)	3rd in South Zone	unplaced	unplaced
NAPFA Results	Silver	Silver	Silver
NYAA	35 Silver 10 Bronze	25 Bronze 27 Silver	42 Bronze 12 Silver

• *Community Safety and Security Programme*

One aspect of the MOE-police partnership is the school adoption of the Community Safety and Security Programme (or CSSP for short), pioneered by the Home Team in our schools in April 2000. CSSP enables schools, through joint planning and action with the Home Team and community partners, to address safety and security concerns, create a safer and more secure school environment and develop greater civic consciousness in our students.

In Jin Tai Secondary School a camp is organised to focus on how our students would be better able to serve the

community. With increased knowledge of the law and the consequences of breaking it, they have become more aware on how to help keep the community safe and secure.

Besides programmes involving the Police, our school also collaborated with the SCDF to extend civil defense skills training to students. A training session where participants learn vital life saving and other civil defense skills was conducted in November last year.

Through school CSSP, the school is empowered to take bolder and more innovative steps in fostering greater confidence and self-esteem in our youths. Along the way, our students also



Teambuilding games.

pick up useful skills. In short, CSSP has instilled a spirit of self-help and mutual support in our students. These are important attributes for our young to embrace as we remake Singapore.

II Mentoring

The goal of mentoring is to raise our students' educational achievement by raising their self-esteem and confidence through rapport-building conferencing and meetings. All Form teachers are mentors and they act as 'coaches' to their students. These mentoring sessions have helped the teachers to get to know their students better as a class and as individuals. In addition to that, informal conferencing sessions are also carried out between Form Teacher and student for a more personalized and confidential mode of counseling.

The E4/N5 students enjoy an 'enhanced'

mentoring scheme as they will be sitting for the GCE 'O' Level Examinations. Apart from the mentoring sessions by their Form Teachers, they are also 'adopted' by other teachers in the school. This Pupil Achievement Tracking (PAT) Programme is introduced primarily to help the graduating students cope with the pressure and

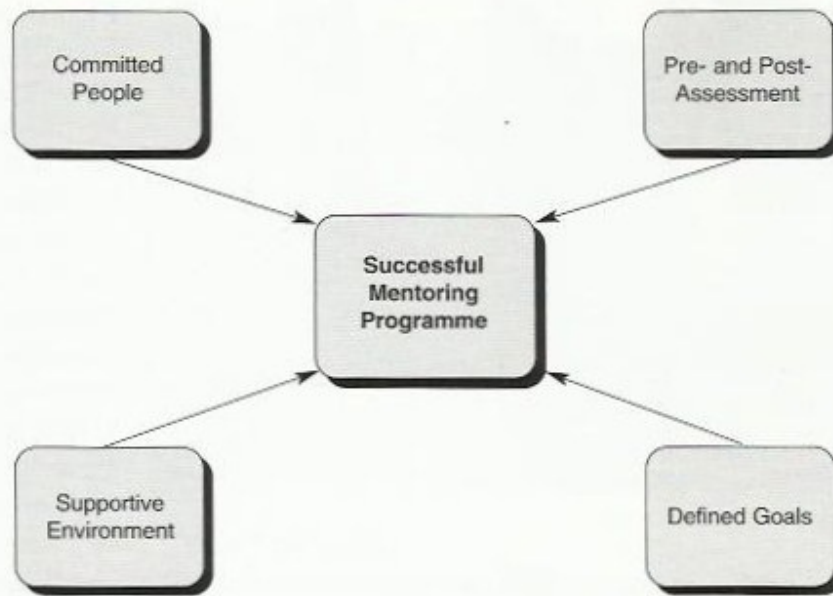
difficulties they may face in their preparation for the national examinations. We also aim to raise our students' academic performance by monitoring their results. Students meet their mentors regularly, not just to discuss academic issues, but also to raise problems they may face. Mentors thus act as supporting pillars to the students.

The programme is successful due to the commitment of the teachers in adding value to the lives of the students under their care. Using the Pupil Profile Form,



Life-saving skills course.

Figure 3 Factors for a Successful Mentoring Programme
 (Adapted from Encyclopedia of Educational Technology, 1999. San Diego State of University)



feedback gathered from the students is documented for monitoring and pertinent issues are raised to help the students accordingly.

III Recognition and Incentives

Our deserving students are recognised for their contribution and efforts. Several awards are given out annually. They are:

- Jin Tai Award
- Academic Awards
- CCA Awards
- EAGLES Award
- SINGA Award
- Merit Award
- Students' Council Investiture
- Students' Council Retreat
- Class Committee Certificates of Appreciation

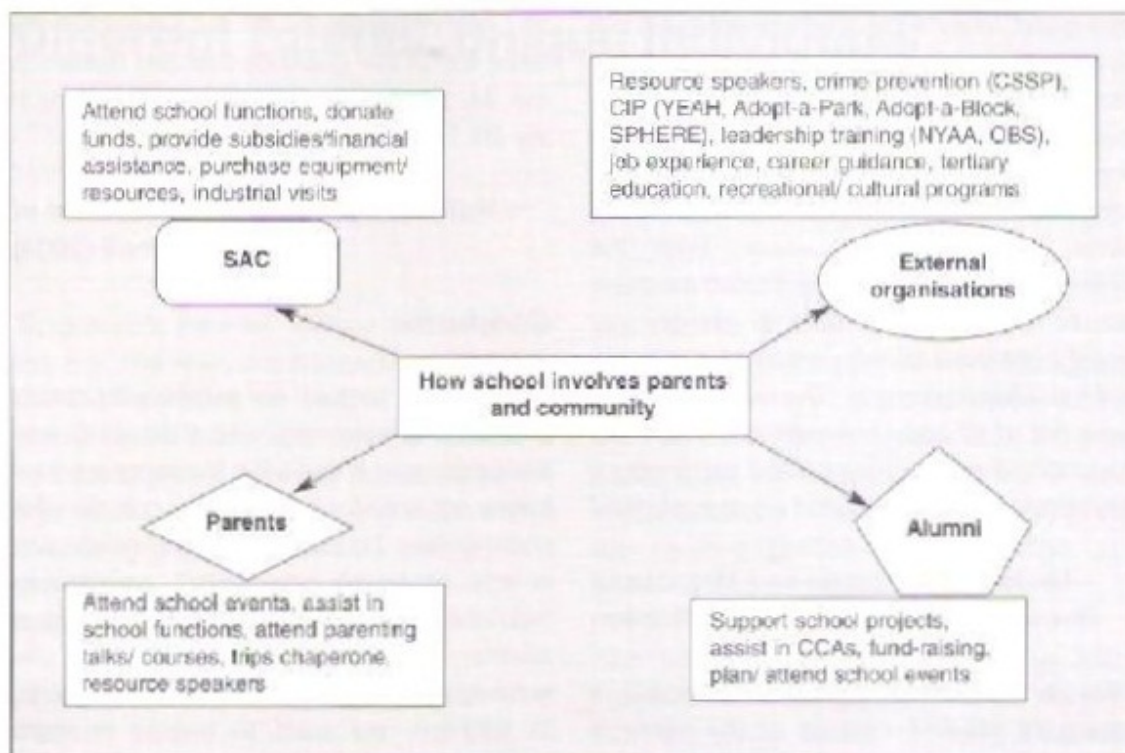
IV Parental and Community Involvement and Support

In the area of parental involvement, precedence is given to the following measures:

- a) helping families establish a conducive home environment to support the children's learning at school
- b) sustaining the flow of information from the school to home and vice versa
- c) encouraging parents to attend school functions and to act as volunteers

Parent volunteers, armed with impeccable educational achievements and diverse experiences, have the capacity to boost pupils' learning in the school. In sharing their knowledge and expertise, they help to motivate pupils. They also offer their time, talent, skills and financial resources to assist the school in various ways. Thus, the school respects and cares for parents and their children, as there is a need to work together for the welfare of the pupils.

Col. (Retd.) Tony-Wong Jensen, father of Hans-Wong Jensen, is the Chairman of the School Advisory Committee. Although his son graduated last year, Mr. Tony-Wong Jensen is still active in the SAC. Together with numerous other parents, he is also invited to grace school events like the Student Councillor Investiture, Speech and Prize-Giving Day, and Cross Country. Parental involvement is further sought in



the Tamil and English LDDS and they feature regularly in school events and competitions. Parent volunteers also help in the planning and organization of NE-related events like the Racial Harmony Day and International Friendship Day. In recognition of their contribution, the school presents them with the 'Friends of Jin Tai' Award during the Speech and Prize-Giving Day.

Collaboration with the wider community is maintained at two levels:

- a) connections to enable the community to contribute to the school
- b) connections to enable the school to contribute to the community

As a result of these "connections", our pupils benefit through added skills from an enriched extracurricular experience. They also gain knowledge of careers and options for future education and work. In addition, the pupils gain in self-confidence and feel valued by the community. They also develop positive relationships with adults in the community.

The alumni are actively involved in the school programmes. The Jin Tai Alumni Association (JTAA) was formally launched

on 13th July 2002 and the alumni members have already immersed themselves in the school programmes, especially in the CCAs. 4 ex-pupils are involved as either Cadet Inspectors or Honorary Instructors with the NPCC. They help to organize and conduct weekly NPCC training sessions. The St. John's Ambulance Brigade, NCC and Band also have a regular number of ex-pupils who volunteer to help out with the CCAs. In addition, the alumni are also invited to school events like the National Day Celebration. The alumni are active in school camps and adventure trips organized by the CCA Department.

The School Advisory Committee is instrumental in providing financial support for the school programs. For instance, the SAC sponsored publicity materials and goody bags for the school's Open House in 2003. They also provide financial assistance to our needy pupils.

Testimonies by parents and pupils

"We found all the Jin Tai teachers approachable, compassionate, understanding and very patient. We had no difficulty in communicating with them because they always found time for us despite their heavy

workload. They were well trained to handle teenagers and to encourage them to develop their potential. As a result, confused teenagers like our daughter and her friends found their special areas of interest. They also found their direction in life, at a crucial time in their school years. With the relentless help from the dedicated teachers at Jin Tai, we were able to identify our child's potential talents, areas of weakness and academic leaning. The whole process was not at all easy but over four years the teachers constantly supported us. It was a tremendous joint effort and we succeeded."

– Mr. Howard Russon and Mrs. Jenny Russon, parents of Mary-Ann Russon

"For a school to nurture and boost a student's interest outside of the class is something to be proud of. My school played a very big role in the creation of my band, 3-Dash-1 and other bands. My band members are also from the same school. After the creation of the band, we were constantly looking for opportunities to perform in front of crowds and spectators. The school gave us loads of opportunities to do so. It invited bands and musicians to audition for school performances such as Teacher's Day, Racial Harmony Day and even Talentime. Through these opportunities, we felt that our talents mattered and that we have a future."

– Muhd. Ashik, Leader of band 3-Dash-1, Winner in School of Rock Competition

"If I had not been in Jin Tai, I would never have found the qualities that are hidden in me. My teachers have made a difference in my life."

– Ruth Hou Enzhen, Vice-President of Student Council (2004)

Conclusion

We want to nurture our pupils with minds that keep questioning, and a desire to use their skills and knowledge to create a better future not only for themselves, but also the community. Through a customised and holistic education programme, we seek to help every pupil find and develop his unique talents, and grow and graduate from the school, a confident and responsible youth. In addition, we want to imbibe in them resilience, the 'toughness' to overcome difficulties and setbacks, and eventually work hard to pursue their dreams. We need to ensure that as learning activities become more meaningful, motivational, multi-faceted and even go beyond the classroom, there must be programmes that help pupils to be the best that they can be and yet hone other life-skills such as leadership service and creativity.

Reference

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✉ Noorismawaty Ismail is the HOD/Pupil Management at Jin Tai Secondary School.

Different Talents, Unique Individuals

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts

Singapore's premier tertiary institution for the arts, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) continues to inspire and nurture unique individuals with diverse talents. It has groomed an aspiring pianist since the age of six, provided a young man with a chance to pursue his dream and given a passionate local artist a clear shot at academic recognition.

Musical Genius Meets Academic Talent

He was first introduced to the piano at a tender age of four. At six, he was one of the selected few to be admitted into the Gifted Young Pianists programme offered by the School of Young Talents at NAFA. Now 20, John Chua still speaks of his interest in music with compelling intensity. Yet, his



Straight A's student John Chua shocked peers by choosing to study music full-time. Now he proves his brilliance at NAFA.

decision to pursue a diploma in music fulltime, four years ago, was met with gasps of 'Are you crazy?' from his peers. At 16, the former Raffles Institution science student had scored eight A1s at his 'O' level examinations and had been accepted at the top ranking Raffles Junior College. He knew he had to make a tough choice.

The turning point for him was the 2001 National Piano competition. He did not win. But the long hours of hard practice, climaxing in the adrenaline rush of performance and competition made him realise where his passion lies. "As you are able to express more, your ear develops and music starts to touch you," he espouses.

The following year, John accepted a place in the Diploma in Music programme at NAFA, with the full support of his parents. He chose NAFA because he knew it was performance oriented. "I wanted to concentrate on raising my playing to the next level so I would be prepared for the immense competition on the international stage," explained John, who wants to be a solo concert pianist. The rigorous training has instilled persistence and professionalism. "At NAFA, I learnt that I must take responsibility for every note I play. I have to give complete attention to everything, even how I walk onto the stage."

John won first prize in the Open Category of the National Piano and Violin competition in 2003 and was NAFA's Best Graduate in Diploma in Music in 2005. He also clinched a full scholarship from NAFA to do a one-year BA (Hons) in Music programme. His future looks promising.

John says emphatically of his scholarship: "It goes deeper than the financial support.



Accounting and Finance graduate Lee Dong Ming traded auditing for fashion.

It is a form of recognition that you are adept at your field and the school is keen to nurture your potential."

Fresh Start in Fashion

"It was cheaper and the school building is new!" Such is the candid reply from Lee Dong Ming on why he chose NAFA to do a diploma course in Fashion Merchandising and Marketing. It is true, the grand dame of arts education has recently moved into an impressive \$115 million building in the revamped education district at Bras Basah. But, his choice is really grounded in practicality. "NAFA is always involved in commercial projects, and actively encourages its students to join competitions, so we receive very good exposure as students," he added.

The affable 26-year-old already holds a diploma in accounting and finance from Temasek Polytechnic, and attained his ACCA qualification while working full-time. Going to NAFA to pursue his ambition in

fashion was a serious and difficult decision he made.

His choice was met with objection from his parents. He had to give up a full-time income and dig into his savings to pay for the course. On top of that, Lee has continued to foot the mortgage for his family's HDB apartment in Clementi. To manage, he juggles some part-time accounting work. It was a great financial relief when he received a full scholarship from NAFA that will cover his current second year of studies.

NAFA has awarded more than \$400,000 in scholarships and financial assistance this year.

Lee was first drawn to fashion as an impressionable teenager. He was attracted by the glamour of the 90's cult of supermodels like Naomi Campbell and looked up to designers such as Gianni Versace.

Attending the diploma course at NAFA has mingled his glamorous notions of the fashion world with some hard-nosed business sense. He appreciates that many of the lecturers in his course are practitioners in the fashion field because they can share real world expertise in the classroom. In a typical day, the lecturers devote time to evaluating his business plans.

Now, rather than Versace, Lee admires homegrown fashion stars such as Andrew Gn and Jonathan Seow, who have established their own internationally acclaimed labels despite tough competition. He explains his respect for them quite simply. "They made it," he grins.

For Inspiration's Sake

At 42, Justin Lee is at NAFA, working on a BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting and Drawing programme. He felt compelled to do so despite having earned a measure of credibility as an established visual artist. His works have been exhibited at the Esplanade, the Singapore Art Museum, in

three successful solo shows and even represented at the Venice Biennale in 2003. Recently, he was commissioned to create a towering 6.5m installation of an Absolut Vodka bottle, decked in red emblems, to mark Singapore's 40th birthday celebrations.

Justin's work is immediately recognisable by his Pop Art penchant for using cultural icons from both the East and West, in a reductive graphic art form. Mickey Mouse, teddy bears and the Double Happiness symbol of Chinese weddings are all fair game. The whimsical juxtapositions capture snippets of a Singaporean consciousness, expressing its constant state of flux. He is most satisfied when his work elicits a response, especially from someone seeing his work by chance. While working on an installation along a corridor at the Esplanade, he overheard a passer-by exclaim, "This can also be art? So interesting!" It filled him with pride.

He declared: "When there is a response, a communication has taken place. Without communication, art is nothing!"

Explaining his decision to study at NAFA, he said: "I wanted to immerse myself in an inspiring environment, where there is a constant traffic of ideas among young artists." NAFA's long reputation for providing

quality education has attracted course mates from Korea, Japan, India and Malaysia, making it a hotbed for cultural exchange. For Justin, it has meant invaluable exposure to different artistic viewpoints.

He has been equally impressed by the emphasis on readings and research in the NAFA degree course. "Theory will help stimulate your ideas. Understanding other artists' methods will help you rework and re-evaluate your own work," he said, adding that furthering his education has given him "the discipline to constantly reflect on my art practice."

Having completed a certificate course with NAFA some time ago, Justin hopes to be able to collaborate with the school after he graduates from his degree studies. He can look forward to that. "We are committed to maintaining a lifelong relationship with our graduates," said Mr Choo Thiam Siew, President of NAFA. "We hope to continue to tap the professional expertise of our alumni and keep them engaged in defining the academic contours of the Academy."

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Hwa Chong's Footprints on Singapore's Changing Educational Landscape: A Personal Reflection

Balasupramaniam Krishna

As a practitioner of many years standing and having been closely associated with developments in The Chinese High School for the last eighteen years, I would like to share some personal insights into the transformation of a leading Singapore school to an internationally acclaimed institution. The story begins in true Singapore fashion from a school of almost insignificant proportions to one that has contributed significantly to the changing face of education in our country.



I came to the school in 1988 fresh from a stint in New Zealand where I had pursued both an undergraduate and post-graduate programme. Upon my return I was posted to a neighbourhood school somewhere along the West Coast. It was here for the first time that I came into contact with the cold realities of an evolution that had taken place during my away-years. I refer to the streaming process that segregated students into bands of high achievers and very low achievers. On hindsight in considering our national priorities then and the need for efficient deployment of scarce educational resources, it now all makes absolute sense. At that point in time, however, I felt differently and so did so many other teachers. There was this pervasive perception that schools lacked the commitment to help their weakest students. To some extent, this was a plight

that the students brought to bear upon themselves: they were bound in a straitjacket of helplessness and apathy as a consequence of their relegation. At the end of five years of secondary education they emerged from schools like factory seconds. It was all very sad. For me it was quite a numbing and unnerving experience. The system did not seem to have the resolve or the resources to carry these students to higher thresholds of performance. There was a sad air of resignation about the fate of such students in so many schools. This was the situation in the late eighties.

It was against this background that the offer to teach in an independent school came as a whiff of oxygen-intoxicated air. I was doing a RSA course with other secondary school teachers with the British Council at the old Shell House located opposite Collyer Quay along Shenton Way. The course was an experience totally different from typical MOE workshops and seminars. There, by some fortuitous twist of chance, a small band of teachers and Council lecturers became engaged in an intense debate on educational directions in Singapore. We were all very charged and enervated about what we each believed in as dedicated professionals and starry-eyed teachers. The opportunities that were being promised for teachers in the newly emerging independent schools to shape a new

learning environment for Singapore's top students was very alluring indeed.

The first day, one gray afternoon in September 1987, that I walked into the Chinese High School was quite memorable. The school had all the air and feel of a typical Chinese community school. Let me explain.

Way back in the sixties, in the early years of my teaching career, I had the privilege to teach in a number of schools with very strong Chinese traditions. What impressed me most about these schools was their Spartan simplicity, clear and distinct notions of what schooling meant, strict discipline and a total lack of sophistication and polish that some of the more established English-medium school seemed to exude almost naturally. The Chinese High School fitted perfectly into the mould of my mental expectations.

The hostel complex where the interview was conducted had a strong smell of antiseptic and the front office staff were plain-looking and drab. They were, however, extremely polite and courteous. The school, except for the clock tower block, was made up of decrepit buildings with a tired and worn-out look. The campus was almost linear and the main buildings were located alongside the school's campus link road. The administration building and the teachers' common room were located behind the classroom blocks. Fronting the tree-lined parking lots was the office. Mounted on one side of the wall was a huge billboard in shocking red with the words 'WIN WIN' in English and Chinese characters. It was so reminiscent of a Maoist hoarding!

Well, to make a long story short I was offered a place in the school and soon got

to be in charge of the English and Social Studies Department.

What struck me about the school, even then, was the fierce and almost relentless determination to excel in almost every field where the school thought it had a fighting chance to prove its dominance. Anyway, English was not the school's forte. The first time I entered a class the students gleefully chanted, "Chinese High, English low!" It was a common joke. Needless to say, there was an almost irrepressible urge and restlessness in the school; the energy level was very high and the optimism almost boundless. It was a combination of these two factors that made teaching in The Chinese High School such a heady experience for me in those days.

The Principal of the school then, Mr Tooh Fee San, displayed a rare sense of openness and willingness to accept changes if these could usher a better school environment for students and teachers alike. The attitude was infectious. By the time he retired from the service it had spread like an epidemic among the campus. Maybe the choice of metaphor is rather unfortunate in the present circumstances but in the meaning it wishes to transmit is, well, quite apt: the change in school mindset was almost unstoppable.

The changes that were introduced into the school began with a basic premise: that sacred cows could be slaughtered. Nothing was sacrosanct.





It began with the decision to review the system of examinations in the school and the realization that it was a Sisyphus-like condition to which school administrators, teachers and students seemed to have condemned themselves. Here were students and teachers endlessly and mindlessly doing the same tasks again and again in the name of disseminating knowledge but in actuality doing nothing beyond ensuring that our charges had answered the last question in the 10-year series with the same exactitude as countless thousands before them. I remember talking to some very able and astute students in a Mathematics class about Karmakar's algorithms and drawing only blank responses. This was at a time when Bell Laboratories was agog with the potential of the new computational system and airlines and defence organizations were ready to seize its promise. In a similar vein, there were students and teachers teaching Geography who had never heard of James Lovelock or the Gaia Hypothesis. Mind you we had some very excellent faculty members but all of them felt too constrained by the examination system to break free and explore new horizons.

In this respect, I think the language teachers had a little more leeway. But for

them, too, examination grades were equally important. Maybe, more so, because English grades determined a student's promotional prospects! That did not, however, stop many of us from telling our students that over the gates of Plato's Academy was written the injunction: Let none enter these portals who do not know Geometry. Or that the new non-Euclidean geometry propounded in the 1930's demonstrated that on non-plane surfaces triangles could have an angle-sum of 270 degrees. We were already then trying to break inter-disciplinary walls and evolve an integrated programme!

It was in the spirit of such unbound and unconstrained learning in the early years of its independence that The Chinese High School took the blasphemous step of doing away with mid-year examinations. This single step freed considerable curriculum for other pursuits that the initial apprehension of "falling standards of performance" and "inadequate attention to the needs of the curriculum" and "corruption of study habits" faded away like Singapore's infamous hazes do after a refreshing downpour. Very shortly after, the school took the further step of announcing that students who consistently scored high distinction grades in the course of term work could seek exemption from the end-

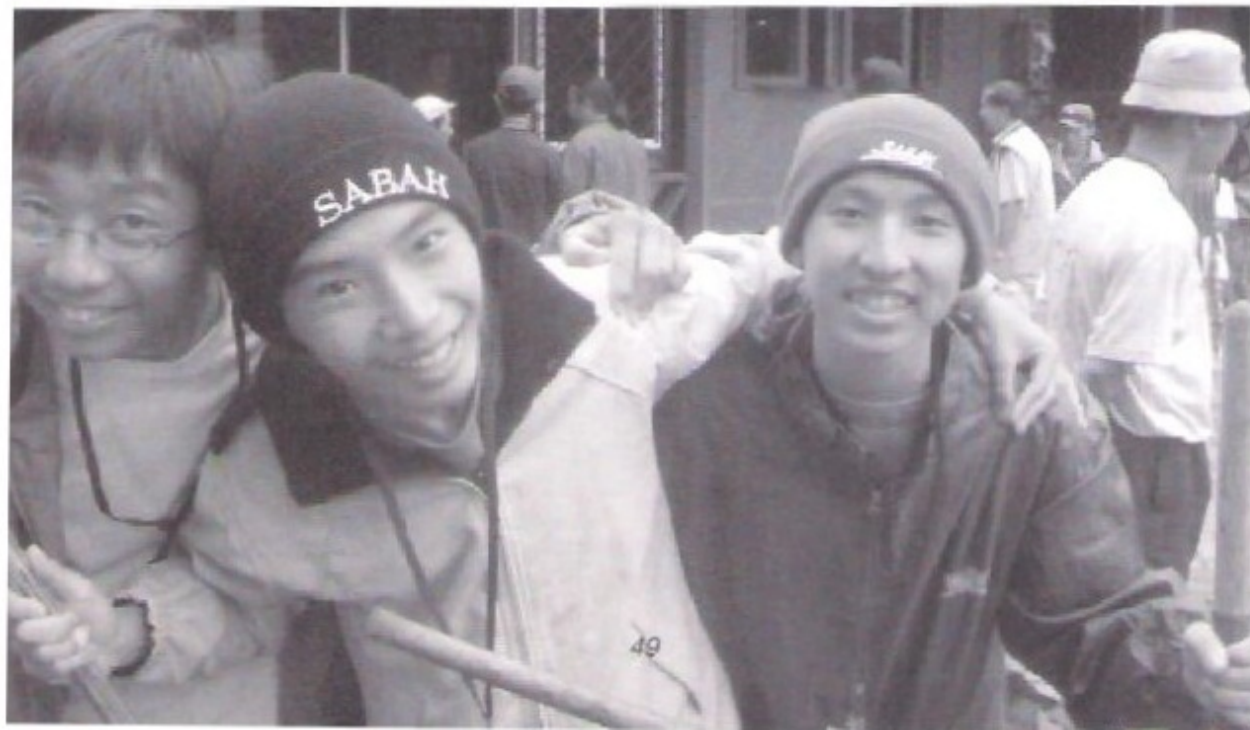
of-year examinations as well! We had breached the dam that had so long parched our educational landscape.

One of the most important outcomes of this bold change was the re-evaluation of the system of student appraisal. Today, Hwa Chong has crafted a system that places almost equal emphasis on teacher-directed, student-directed as well as traditional written examinations. It is a point worth noting that students studying Humanities these days are assessed solely on the basis of a Major Research Paper (MRP) that requires a crossover to other disciplines to attempt a truly integrated approach to learning and academic enquiry. The culmination of this exercise is an oral defense of their thesis by students. Within the gambit of this system, they have ample opportunities to demonstrate their competencies in chosen areas of passion and interest. I would like to think that the customization of education to suit each individual child's unique talents that the Minister has been advocating for some years has now been realized in substantial measure in Hwa Chong. The student is now truly at the heart of the entire education learning process.

Another encouraging outcome that is in tune with the zeitgeist has been the tremendous focus on research-based learning and project work. What started off in the early years as simple show and tell pieces has

now matured into sophisticated and world-class academic endeavours that have caught the attention of experts and organizations overseas. In this respect I would like to highlight the recent work of one of the students who quite casually became interested in the phenomena of artificial lighting on the physical landscape.

Philip Chan is like any other Secondary 3 student in Hwa Chong but with a difference. He is a self-confessed astronomy aficionado. In the course of his pleasurable pursuit of star-gazing he became increasingly perturbed by the effects of light pollution on his favorite activity. He began investigations into the problem as part of his school project in the true manner of a scholar. But unlike typical scholars in ivory towers, he became an environmental activist as well. He directed his concern, like any civic-minded citizen should, to various local government bodies like the Cut Waste Panel, National Environment Agency and even to his Member of Parliament. His interest in the subject soon led him to discover the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) in the USA and his correspondence with them led to an invitation to present his findings at one of their competitions. Subsequently, his research paper: "Challenges of Overcoming Light Pollution in Modern Day Cities: Drawing Parallels Between Tucson and Singapore" clinched the top prize in the Grade 7-9 Category.





The story of Philip Chan is an example of the light-years Hwa Chong has traversed in the course of less than two decades of mind-boggling change. The school now offers exciting opportunities to all learners, whether they are teachers or students. Many years ago I remember making a proposal to the Principal that the school could actually link with an interested American university and offer faculty members to read for post-graduate practitioner's degree. It was an idea that the school felt was a little too premature. Today, the school works closely with The University of Western Australia to offer teachers an opportunity to read for their Master's degree. Even more impressive is the fact that more than 50 out of 130 teachers in the school are undertaking post-graduate programmes including doctoral dissertations!

The school's reputation has won it acclaim across the globe. With the merger of The Chinese High School and Hwa Chong Junior College into a mega-institution – Hwa Chong Institution – their aggregate reach and impact has become even greater. The metamorphosis to a cutting-edge institution has been the consequence of bold and imaginative attempts to find new solutions to old problems. Sometimes it began with asking just the right questions to overcome persisting challenges. By now, educationists in Singapore are almost all of them aware of the school's revised organizational structure

with students and teachers grouped into four different consortia that function like schools within schools. Equally familiar to many Singapore teachers is the school's sharp focus on segregating professional and administrative chores so that there is no dissipation of energy and resources from a teacher's primary function: to attend to students' needs.

This, in my opinion, is by far the best-kept secret of Hwa Chong's success and track record of enduring excellence. The total commitment of both the school leadership and the teaching faculty to the full realization of every child's potential is very explicit. The lapses, if any, are few and far in between. The school ensures that every teacher is not a mere transmitter of book knowledge but is a guide who re-affirms moral and ethical values and a mentor who provides emotional and psychological support. Children grow best in an environment of love and security; they learn even better when such conditions prevail in ample measure. The school organizational and support service has this and only this objective in mind. So while we can talk about all the various factors, tangible and intangible, that have impacted the school significantly, this is certainly the most significant. This shapes students in marvelous ways. Most importantly, it manifests itself in the way a student of the school carries himself always.

So, while visitors may be impressed by the lovely campus and its wonderful facilities, what is most satisfying for me as a teacher is to see simple acts of courtesy and consideration in my students. I see this shining through every time one of them, even out of uniform, bows and greets his teachers even in the busiest shopping mall or noisiest food-court. This for me is a clear affirmation of the deep and lasting impact of the school in shaping a confident and cultured young man. Surely, a school that can do this time and again must have a spirit that transcends the commonplace!

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Where Studies and Sports Meet – The Dream Journey

Student-centred learning and support in the Singapore Sports School (SSS)

Ho Beng Kiat and Flossie Chua

The idea for the Singapore Sports School was conceived when the Committee on Sporting Singapore (CoSS) noted that Singapore's demanding academic environment placed enormous pressure on young aspiring athletes, leading to the disconcerting result of many eventually abandoning their sporting aspirations to concentrate on acquiring academic qualifications. This meant that these blazing talents who could have brought our young nation sporting glory were snuffed out prematurely. Thus, CoSS recommended that a dedicated sports school be set up to

ensure that our educational landscape provides support for those who are athletically gifted.

The result of this was the launching of the Sports School in January 2004, a specialised independent school operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS). It bears the sporting hopes of the nation on its fledging shoulders, for it is entrusted with the mission to groom Singapore's future sporting champions while supporting their academic pursuits.



Letting it rip in the Science class.

1. Quality education is defined by the team as igniting the passion for learning in lower sec & achieving academic success based on 'O' level standard in upper sec.

The Big Questions

How does one accomplish the seemingly insurmountable task of providing quality education' to students with a bright sporting future, when their studies are frequently interrupted by their participation in training stints and competitions?

It is no secret that an athlete needs to train consistently if he hopes to always extend the boundaries of his own achievement. So, if a gifted sportsman

- is frequently missing lessons due to competitions & overseas training stints,
- has less time to do homework & study as a result of a rigorous and demanding daily schedule (comprising 4 hours of sports training and 9 hours of sleep & rest. See **Table 1 – Student Daily Schedule**), and
- is physically drained even before stepping into the classrooms at 9am.

How is the school to ensure that he is also academically prepared to pursue higher education, which his mainstream peers are privy to? This is the challenge that we face in shaping a viable curriculum and school system that will allow our sports talents to develop their sporting prowess with minimum disruption.

Table 1 – Student Daily Schedule

6.00 am	Rise and shine
6.30 am	Training session 1
8.00 am	Breakfast
9.00 am	School lessons
12.00 pm	Lunch
12.30 pm	School lessons
2.00 pm	Afternoon rest or Personal Effectiveness Programme (PEP)
4.00 pm	Training session 2
6.30 pm	Dinner
7.30 pm	Supervised study time
9.00 pm	Free time
10.00 pm	Lights out

At the Sports School, the academic team has embarked on the journey to answer this big question. It has been no mean task, for it is a journey through uncharted waters. We foresee that this journey will continue to be challenging but are motivated by the realisation that as we search for the best ways to provide our students with a quality education, we are also growing as educators and a team that is carving out new tracks on a hitherto well-ploughed field.

At present, we employ the following student-centred learning and supporting strategies:

- 1. Teach & Learn Right From The Start**
- 2. One Student At A Time – Close Support & Monitoring**
- 3. Flexible & Credible Curriculum**

Teach & Learn Right from the Start

We believe that the way to go is to focus on quality teaching and learning, i.e. ensure that whatever is taught is effective the first time round. In this way, students' interest in the subject will be sustained as there is no need for repetitive and tedious revision or mountains of homework to ensure that students 'drum' the concepts into their heads. This should also create buzz and excitement during the lesson as new things are learnt each time they enter the classroom. Such a vibrant atmosphere will certainly circumvent the problem of the students' already fatigued bodies causing a lack of concentration.

This strategy is possible because of the following actions and structures in place:

Our Home Room System

At the SSS, students are not confined to a specific classroom for lessons. Instead, they move around to home rooms that are 'owned' by subject teachers. Such an arrangement allows teachers to transform their home rooms into more than just classrooms; the home rooms are learning centres that are rich in materials and learning apparatus to make learning a 'living' experience.



Learning about Mathematical proportion through music.

Our Lesson Delivery Approach

To complement the physical learning environment (the 'hardware', i.e. home room), the 'software' – lesson delivery – is just as important. Many teachers use Cooperative Learning strategies, Problem-based Learning methods, Differentiated Instructions or the Activity-based Learning approach in their teaching.

To further enhance their teaching & learning competency, all teachers have begun their involvement in Peer Coaching, an approach that encourages teachers to work with their colleagues in an open and collegial relationship for self-development. In this novel approach, every teacher is recognised as a self-directed learner (Dr Moo, 2005).

Our Teacher Recruitment Policy

Both the 'hardware' & 'software' will amount to little success if the 'heartware' is not in place. This 'heartware' is the X-factor in any classroom, i.e. the teacher who is caring and able to build quality relationships with students. As such, the

school places great emphasis on recruiting the right teachers with this X-factor.

When the 'hardware', 'software' and 'heartware' are properly put into practice, Teaching & Learning Right From The Start will naturally follow.

One Student at a Time – Close Support & Monitoring

At the SSS, we place primacy on supporting each and every student in realising his dream of balancing sports and studies. Students are taken care of academically when he is away from school, so that he does not lag behind his mainstream peers. To achieve this, we have initiated the following:

Small class & mentorship group size

For the tracking system to be effective in the SSS context, class size is deliberately kept below 25, while each mentor group is capped at 20. The smaller sizes allow subject teachers and mentors to establish a better-quality

relationship with their students, thus, enhancing the effectiveness of the Student Support & Monitoring system.

Student Tracking System

Each student goes through a pre & post 'away' procedure:

The pre-phase will ensure that school work that can be completed ahead of the absence will be completed before the student's scheduled absence from school.

When he returns, the post-phase kicks in. A personalised make-up time-table will be created to allow each student to catch up on work missed. His subject teachers will ensure that he is brought up to speed with the class.

In a Level Meeting conducted at the end of each 5-week module, student achievement or issues (e.g. if a

particular student exhibits a deteriorating learning attitude) are surfaced for the mentor to take the necessary actions to remedy the situation. The mentor's role is to monitor and oversee the academic and behavioural aspects of the students under his charge. This ensures that the students are provided with timely support and intervention to help him stay on course.

Flexible & Credible Curriculum

The challenge for us has been to develop a curriculum that is flexible enough to accommodate the students' absence from school, so that they can 'fit in' immediately upon return. The curriculum has also to be academically sound so that the students are recognised to have achieved a level of knowledge and skills be credible enough to qualify them for higher studies in respected institutions of learning.



The English Homeroom.

This is achieved by adopting the following:

Modular System

The school operates on a modular system where the academic calendar is organized in blocks of 5 weeks per module. The modules are independent, non-sequential learning units. This allows entry at any point and makes catching up with the lessons easier. This flexible system enables our students to train for and participate in competitions with less worry. Teachers also develop individualised study packages for students away for overseas tournaments to ensure that they do not lose track of what is being taught in school.

The academic calendar is also flexible enough to allow its school holiday to coincide with major sporting events for that year, e.g. SEA Games, particularly if a large number of our students are involved in the competition.

Through-Train Programme

Our partnerships with New Zealand's Auckland University of Technology (AUT) as well as Singapore's Republic Polytechnic (RP) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have enabled us to provide our own unique through-train programmes for our student-athletes. These ground-breaking partnerships remove the dilemma that many national youth athletes face – to skip a year of school to compete in major international competitions or stop their training to prepare for the major GCE examinations. Our MOUs with these top institutions mean that our students can now pursue diplomas and degrees in a wide field of disciplines, including sports science, without having to sit for the GCE 'O' and 'A' Level examinations. With these exciting routes open to them, our students can now continue with their training and competition without lagging behind in their academic pursuits.

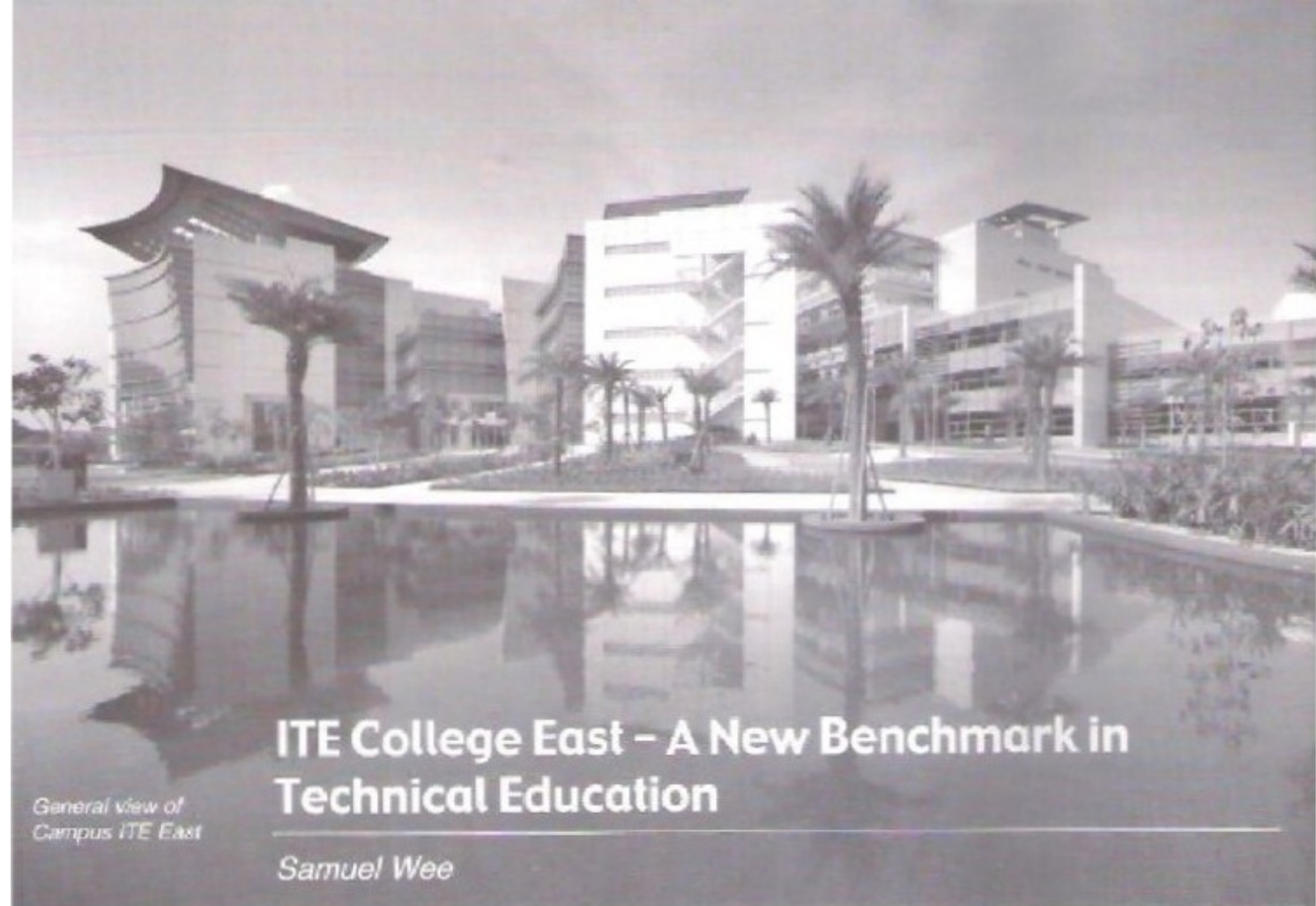
In Conclusion

Every school has its unique 'Big Question' to answer. At SSS, our guiding principle has been what is best for our students. Even with all these structures in place, there are still many challenges to surmount in our day-to-day operation. Basically, what oils the wheels of our enthusiasm and staying power is the belief that we are serving the needs of our students. That makes finding the elusive key to untangle the knots a worthwhile enterprise.

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⁶⁷ *Ho Beng Kiat is HOD Maths at the Singpros Sports School. This article was written by Team Academic (Teachers of Singapore Sports School), coordinated by Ho Beng Kiat & Flossie Chua. Website: www.sportsschool.edu.sg*



ITE College East – A New Benchmark in Technical Education

Samuel Wee

“That’s why Singapore works. It’s not just because we have a few stars but a strong Singapore team. That’s why the tsunami operation was possible. You can have the best generals writing orders, but unless you’ve got the volunteers, you’ve got the specialists, you have got the technicians, you have got the crew men, the sailors, the men on the ground, an excellent organisation from top to bottom, you cannot deliver. Everyone has to be well-trained, know his job.”

– PM Lee Hsien Loong

(National Day Rally Speech delivered on 21 Aug 2005 as he emphasised the importance of an ITE education)

Clearing the Ground

With the advent of the knowledge economy and the information age, education in Singapore is undergoing tremendous changes. One of the most fundamental is the need to provide diverse education opportunities to our students. In this way, not only every student’s potential can be maximized, the skilled manpower needs of its various sectors of the economy could also be catered for.

Howard Gardner (1983, 1999), an eminent psychologist and a professor in education,

mooted his theory of multiple intelligences, namely, *linguistic intelligence*, *logico-mathematical intelligence*, *musical intelligence*, *bodily-kinesthetic intelligence*, *spatial intelligence*, *interpersonal intelligence*, *intrapersonal intelligence* and *naturalist intelligence*. This theory has helped educators appreciate and understand the need for diversity in our education – not just in providing subject electives but to offer alternate pathways.

Traditional mainstream education has often valued the first two types of intelligence with the next three associated with the arts, the

next two with personal effectiveness and the last his/her relation with the environment.

An ITE education caters to those who are more competent in the other types of intelligence different from the mainstream students by using broad base education, local and flexible programmes and a focus on character education. This brand of education is now known as the 'hands-on, minds-on, hearts-on' education.

ITE College East: Four Educational Pillars

As the newest kid on the block offering technical and vocational education in Singapore, ITE College East opened its doors to secondary school leavers in January 2005. The vision of the College is "To become an institution of choice for post-secondary technical education; a new benchmark for transforming technical training in Singapore."

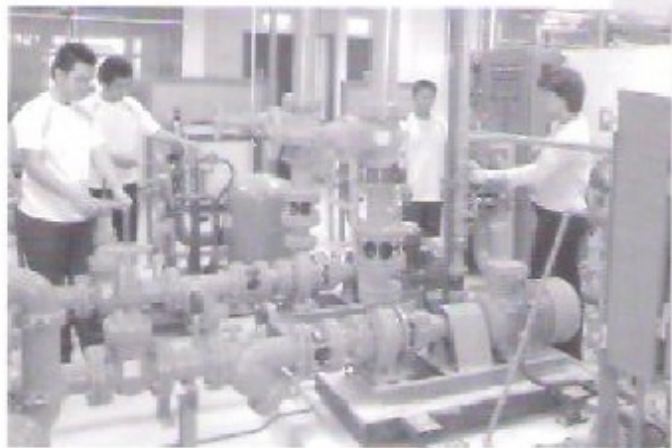
Situated in Simei, ITE College East is the first comprehensive technical college offering a wide range of Nitec and Higher Nitec courses under one roof. It has four schools of study, namely,

- School of Applied and Health Sciences offering courses in Nursing and Life Science;
- School of Business offering courses in Accounting, Logistics, Office Skills, Retail, Sport Management;
- School of Engineering offering courses in Electrical, Electronics, Mechanical and Building Services Technology; and
- School of Info-Comm Technology offering courses in Info-Comm Technology, Multimedia Technology and Wireless Technology.

The College sees our students as young adults who aspire to achieve excellence in their technical careers and to serve the society and community. Foundational to the rolling out of our curriculum and other programmes are the four educational pillars of ITE College East.



'Battlefield'



Practical studies.



Life Science Lab @ ITE East

1 Technical Competencies and Skills

As a technical college, the mainstay of our holistic education philosophy will focus on developing technical competencies in our students. The four schools have identified their own niche areas and formulated their technology roadmap. A key strategy is to set up Centres of Technology. These are collaborative efforts between ITE College East and key industry players such as Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, ABB, just to name



Students and lecturers relaxing.

a few. Such collaborations will prepare the student to glean from the latest developments in industry and be trained in these areas so that the barriers to entry will be minimized when they enter the job market. Students who undergo these programmes will receive Joint ITE-Industry Technology Certifications besides their Nitec or Higher Nitec certifications. Many of them will all be given a chance to take part in the Student Internship Programmes offered by these industry partners.

In the areas of curriculum delivery, our courses are designed to be 70% practice and 30% theory. Our students receive their training in 'real-life' laboratories with industry standard equipment. Lecturers come with industry experience and undergo extensive teacher training and numerous pedagogic and professional courses to help them facilitate the learning through various teaching methodologies.

Beyond just acquiring the pure technical skills, all ITE College East students receive

lessons in Lifeskills, called the Steps-to-Success programme. This programme has five steps, developing the student from within to serve the large goals on the outside. They are namely:

- a. Realising your potential (with an emphasis on Personal and Interpersonal Effectiveness)
- b. Shooting for goals (with an emphasis on Communication Skills)
- c. Connecting well with others (with an emphasis on Customer Service)
- d. Being entrepreneurial (with an emphasis on Thinking & Problem-Solving Skills and Career Development & Planning)
- e. Serving the community and the Country (with an emphasis on National Education).

This programme aims to provide total learning for our students, helping them to be professional, primed and purpose-driven.

2 Character and Ethics

Of equal importance is the development of

what Gardner calls the "personal intelligences". Gardner (1999:4) mentions "We must figure out how intelligence and morality can work together...to create a world in which a great variety of people will want to live." As a new College fostering a new culture, we have designed a framework to shape student's character development based on the ITE CARE values of *Integrity, Teamwork, Excellence and Care*. This emphasis is infused meaningfully into the curriculum with activities valued by the students. This is further developed into professional conduct and ethical behaviours associated with students' chosen technical careers.

3 Community Care and Belonging

The College believes in service learning. As our students are technically inclined and are well trained in a broad spectrum of skills, they are able to contribute actively in community service both locally and in the

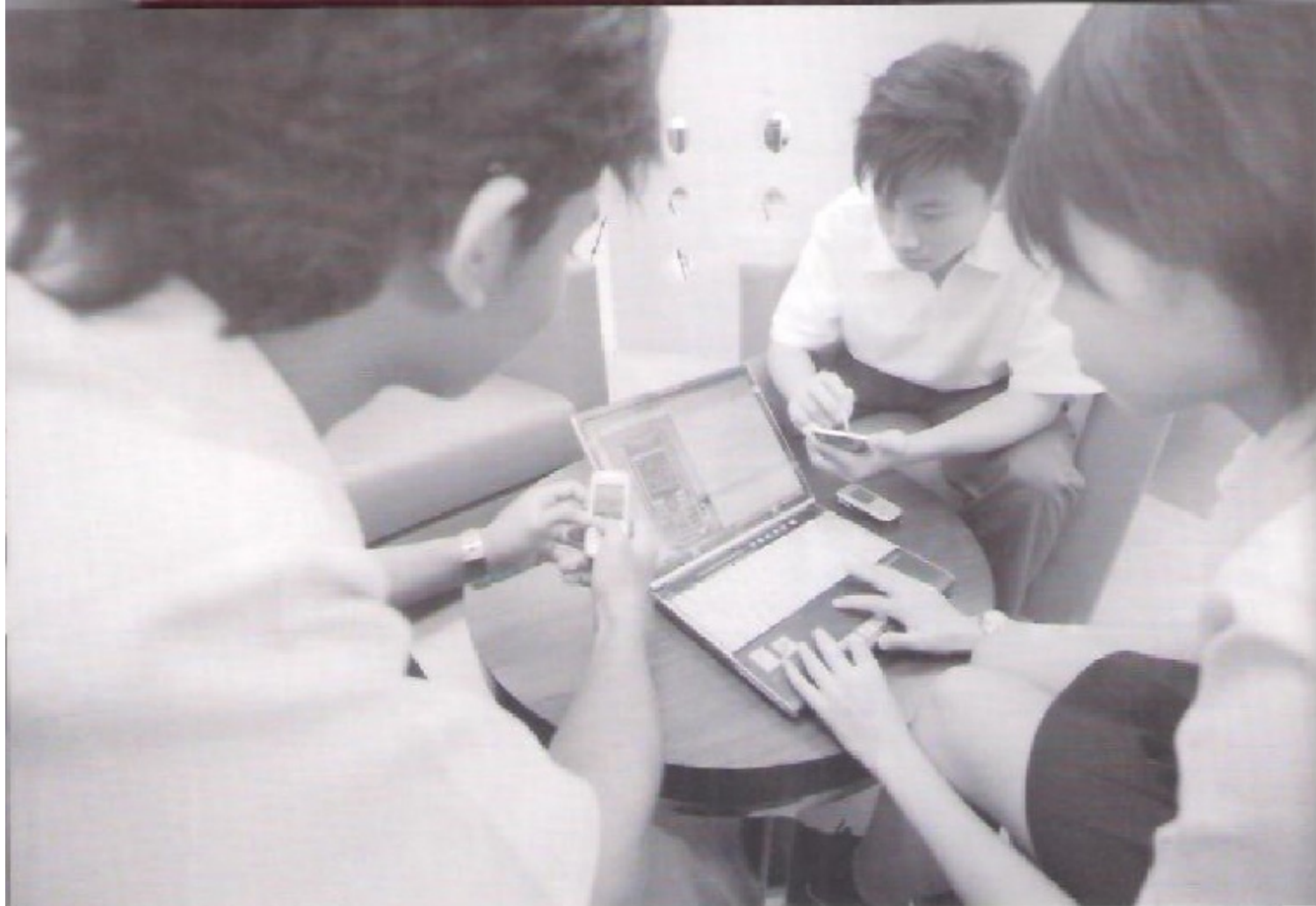
region. For example, our students 'adopt' blocks within the community and offer their technical skills to the residents in the repair of electrical fixtures and other household equipment under our 'Safe Home' project teams. We have also sent a team of students to the Tsunami-battered regions in Sri Lanka to help them rebuild their villages and schools. This interaction with the community and the environment help develop the naturalist intelligence of the students.

Gardner states (1999:48) that this type of intelligence "enables human beings to recognise, categorise and draw upon certain features of the environment. It combines a description of the core ability with a characterization of the role that many cultures value."

Moving ahead, the College is developing a Leadership Development and Survival/



Discussing project



Wireless Tech @ ITE West

Lifeskills Development Programmes to further strengthen our students' capabilities.

4 Enterprise and Innovation

Innovation and enterprise are fast becoming buzzwords in the educational scene. The Student Enterprise Education & Development (SEED) Programme was started to nurture the entrepreneurial and creative spirit amongst the ITE College East students. Based on a 3E Learning Model of Education, Experimentation and Enterprise, students on this programme will experiment with and explore their aptitude in running their own businesses. This pillar is supported by an entrepreneurship club in the College and some of the potential product development are housed at and marketed by the Technopreneurship Incubation Centre. ITE College East also collaborates with 77th Street Inc. to train students in running a retail business. To offer an e-platform which enables students to access materials, learn and practise business processes, a SEED Centre was set up.

We see the inculcation of enterprise and innovation as exemplifications of a blend of Gardner's logico-mathematical intelligence, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences and to some extent naturalist intelligence.

The Way Forward

Still in its infancy as a technical college, ITE College East is excited to be part of the development of the diverse educational landscape in Singapore. We believe that we offer holistic training opportunities for our students that appeal to their different abilities, founded on our four educational pillars.

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Centre for Exceptional Children: An Alternative Choice for Children with Special Education Needs

Noel Chia Kok Hwee

The Centre for Exceptional Children (CEC), housed in a rented terrace house just off Upper Thomson Road, was officially opened on the 21st March 2003 after being accepted as a Full Member of the National Council for Social Services. A month later, it was accepted by the College of Teachers, London, UK, as an institutional member. Today, it is run by a team of three special needs teachers and some volunteers led by a principal and advised by a professional team comprising of a psychologist, a counsellor and an educational therapist. The centre also provides clinical supervision for trainee teachers, therapists and counsellors who need to fulfill their practicum requirements of the courses they are currently undergoing. In addition, the CEC serves as the meeting place for members from the local study groups of two American professional bodies: the Association of Educational Therapists (AET) and the International Association of Counselors and Therapists (IACT).

A Brief History of the CEC

The CEC began its formal operations in the first week of January 2003 with one teacher

and eight children: two with Prader-Willi syndrome, three with Asperger syndrome and three with Down syndrome. By March before its official opening day, the centre employed 2 special needs teachers to cater to 18 children, aged between three and ten years old, with various developmental disabilities, mainly those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), specific learning disabilities and mental retardation. Since the day of its inception, many parents have been referred to the centre by hospitals, clinics, pre-schools, student care centres and schools (see Figure 1). Within three months, the number of children grew to more than 50. By mid-2004, the number went up to 68 (Goh, 2004). One part-time special needs teacher was employed and 3 volunteer teachers were recruited to help out at the centre. However, due to the shortage of full-time teachers and professional staffs, the waiting list became longer when the demand for its services increased.

When the Pathlight School was open, high-functioning children with ASD who met the criteria for admission to the special school were encouraged to go there so that others



Outside the Centre for Exceptional Children.

on the waiting list could be admitted to the centre. Today, the CEC caters to 42 children; among them, 6 attend the centre on a full-day programme, 9 are on half-day programme, and remaining come for daily 1-hour intervention sessions, sometimes conducted by different professionals (e.g., occupational therapist, speech therapist, educational therapist, counsellor and psychologist), who come in to help on a specially arranged schedule. The centre has also begun running a home-based therapy programme for 12 children with very severe disabilities and/or under medication since the beginning of 2005. In addition, the CEC also provides reading enrichment programme for a small group of children, who are exceptionally bright readers and have been assessed with a reading quotient above 100.

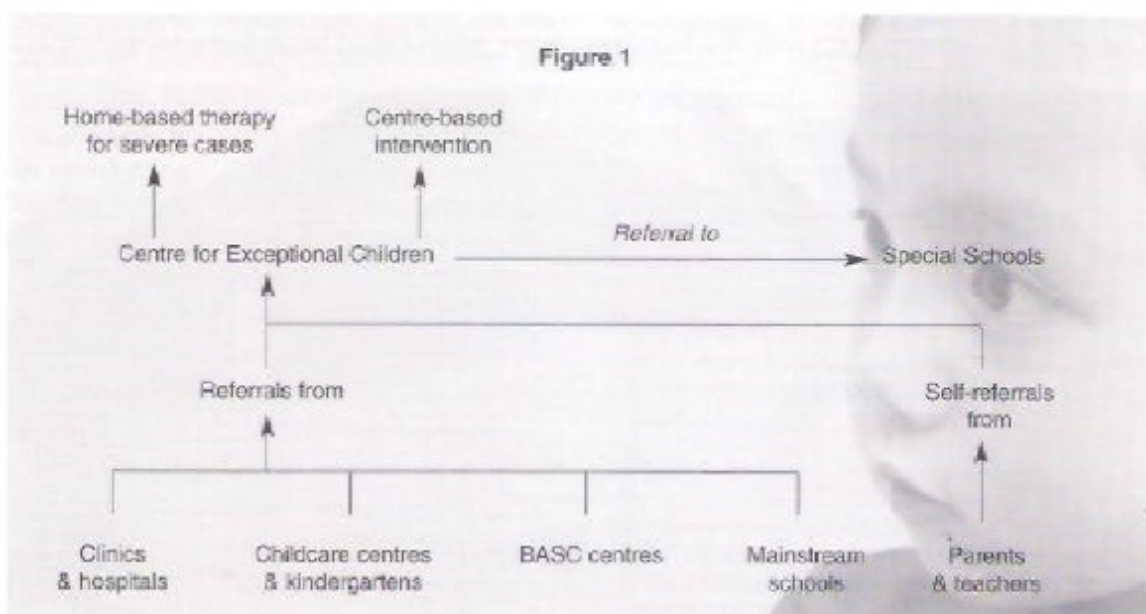
The founder of the CEC is Mrs Queenie Tan, formerly a clinical instructor at the Wellington Hospital in London, UK. Later she roped in Mr Noel Chia, who is currently the only board-certified educational therapist outside the United States to be registered with the Association of Educational Therapists. They met sometime in May 2002 and it was Mrs Tan who mooted the idea of opening an educational therapy centre for children with learning disabilities from low-income families, charged at a reasonable fee so that everyone could afford it (Lee, 2003).

Besides running a training centre for adults at Balmoral Plaza, Mrs Tan was then helping a young couple to manage their toddler born with Prader-Willi syndrome. Mr Chia, on the other hand, was doing part-time training for pre-school teachers in special educational needs. In the evening, he visited homes to work with children with special needs. The two met again in September 2002 and decided to run a small-scale programme for such children at Mrs Tan's training centre in Balmoral Plaza.

Soon both Mrs Tan and Mr Chia were seriously exploring the possibility of starting a special needs centre. They met up several parents, whose children have been born with severe developmental disabilities, to discuss and make plans deciding the kind of intervention centre for children with special needs. They also met other professionals such as a lawyer, an accountant, a counselor, teachers and nurses to discuss the feasibility of their plan before forking out nearly \$50,000 to set up the premises located at Jalan Hari Raya (see Goh, 2003; Lee, 2003; Yeo, 2003). These professionals were later invited to sit in the Management Committee as honorary members.

Services that the CEC provides

The CEC is not another special school and does not intend to become one. Its focus is





Visuo-spatial-motor lesson for the children.

on three main areas: (1) formal and informal psycho-educational testing and profiling, (2) school-based counselling and intervention programmes, and (3) educational therapy offered at four levels of intervention, i.e., preventive, corrective, remedial and compensatory. Although the term educational therapy is not new in Singapore and has been in use since the early 1990s, few people know and understand what it is all about. According to the Association of Educational Therapists based in Burbank, California, USA, educational therapy is "not simply a one-to-one luxury for the few. Rather, it is both a unique intervention and a laboratory for determining the most effective techniques and interpersonal attitudes that facilitate learning" (Ungerleider, 1991, p.1). It includes learning support service, case management, collaborative consultation with allied professionals from relevant disciplines of specialization, counseling for parents and their children with special needs, and various forms of creative therapies such as music, art, play, drama and poetry.

The CEC provides the following services:

- Psycho-educational diagnostic assessments
- Synthesis of information from parents and other specialists
- Professional advices and counseling services
- Development and implementation of appropriate intervention programmes for school-related learning and behavioural problems
- Strategies for addressing social and emotional aspects of learning problems
- Formation of supportive relationships with the child and those involved in the child's educational development
- Facilitation of communication between the child, the family, the school, and involved professionals
- Specially customized workshops for parents, teachers and schools
- Reading enrichment programme
- Volunteer befrienders' programme
- Home visits and home-based therapy sessions

All the services are delivered by qualified teachers trained in special needs education, supported by a group of volunteers and led by a principal. Three professionals – an educational therapist, a counselor and a psychologist who are all in private practice – have been invited to be honorary advisors to the centre and they also sit in the CEC professional development committee.

In addition, the centre also accepts trainee teachers, therapists and counsellors for practicum attachment and charges a nominal fee for its clinical supervision. This is one way it raises its own funds to subsidize children who come from low-income families. The centre also provides its counselling services and intervention programmes in primary and secondary schools for a reasonable fee. In this way, the CEC can reach out to more children who need help.



It's playtime for the children in the playground at the CEC.

Besides, special needs professionals from different fields of specialization meet at the CEC on the first Sunday of each month for case conference. During the session, these professionals present their cases for open discussion and they explore the best ways to intervene in each case study. At times, guest speakers are invited to share their expertise during the case conference.

To date, the CEC has collaborated with several professionals conducting single-subject experimental studies or small group-based case studies. Several of its collaborative research studies such as, an investigative study on the effectiveness of sentence-by-sentence self-monitoring, developed by Buettner (2002), as a strategy to improve reading comprehension of children with nonverbal learning disability (Chia & Tan, in press), and another on the use of scaffolding interrogative method (see Chia, 2002) to teach reading comprehension to children with Asperger syndrome (Chia & Tan, 2005), have been published in journals overseas. Published papers are often made available to those who are interested in such studies during the case conference.

Cases at the CEC

It is estimated that at least 12000 out of 50000 children (or 24%) who enter primary school each year are suspected to experience academic difficulty and even failure when they do not respond to traditional teaching methods. While these individuals often have unique learning styles, they are able to progress when an appropriate educational programme is put into effect by a learning support or special needs teacher or therapist in a one-to-one or small group setting (Association of Educational Therapists, 1989).

Most cases seen at the CEC are referred from clinics, hospitals and

schools. There are also parents who made self-referrals or have been recommended to the centre by friends and relatives. There is also a minority of them who have to be persuaded by their children's tutors and/or teachers to seek help at the centre. Many a time, the parents from this last group are still in the state of denial, refuse to accept the results of the psycho-educational assessment, put the blame on the teachers or their spouses, and reluctantly send their



A special needs teacher working with two intellectually challenged children.

children to the centre for intervention. It is most challenging for the CEC staff to work with such parents.

The counselling services for both parents and their children provided by the centre involve more than just lending a listening ear, sharing about problems and providing professional tips. It includes parenting skills to manage children with special needs, working through gradual acceptance of a child born with special needs, behaviour modification, and a wide range of creative therapies such as diagnostic and expressive art therapies, psycho-educational play therapy, bibliotherapy and Aesopian therapy. Such sessions are normally conducted by professional counsellors and therapists, who have experience working with children with special needs and their parents. These professionals come to the centre as and when their professional services are required. This is also another way of keeping the fees and the cost of running the centre low.

At the CEC, each teacher, assisted by a volunteer, handles between 3 and 8 cases a day. The current teacher-to-children ratio is 1:3 for the children, who attend the full-day programme beginning in the morning,

and 1:5, when children who attend half-day programme come to the centre in the afternoon. Usually, the teacher will attend to a maximum of 8 children at any one hour when those who attend daily 1-hour intervention session come to the centre.

The cases seen at the CEC have been classified according to Professor B.F. Pennington's (1991) neuropsychological model of five main learning disorders:

- Phonological processing deficits, e.g., alexia and dyslexia
- Executive function deficits, e.g., attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder
- Spatial cognition deficits, e.g., dysgraphia and dyscalculia
- Social cognition deficits, e.g., Kanner syndrome and Asperger syndrome
- Memory deficits, e.g., working memory deficit

In addition, the CEC also sees cases that include the following:

- Motor coordination deficits, e.g., dyspraxia
- Socio-emotional problems, e.g., low self-esteem and poor motivation
- Disruptive behavioural problems, e.g., bullying and obsessive-compulsive habits

- Mental retardation, e.g., Down syndrome, Angelman syndrome and Prader-Willi syndrome

It is interesting to note that since its inception, the CEC has reported at least seven successful cases, teaching preschoolers with Down syndrome to read through whole word approach and direct association between words and their meanings. Results at the end of the one-year intervention show "a significant impact on their language progress and development of auditory and visual memory skills" (Chia, 2005a, p.L4).

More recently, the centre has seen an increase in the number of teenage boys with what has been termed "computer-addiction syndrome" (also known by other terms like Internet, virtual or cyber game addiction). The findings of the Parents Advisory Group for the Internet (Pagi) survey, based on a survey of about 1000 gamers, who visited the Planet Games exhibition held at the Singapore Science Centre last year, reported that 37% of our one million gamers are at risk of becoming computer-addicted (Chia, 2005b; Chua, 2005; Leng, 2005). The intervention for these gamers is rather challenging as many of them do not see themselves as having any problem.

The Future for the CEC

As a young institution of special education catering to the learning and emotional needs of children with special needs, the CEC has come a long way to fulfill its mission. It hopes to continue offering its services at low cost so that low-income families can afford to send their children who require such services to the centre. It also aims to educate these families the importance and urgent need for early intervention so that these exceptional children are given a chance to build fuller and more independent lives.

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Noel Chia is a board certified therapist registered with the American Association of Educational Therapists (California), and a counseling therapist registered with the International Association of Counselors and Therapists (Florida).

Using Technology to Change Pedagogy – A Nan Chiau Primary School Story

Tan Yew Lee & Hairon Salleh

Our goal is ultimately not about the use of technology, but about changing the culture of the classroom and school to support and motivate thinking and independent learning among our pupils. (Tharman, 2002)

But at its core, I&E is about a qualitative change in the interactions between teachers and students, in and out of the classroom. It is about teaching less and learning more, about spurring independent thinking and learning, and about encouraging students to follow their passions. It requires that we reassess the 'why' and the 'how' of teaching and learning. (Tharman, 2004)

Since its relocation to Sengkang in January 2001 Nan Chiau Primary School has to revisit its vision and mission in light of not only the new community, but also the greater autonomy given by the Ministry of Education to explore niche programmes. Prior to this, it was the primary section of Nan Chiau High School, which operated as a full school at Kim Yam Road since 1947. This article describes in summary the story of how Nan Chiau Primary School attempts to develop a niche programme in the area of information and communication technology in the spirit of providing pupils with diverse learning experiences.

Baby Steps ...

The journey of using technology to enhance pedagogy for Nan Chiau Primary School started in July 2002 at the iTopia conference when both the principal, Mr Chia Soo Keng, and HOD IT, Mr Nicholas Tan Yew Lee, attended a talk given by Dr. Elliot Soloway concerning the use of handheld computers to promote learning in pupils. Dr. Soloway presented on how elementary pupils have used handheld tools to create greater meaning to what they ought to learn. Handheld computers

may become an increasingly compelling choice of technology for classrooms because they enable a transition from the occasional, supplemental use associated with computer lab, to frequent and integral use of portable computational technology (Tinker & Krajcik, 2001).

The upshot of the conference was a series of informal discussions between the principal and HOD IT followed by discussions with two external IT vendors (iTutor P/L and iKnow P/L) and Palm Singapore, along with informal feedback from pupils regarding their views on using PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) in classroom learning. The decision to use PDA technology in one Primary 2 class for 2003 was eventually made based on the understanding that the one-year pilot project to integrate PDA technology in classroom teaching and learning for English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics and Music would have minimal disruption to the curriculum, and that parents were willing to



Pupils sharing information using a PDA.

provide social and financial support. In addition to this, pupils, parents and teachers were given training support in using both hardware and software applications.

With favourable feedback from stakeholders such as pupils, parents, teachers, school leaders and researchers from National Institute of Education, the school rolled out two other handheld projects with 18 other schools in 2004. The projects, involving more than two hundred teachers, impacted 1200 pupils, ages nine and eleven, in the learning of Science and Mathematics.



A pupil interacting with a PDA software at Sungei Buloh.

In project PDA-Science, the school collaborated with four other Singapore Hokkien Huay Kwan schools (AiTong, Tao Nan, Chongfu, Kong Hwa) in the use of handheld in learning primary science. While HODs for IT from respective schools planned on the project implementation, HODs for Science contributed in the content and pedagogy with technical support from two industrial vendors. The project, which impacted 600 Primary 3 pupils, created new ways of science teaching for 60 science teachers of the five schools. With customised software, pupils used the handheld with integrated camera to learn the fauna and flora at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Thereafter, they shared their outdoor learning experience with their peers in the classroom.



Pupils working in a group and using a handheld device at a grocery store.

In the same year, the school also took the lead in another handheld project involving 14 schools from North 3 cluster. The project, titled eN3prise, sought to teach primary 5 pupils the value of money through a learning expedition. The project consisted three parts: pre-trail, trail and post-trail activities. At the trail, in groups of four, Primary 5 pupils were tasked to complete three learning tasks (stockpiling of essential items for emergency, purchase of handphone subscription plan and saving plan for tertiary education) at two different shopping centres. Armed with handheld learning devices, pupils who were chaperoned by a teacher/parent volunteer planned their route to these shopping centres and wirelessly surfed to access their learning activities. After the trail activity, pupils shared their findings with the rest of their classmates. The project, which involved 15 HODs, 150 teachers and parent volunteers, and five industrial partners, had provided opportunities for 600 Primary 5 pupils the value of money in a wireless way.



Pupils interacting using their PDAs at Sungei Buloh

This year, the school started an innovative project titled eNCee (e – enterprising in the use of handheld learning device, Microsoft

Learning Gateway and wireless technology; NC – Nan Chiau). The project, which engaged pupils in the use of the handheld learning device, Microsoft Learning Gateway and wireless technology, sought to integrate social constructivism into pupil e-learning environment. Twelve Primary 4 classes embarked on this programme with their subject teachers consisting English Language, Mathematics, Chinese Language and Science. Both teachers and pupils were trained in the use of hardware and software applications. Teachers and HODs also received training on action research. This is to not only build capacity of teachers to create effective lessons that integrate technology, social constructivism and curriculum content, but also provide the learning framework for teachers and HODs.



Pupils beaming information from a PDA to another.

On hindsight, Nan Chiau Primary School has come a long way in its attempt at integrating information and communication technology (ICT) in classroom pedagogy (Diagram 1). This does not suggest that it has attained perfection, and on the contrary, it is still experiencing a steep learning curve in matters of ICT integration.

The amount of learning that had taken place from the start of the journey is however rewarding. It is hoped that the learning points described below will provide lessons and insights for educators who wish to take similar steps in providing diverse educational paths to our pupils.

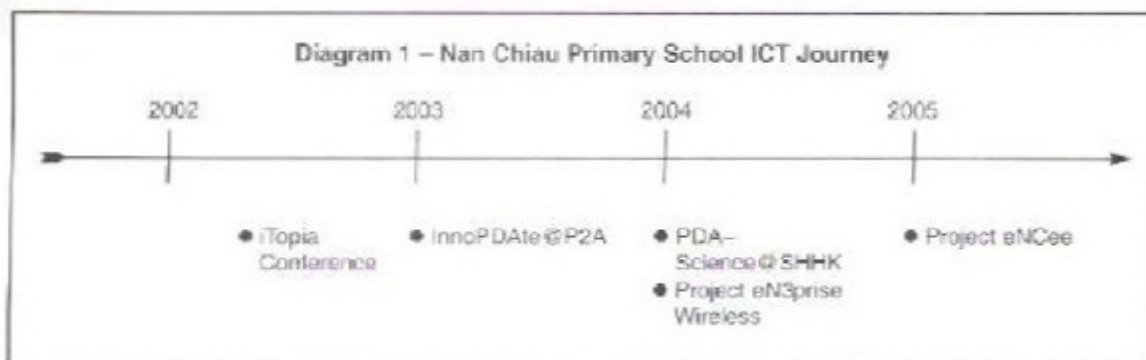


Teachers engaging in a training workshop.

Learning Steps ...

1. **Dare to try attitude.** We feel that for any change to take place, educators must be willing to try doing new things that we have not done before. This suggests going beyond our comfort zones and looking at possibilities and opportunities around us. This suggests that there might be discomfort in the initial change process. For example, during the initial phase of the InnoPDAt@P2A opportunities were matched with uncertainties.
2. **Reality check.** Equally important to the attitude of 'dare to try', educators must come to terms with the limitations and challenges – current and future – that may have a counter effect on the change project, and vice-versa taking opportunities of available resources and school strengths. Reality checks also involve understanding the needs of various stakeholders such as pupils, parents, teachers, senior management, alumni and the Ministry of Education.
3. **Balancing change and stability.** Paradoxical as it may seem, change and

Diagram 1 – Nan Chiau Primary School ICT Journey



stability must go hand-in-hand. Change projects without stability only jeopardise sustainability. In other words, there must be a balance between pressure and support for change. For example, the buy-in for the InnoPDAt@P2A project was successful because both teachers and parents were assured that the curriculum completion for core subjects was not put under stress. In addition, support in the form of training was given to pupils, parents and teachers in the use of hardware and software applications.

4. **Start small.** As change has potential to disrupt stability, it is vital that change projects start small and gradually evolve to bigger scale projects. It makes economic sense to invest small when risk or uncertainties are high, and to invest big when risk or uncertainties are low. The gradual progression from InnoPDAt@P2A which involved one class to eNCEe which involved one level did help in both mindset and practice change.
5. **Communication with stakeholders.** The importance of communication – involving information and discussion – cannot be overstated especially when it is a necessity to bring about ‘buying-in’ and consensus among various diverse stakeholders – pupils, parents, teachers, HODs, researchers and industrial partners. Communication is a basic means where support from stakeholders is attained, and where hearts and minds can be engaged. We find that although communication is time demanding, it is so mainly at the beginning phases of change projects. Furthermore, the insights given in the form of feedback by various stakeholders had been helpful in the continual improvement of change efforts.
6. **Funding.** Funding is an important aspect in contributing to the success of change projects. However, what is more important is how funds are raised and

used creatively, responsibly and equitably. On hindsight, funds for both hardware and software applications were cooperatively raised by various stakeholders – parents, alumni, industrial partners and school.

7. **Commitment towards learning.** One identifiable objective that ran throughout past projects is the commitment towards pupils’ learning. This was the central motivation – conscious or unconscious – for all stakeholders (Hairon et al., 2004); that the learning of our pupils will be enriched using information and communication technology.

Final thoughts ...

As technology continues to advance and make positive changes to our life, schools should move in parallel to bring relevance to our pupils’ learning. However, schools have to take note that all technology explored should always gear towards capitalising on technology to value-add learning and not about exploring technology for technology sake. As quoted by Margot Williams – ‘It is about learning, not just technology.’

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Guiding the Young to Make the Right Choices

Eric Koo Peng Kuan & Winston Lai

Introduction

As Singapore enters its fortieth year of independence as a nation state, the question of education becomes one of the issues of paramount importance. Traditionally a society which placed a high value on academic learning and examinations, with an increasing affluence, cosmopolitan outlook and a liberal policy of attracting foreign talents, the changing needs brought about by the bewildering, dramatic economic global developments has also confronted the Singapore educational system with serious challenges ahead.

Hitherto, the emphasis had been on scientific technology with its focus on engineering and the major hard sciences such as medicine and physics, which provided the engines of growth responsible for Singapore's spectacular economic success since 1965. However, with increased globalization, many new discoveries in technology were brought about, such as the exciting prospects of life sciences in the field of medicine, as well as fundamental seismic shifts in the world economy. *With the emphasis on the production of higher quality goods at ever competitive prices, the concentration on the established educational formula is no longer tenable.* In keeping abreast with economic changes in the world, Singapore is now increasingly providing more diverse educational choices to students. This is in the hope that Singapore would not be marginalized but be able to find a respectable place in the world's economic playing field.

Increasingly, to this end there seems to be gradually grafted on the educational system an ever wider range of different types of

courses – technological, commercial and humanistic courses available at the tertiary level. Fortunately, Singapore as a nation is able to capitalize on its greatest asset – its well educated, skilled, and highly competitive people, in shaping itself as an educational and training hub at the regional level, and then possibly at the international level in the near future.

As such, with the vast variety of choices – from laser disc production to the manufacture of ceramic tiles – courses



being now offered in the Polytechnics and other tertiary institutes, the education landscape seems to be opening new and exciting vistas. It is thus essential if not vital that young students are informed of the routes in the educational system that they may have to take in the new millennium.

The Argument

Putting it in a nutshell, the problem is made more complex because of the philosophy behind the manner in which a choice can be selected. Professional educationalists seem to be divided into two schools of thought on the how the right choice for the student can be achieved. On one hand the authorities should not interfere, but respect the young individual's right to a complete freedom of choice. Provided the subject is of an orthodox academic pedigree, the teacher or parent should respect the decision of the young mind in deciding the issue. The second school of thought involves the role of teachers acting as mentors, to guide and point the right way forward. Being too young, the mind of a student may not be ready to make the crucial decision yet with the correct amount of sense. Therefore, teachers have a responsibility in guiding their young charges in making their choices sensible



ones in accordance with their personalities, academic aptitudes and interests.

Choices, choices and more choices!

Right from the basic level, Singaporean children are faced with a Hobson choice – their parents generally choose for them the kindergarten school, followed next by entry to a primary school and six years of basic education. This followed by another crossroads of choosing a suitable secondary school that will educate and prepare the child for the Cambridge GCE "O" Levels examinations at the required age of 16.

With a qualification in "O" Levels, the next logical step would be a choice offered by three branches of tertiary education – to pursue another two years of academic study in a local junior college, in pursuit of the GCE "A" Levels, and hence to the university, or to pursue a three year polytechnic diploma with more work related skills being taught.

For those not so academically inclined, a third option – that of pursuing a technical education, with an emphasis on hands-on practical skills, at any of the Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs), is also available. Again, excellence in performance is accessed. An ITE graduate can choose to either utilize his or her professional qualifications to join the workforce, or upgrade himself or herself academically through entry into any of the polytechnics.

With increased opportunities and possibilities of university course admission through the traditional academic route of the GCE "A" Levels, or through the more flexible polytechnic diplomas, which employ the academic module system, competition for entry into any of the three state universities has become very intense.

Over the years of independence, Singapore has augmented ever more available options to its educational system. Today, a fourth option – that of pursuing an overseas

degree, is increasingly widespread and better known. With the onset of the Internet, online degree courses are also available for consideration. Online degree courses, however, to date, has not proven popular with the younger generation, and are more suitable for mature adults in mid-careers, who wish to upgrade themselves.

In reality, the majority of young Singaporeans try their best to obtain qualifications the traditional way – through enrolment into the local schools, and later, tertiary institutes. Apart from a reputation of par excellence in the local educational system, many families, with their middle class or lower income backgrounds, find that this may be the only option feasible financially. The total cost of an overseas degree course, inclusive of airfare, tuition fees, lodging, clothing, food and other miscellaneous costs, may well require at least a few hundred thousand dollars – a colossal sum of money which many in the working class can ill afford.

However, there is now a revision of the educational system. Where before, the educational pathway is perceived as that of a straight forward, one way route, now it moves toward a wide array of branch-outs for the young individual. The view that is gaining strength is that the traditional choice is not universally for every one. That human beings are diverse in their intellectual development, as well as their physical endowments is a sensitive issue which is appropriate to address now. Not only are people possessed of different talents, their development do not always proceed on a predictable path. Take the example of the great scientist Albert Einstein. His development was such that perhaps, in truth, no other educational system throughout the world in his time might accept him but nevertheless, this did not stop him from reaching his full potential in utilizing his talents. Similarly, we need more diverse ways in which a human being's aptitudes can be assessed. This is precisely, what the educational system in Singapore is striving towards.



A well trained mentor

Having a well trained mentor is vital in guiding and charting a student's progress. A mentor is someone who is well trained in understanding the child's aptitude and capabilities, in the whole context of his learning experience from his studies to other aspects of his life. To this end, the role of the mentor could be filled by the anxious parent, or more realistically, the classroom teacher.

What are the necessary pre-requisites of a mentor? Although possessing the highest scholastic achievement could be an advantage, an understanding of the student should be the criteria for the selection of mentor. Indeed personal academic success could be a distinct disadvantage as the mentor may not have any inkling of the pitfalls or difficulties that an average student might face. The Emotional Quotient, or EQ, rather than the Intelligence Quotient, IQ, is more important here, than anything else.

For example, when a student has difficulties with Mathematics, the mentor, without doubt, must be sufficiently equipped to explain and teach the concepts. However, if the student does not understand at the first try and is overwhelmed by the wealth of information, then the mentor should be in a position to impart his wisdom using mind maps or other alternate learning tools. In reality, classroom teachers (who also double up as mentors), use any available physical infrastructure for teaching and improvise whenever necessary.

Physical teaching materials, however, are of secondary importance in the process of

learning and mentoring. The character and virtues of the teacher and mentor himself are paramount. Without doubt, most teachers will definitely agree that patience is a necessary ingredient in excellent teaching. A teacher must take time to study and understand the character, aptitudes, strengths as well as weaknesses of their students in their charge, in order to be a suitable mentor. This has the same logic as a detective investigating a murder case or a general planning a military campaign.

As a first step, it is necessary for the mentor to establish a close rapport between himself and the student. This is vital, as each side then becomes aware of the student's true academic progress. The mentor then employs his experience in helping the student in overcoming obstacles along the way, but without interfering with the learning process. If a student is unable to express his problem and aspirations, that could lead to defiance, a loss of interest in learning, and ultimately resulting in the derailing of goals to be achieved.

In cultures where honest or frank dialogues between teachers and students are lacking, the student is often not given a chance to exert his own views. This is so in Asian society and culture. As a consequence, students often defer to elders in making their decisions as to the choice of their educational paths. Too often, it is the student himself who must pay the price and shoulder the responsibility of making the wrong decision in determining his own educational path at the earlier stages.

Conclusion

The best thing to do, of course, is for the school-going individual, the student, to make his own choice, and of his own free will. Yet, it must be recognized that the student must not make his own choice at too early a stage, where he may well be totally unprepared. The standard factor used to determine responsible decision making, is in the individual's maturity.

We often set standards for maturity using age. In Singapore, the traditional stint of obligatory national service for males is used as a measuring scale and the traditional celebration of coming of age in the modern context. However, such a viewpoint is inaccurate. Great men in history, such as Abraham Lincoln, Genghis Khan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi or the Kang Hsi Emperor, had mature demeanors even during their teens. Thus the co-relation between age and maturity is a disputable and moot point.

All too often, parents and mentors are generally worried that their young charges will make the wrong choices. Therefore, they perceive themselves as shouldering the responsibility of choice, taking the vital decision for their young charge without the slightest consideration or opinion of the student who, incidentally, will be most affected by such a momentous decision in future and for the rest of his life.

Such a practice is, in a sense, wrong. Each individual is unique and has his own aspirations and dreams. Each individual has a right to choose. It is the duty of the mentor not to attempt to influence his young charge's freedom of choice, yet still train and equip the student to point of being capable of making his own sensible decision. To this end, the mentor's role is to act as an advisor and a source of necessary information in helping the young student decide his own educational path in the future.

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Behavioural Problems: Through the Eyes of Our Primary School Students

Manatonufus bte Yusoff, Oh Bee Ling, Seow Enning, Rebecca, Cindy Zhang Qiulin

Introduction

In Semester 2 of the academic year 2004, we carried out an interview for the prescribed module 'Effective Pupil Management'. This module is offered to pre-service teachers in the degree course of the Initial Teacher Training Programme. Our aim in working on this article is not only to share our fieldwork findings with fellow trainee teachers and experienced educators, but also to provide an overview of the difference in perceptions towards behavioural issues between genders. This fieldwork is based on our hypotheses and interview on a group of Primary Five and Six students. The interview was conducted with six students (3 students of each gender) and we implemented a survey on thirty students (15 students of each gender) to complement it.

Rationale

At the time of this fieldwork, we had just returned from Practicum 1 (Teaching

Practice), and would like to verify our perceptions on one aspect of classroom management. Classroom management has always been a major concern especially to trainee teachers. To date, our analysis of the following fieldwork has not differed from our fieldwork findings even after Practicum 2.

Hypotheses

Our perceptions of students' misbehaviour were broadly categorised into three hypotheses, namely:

1. Both male and female students undergo the same education system hence there should not be any difference in their perceptions of misbehaviour.
2. The students' perceptions and definitions of misbehaviour should be similar to what we have come up in the survey.
3. The nature of punishment carried in schools presently is acceptable to students as compared to those punishments meted out in the past.

These hypotheses were supported for or against by means of conducted interviews and surveys.

Procedures

1. Parental consent was obtained from the interviewees
2. We ensured that the interviewees themselves consented to the interview
3. Interviewees were assured that the information provided by them would be kept anonymous.



Responses

Question 1

How do you find your sense of identity/belonging (security and acceptance) in and out of school?

Interviewee 1

In the school, I look to my close friend and teacher for security. After school, I depend on my family members to protect me.

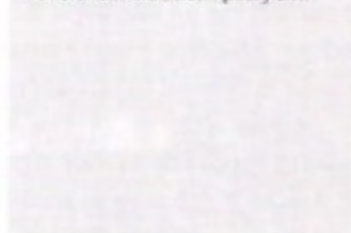


Interviewee 2

Friends are present in school for our company and play games. A strong relationship builds up over time. Being with a group of people gives us strength as compared to being alone. Outside school, I still feel a sense of belonging as I am still wearing my school attire.

Interviewee 3

I look up to my best friends in or out of school. They understand me better. I also join soccer as my passion is to be a football player.



Interviewee 4

In school, I join netball as my CCA. There are teachers around and they play with us. In class, I have many classmates and friends. We stay united as a class very well. At home, my parents would take care of me.

Interviewee 5

I join basketball as my CCA in school because of my interest. I feel honoured to represent the school in competitions. I like to meet my friends to go out after school hours too. I look forward to going to school because of my friends, and not so much the learning part.

Interviewee 6

I'm in my netball team I usually hang out with my friends at the shopping centre over a drink.



Question 2a

What do you think are the worst behavioural problems you can find in class?

Interviewee 1

The worst problems I can find in class include hitting the teacher and arguing and quarrelling with the teacher.

Interviewee 2

Classmates who curse the teachers whom they hate, as if they have some feud with the teachers.

Interviewee 3

Think they are defiant to teachers and being a nuisance to classmates during class.

Interviewee 4

When recess is over, students do not raise their hands properly when lining up. When the teacher is talking to another teacher, the students in the class start to make noise.

Interviewee 5

Fighting and talking back to teachers are the worst behavioural problems I have witnessed.

Interviewee 6

Truancy and defiance to teachers. I have witnessed my friend just walking out of the class after arguing with the teacher.



Question 2b

What do you think are the causes of the above listed behavioural problems?

Interviewee 1

Parents are the root cause of the problems. They often quarrel and fight and children who grow up in this kind of environment will misbehave.

Interviewee 2

The student may have failed to do an assignment as required by the teacher, causing his/her to flare up. This student may also have some attitude problems towards teachers, causing him/her to bear a grudge against the teacher.

Interviewee 3

The students are annoyed with the teachers as teachers are very sarcastic and demanding. They always want to pull their rank with the students.

Interviewee 4

The students do not feel like raising their hands even if they see the teacher do it. Sometimes, the teacher does not even care about us when she is busy.

Interviewee 5

The students have the wrong attitude themselves. They may also be facing family problems such as divorced parents or living with grandparents. There is a lack of communication with their families, causing them to misbehave in school.

Interviewee 6

Students do experience bad days so teacher should understand the students. Teachers like to jump to conclusion or scold student without thinking of their pride.

Question 3a

In your opinion, how would you describe the nature of punishments being carried out in school?

Interviewee 1

The punishment is strict.

Interviewee 2

Most teachers would send either send you out of class or simply deduct your test marks.



Interviewee 3

I feel it's very harsh and at times very illogical. Teachers always make students stay back 1 or 2 hours after school. They should know that we are very tired and got homework to do. They want us to complete our work on time but by holding us back, they are contradicting themselves.

Interviewee 4

The system is fair.

Interviewee 5

The system is fairly all right. I am immune to it.

Interviewee 6

The punishment is fine.

Question 3h

How do you think the school can handle these problems differently?

Interviewee 1:

The school can make the students wash the toilets or sweep the floor to make them learn these skills.

Interviewee 2:

This way of handling the problem is good as children are already old enough to know what is right and what is wrong. Persistent screaming and scolding at them would not serve much purpose too.

Interviewee 3:

I think teachers should be sensible and put themselves in the students' position. If the teacher is good and equipped with etiquette values, I'm sure students won't be defiant.

Interviewee 4

No comments to offer.



Interviewee 5

I think if the system remains more or less the same, I would be happy. But I would like the school to scrape the idea of making public apology as punishment. It serves no purpose and I feel that none of us care whether the person will repent. He may not be sincere when apologizing too.

Interviewee 6

I think there should be teacher and student conference.



Question 4

Do you think teacher need to exhibit exemplary social behaviour (dressing, personal grooming and punctuality) for students to learn from? Why or why not?

Interviewee 1

Yes! Teachers need to exhibit exemplary social behaviour or else the students may feel that it is unfair if they have to listen to a teacher who does not even set the basic example.

Interviewee 2

Yes. Most schools require students to wear proper attires to school (not to style their hair like gangsters or Ah Bengs). If the teacher were to set a good example, the students would definitely role model it. Should they get punished for breaking the school rule, they would not be able to use the excuse that if the teacher can do so, why can't I?

Interviewee 3

Yes but not until teacher's social behaviour be very fake.



Interviewee 4

Yes. They are older than us so they should set a good example for us to follow.

Interviewee 5

No! We are all humans. We tend to make mistakes and so do teachers. They will appear fake in front of us if they are overly disciplined.

Interviewee 6

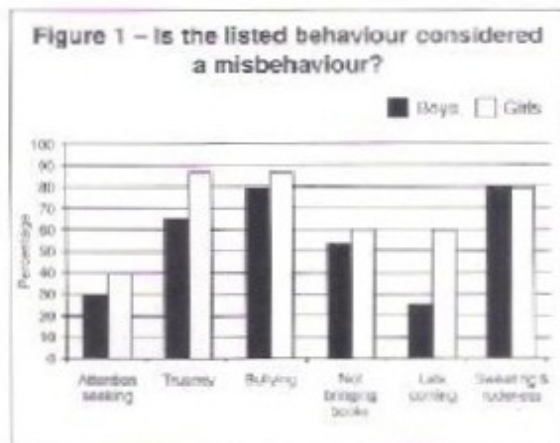
Yes, some of us do look up to teachers. If the teachers are very harsh in their words, it's not wrong for us if we follow them.

Survey

Method of data collection

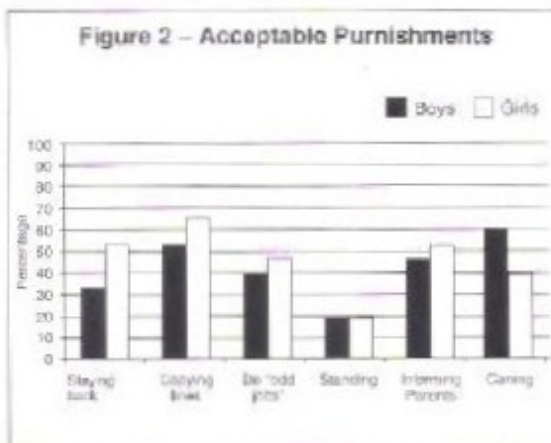
We used pencil-and-paper questionnaire to collect data. A total of ten questions on behavioural issues were listed in the questionnaire. Thirty respondents were asked to tick against a checklist with regards to their classroom experiences.

The findings:

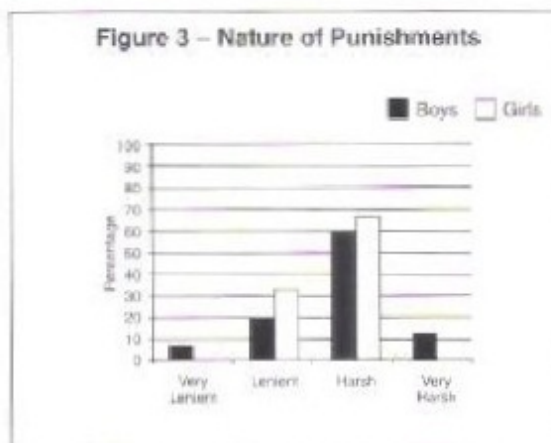


With reference to *figure 1*, we can see that truancy and bullying are the most commonly classified misbehaviours. Only 26.7% of boys thought that late coming is a misbehaviour as compared to 60% of girls. Boys thought that late coming is an unintentional act as they might have experienced it before. Less than half of the total number of students surveyed expressed that attention seeking is not a misbehaviour, which contradicts hypothesis 1. In all the misbehaviours listed above with the exception of swearing and rudeness, more girls than boys surveyed recognised these as behavioural problems.

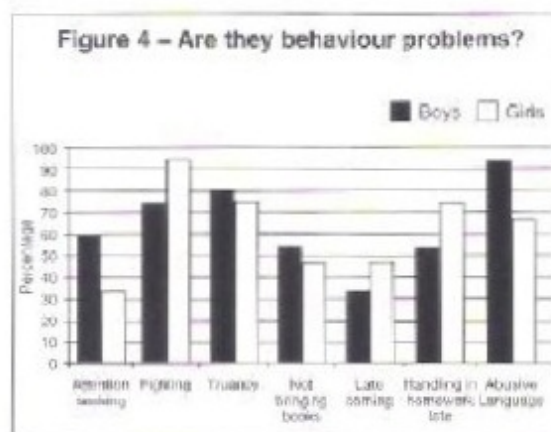
From *figure 2*, we can see that 60% of boys agreed that caning is an acceptable punishment as compared to 40% of girls. This may be attributed to the fact that boys have personal experiences that caused them to fear the rod and be obedient. Girls felt that copying lines would be most acceptable as it is a less physical punishment. 20% more girls were receptive to the idea of staying back during recess as punishment than boys. Students generally did not think that standing in class, on



tables or chairs is an acceptable punishment as this seemed like a barbaric act of punishment, which may endanger the safety of the punished student.

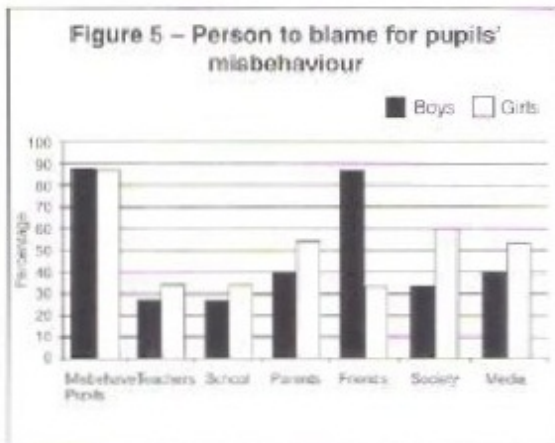


In *figure 3*, most of the students (about 60-65%) felt that punishment in schools is harsh. None of the girls (0%) felt that discipline in their schools is very lenient or very harsh. The responses of the interviewees of question 3A supplement this viewpoint as well.

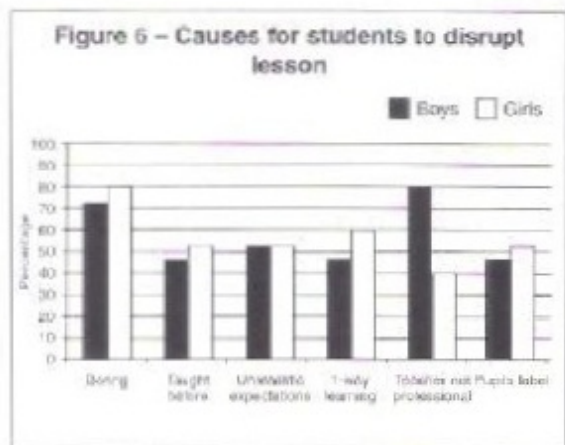


In *figure 4*, we see that 90% of girls felt that fighting is a behavioural problem while more than 90% of boys thought that abusive

language is a behavioural problem. A possible reason why students felt that fighting and abusive language are behavioural problems is because they cause emotional, physical and psychological damage to the well-being of the students.



From figure 5, we see that about **86.7%** of both genders thought students themselves ought to be blamed for their own misbehaviour. **86.7%** of boys thought that friends should be blamed for their misbehaviour, while only slightly fewer than **40%** of girls thought so. Teachers and the school played a less important responsibility in misbehaving students. **26.7%** more girls thought that society played a role in student misbehaviour through the influence of media (TV



programmes, the Internet, gaming etc). From figure 6, we see that **80%** of girls attributed lesson disruption to boring lessons. Girls do not feel engaged in the lesson and are not personally involved and participating in the learning process. **80%** of the boys believed that teachers who act unprofessional encourages lesson disruption. Contrasting the results, only **40%** of the girls felt that unprofessional teachers would disrupt the lesson.

Conclusion

This simple fieldwork has yielded interesting results as it differs from our hypotheses. Both genders exhibit a difference in perception towards behavioural issues. The students' definition and perception of misbehaviour is different from that of teachers. As such, we strongly believe that good rapport must be established between the teacher and students. Teachers must regularly interact and communicate with students to find out about what want and how they expect teachers to handle certain misbehaviours and situations. Teachers should practice what they preach and not merely impose certain threats without putting them into action.





Teachers should also make known explicitly to students their expectations so that students know exactly what their teachers want from them. It is important that before we start any academic year or take over the charge of any class, we state our rules and procedures clearly to them. We can also discuss the rules together as a class and agree on a set of rules to be used during lesson running times so that when they are punished, they can accept the punishment as it had been discussed together as a collective agreement. Before we carry out any form of punishment, we must indicate exactly which rule has been broken and explain the reason behind the punishment so that students will feel justified and understand the rationale for the punishment. In our teaching, we should incorporate Howard Gardner's Eight Aspects of Multiple Intelligence into our lessons to cater to the different. If we fully engage them in our lessons, they will feel involved and have no

reasons for misbehaving in class. This fieldwork has been an eye-opening and enriching experience considering that what we have found out from the fieldwork differs from what is taught in theory. Presently teaching in the school, we are now more aware and sensitive of students' needs and know how to handle students better. Before we did this project, we were worried about how to handle students as it really involved a thorough understanding of the pupils. Upon deployment to teach in schools, we only have a short period of time to establish rapport with the pupils. Thus, the need to establish the ground rules and familiarise ourselves with our students is essential to a smooth career, especially for beginning teachers like us.

Manestonufus bte Yusoff, Oh Bee Ling, Seow Enning, Rebecca, Cindy Zhang QiuLin are beginning teachers recently graduated from NIE.

"Teach Less, Learn More"

Pearly Chai

I had a choice..... to teach or to just deliver. I chose to teach. For me, to deliver means to give to my students a package that has been prepared with all the guidelines, textbooks and worksheets.

When I teach, I communicate with my students and I encourage them to communicate with me. My students are alive and so am I. I want to know their opinions about things, their hopes and fears, how they feel and how they react to situations. I want them to interact with me and with one another. In this way, learning becomes fun and purposeful.

A prepared package is only a resource, a means to an end. The teacher must dare to be creative, dare to be different and dare to try out ideas, bearing in mind the needs of the students. Jill Wolf's poem, "A Teacher's Prayer", expresses how I feel and is reproduced here.

One way of putting my beliefs to practice is in the strategy of dialogue journal writing. I term it 'Let's Chat' using part of the title on an article on dialogue journals (TELL Vol 12 No1, MAR 1996) co-written with Dr George M Jacobs.

Dialogue journal writing is a two-way communication between the writer and one or more readers who write their responses in the journal. It is like what we do when we email someone on computer and receive his or her responses. We 'chat' or communicate with each other on a topic and give our

A Teacher's Prayer by Jill Wolf

*I want to teach
my students more
than lessons in a book;*

*I want to teach them
deeper things
that people overlook -*

*The value of
a rose in bloom,
its use and beauty, too.*

*A sense of curiosity
to discover
what is true;*

*How to think
and how to choose
the right above the wrong;*

*How to live
and learn each day
and grow up to be strong;*

*To teach them always
how to gain
in wisdom and in grace.*

*So they will someday
make the world
a brighter, better place.*

*Let me be
a friend and guide
to give these minds a start*

*Upon their way
down life's road,
then I'll have done
my part.*

opinions and suggestions and learning takes place. A separate book is used for such communication.

When I give someone a poke, I believe he or she would respond with an 'Ouch!' I bear this idea in mind when I teach. I poke and prick my students' minds with stimulating thoughts and questions to get them to think and respond, leading and guiding them to the highest they can give and achieve. They provide the ideas and suggestions and I provide the opportunities for them to expand on those ideas and suggestions. Below is an example of how this was done in 'Let's Chat' with one of my former Primary Two students, Jazin, (2003) Punggol Primary School.

On a certain day in the week, my pupils move into the 'Animal' groups they were allocated, to work on language based, ability learning activities. Jazin suggested creating riddles as one of the activities.

Thursday, 16 January

*Dear Miss Chai,
Perhaps we could do our Animal
Groups and paste up riddles.*

*Yours sincerely,
Jazin*

I gave Jazin credit for his fantastic idea. I modelled correct sentence structures through my suggestion, expanding on his, and asked for his opinion.

Thursday, 30 January

*Dear Jazin,
What a brilliant idea! Perhaps you
could create a few riddles, write them
down and illustrate them. We could
display them for the class to read. How
about that?*

*Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai*

Each pupil was encouraged to keep a 'My Own Creations' book. The pupil would choose a wrapper for such a book and wrap it. I would label these words on the wrapper:

My Own Creations
Author: (Pupil's name)
Class: 2-8

I would then wrap the book with a plastic sheet to show my interest and care. I wanted to take the pupils through what a writer does. Below was Jazin's proposal to my response to his chat.

Thursday, 13 February

*Dear Miss Chai,
I can do it, Miss Chai. May be I can
create a few poems too. Shall I write it
in my Creation Book?*

*Yours sincerely,
Jazin*

Jazin was encouraged to carry out his great idea.

Monday, 10 March

*Wonderful, Jazin!
Would you like to create a poem for
your next chat and a few for your
Creations Book? I would love to read
them.*

*Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai*

Jazin showed his enthusiasm. I had not returned his 'My Own Creations' book as I had yet to give my comments on his last piece of writing.

Wednesday, 26 March

*Dear Miss Chai,
Maybe you could give me back my
Creation Book back to me so that I can
start to write the poems tomorrow.*

*Yours sincerely,
Jazin*

I promised to return Jazin's 'My Own Creations' book and nudged him to write a poem in his next chat.

Wednesday, 2 April

Dear Jazin,
Yes, I'll return you your Creations Book. You can write your poems in it. It would be wonderful if you could write one in your next chat. Would you like to do so?

Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai

Jazin's first poem:

Wednesday, 23 April

Dear Miss Chai,
Yes, Miss Chai.
Here it is, created by me.

Look up the sky,
oh, I change my mind.
I see butterflies up in the sky.

Yours sincerely,
Jazin

My suggestion and guidance:

Friday, 6 June

Dear Jazin,
That is a good start. Would you like to try writing another poem? You can begin it like this.....

Up and down I go,

You can discuss this with me.

Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai

Jazin's second poem after conferencing:

Wednesday, 2 July

Dear Miss Chai,
I try writing a poem with your ideas. It goes like this:

Up and down I go,
On the see-saw
Playing with my brother
Having fun together!

Thank you for your ideas.

Yours sincerely,
Jazin

Jazin was so enthusiastic about his new idea. He went on to another poem.

Wednesday, 2 July

Dear Miss Chai,
This is another poem that I have created. Here it is:

On the first day of school,
I met my friend,
We held hands together
We looked at each other,
We said,
" We'll be best friends forever! "

Yours sincerely,
Jazin

My praises and encouragement:

Monday, 4 August

I like your poem, Jazin! I think that you are very creative. Would you like to compose another one? It could be about 2-8.

Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai

Jazin's poem about his class:

Monday, 18 August

*Dear Miss Chai,
Here is another poem about 2-8.*

**2-8 is a class, a very, very polite
class. Helping teachers and greeting
them, and caring to their friends.**

*Yours sincerely,
Jazin*



Students write on different topics like how the class is being taught, events in and out of school, their classmates, their family members, places they have visited, questions they want answered, their opinions on things, poems, jokes and riddles they want to share. The focus is on communication. Thus, there is no overt error correction. I model the spelling/correct spelling of the word/correct sentence structure in my reply and written comments. Using such a strategy has helped my pupils become more mature in their thoughts. Many a time they chat with me like adults.

Another suggestion for conferencing:

Friday, 22 August

*Dear Jazin,
Great! Would you like to see me about
rewriting your poem?*

*Yours sincerely,
Miss Chai*

Jazin's masterpiece!

Friday, 14 November

*Dear Miss Chai,
Here is the poem:*

**2-8 is a class,
A very, very polite class,
Helping teachers and greeting them,
And caring for their friends.**

*Yours sincerely,
Jazin*

Pearly Chai is a Senior Teacher at Punggol Primary School.

VOICES from our Teachers...



ASCD Organised

Principles of Learning & Teaching Workshop

by Dr Julianne Moss

Fri 11 March 2005

Over 60 Senior Teachers from different Primary and Secondary schools were enthusiastically engaged in a one-day intensive workshop by Dr Moss. The many hands-on activities were designed to bring across the principles of learning and teaching. A spin-off from the session was the networking among the STs. Many were sharing good practices and exchanging ideas. It was a day well spent with a group of highly energised STs. They will be bringing their learning back to their own schools to share with the larger community of teachers.

ASCD 16th Annual General Meeting & Lecture: Principles of Learning & Teaching (POLT)

by Dr Julianne Moss

Sat 12 Mar 2005

Lecture Theatre 1, TJC

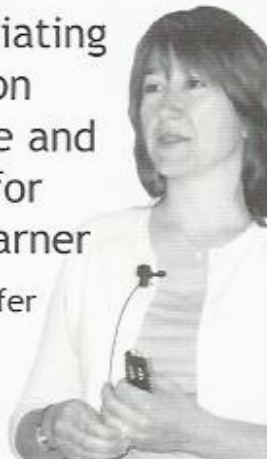
This AGM lecture was attended by 334 participants.

Differentiating Instruction Challenge and Support for Every Learner

by Ms Jennifer Beaseley

Fri 3-4 Jun 2005, NJC

This one day workshop for two groups of teachers was held at 'The Sanctuary' of NJC. Jennifer's workshop was timely as all classrooms at every level face the need to differentiate to a certain extent. ASCD titles on differentiating instruction in mixed-ability classrooms were quickly sold out by the end of the workshops.



2005 Teachers Mass Lecture:

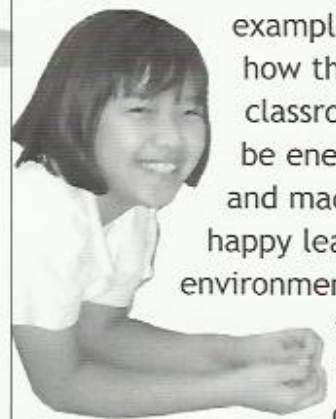
Humour@Work: Happy Classrooms, Engaged Learners

by Michael Myers (Keynote Speaker) and Ensemble Performance by Wavelength troupe

8-9 Sep 2005, Rock Auditorium, Suntec City

Organised by MOE & ASCD

A total of one thousand five hundred teachers attended an unusual mass lecture held over 4 sessions in 2 days for teachers from the four zones. Keynote speaker, Michael Myers gave some pointers and hands-on



examples of how the classroom can be energised and made into a happy learning environment through the use of

humour that entertains even as it teaches. His colleagues, Brendan, Kara and Anne, made up the rest of the Wavelength troupe who shared via music, songs and an ensemble presentation, how the classroom can be a funny place in which to teach and to learn.



Events 2005

Connecting Character to Conduct: Helping Students Do the Right Thing

by Roberta Richin

Wed 26 Oct 2005

The Auditorium, Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Sec. School

A Talk for ASCD members, teachers and parents

Over 200 ASCD members attended a free talk by Roberta Richin on how to nurture the right values and help our students in character development.

Held in the cool and comfortable auditorium of Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School, the session was well received by our members and teachers. Roberta's book and other ASCD publications were also on sale at the venue. Sales were brisk as teachers made a beeline for the book

display during the tea-break.



Curriculum Development & Assessment Workshops

by Dr Colin Marsh

10-14 Oct 2005

Teachers Network, MOE



Prof Colin Marsh from Curtin University touched on Curriculum Planning and Evaluation for the CPDD officers at this workshop. For the principals, his workshop focused on School Leadership: Issues and Directions. Topics he covered in the workshop included Action Research, Concerned-Based Adoption Model (a model to gauge the readiness of teachers when implementing an innovation), and the Development of School-Based Curriculum and Assessment.

Principals of Learning & Teaching Workshops

by Dr Julianne Moss

14-18 Nov 2005 for secondary schools

21-25 Nov 2005 for primary schools





Jennifer Beaseley Workshops @ National Junior College





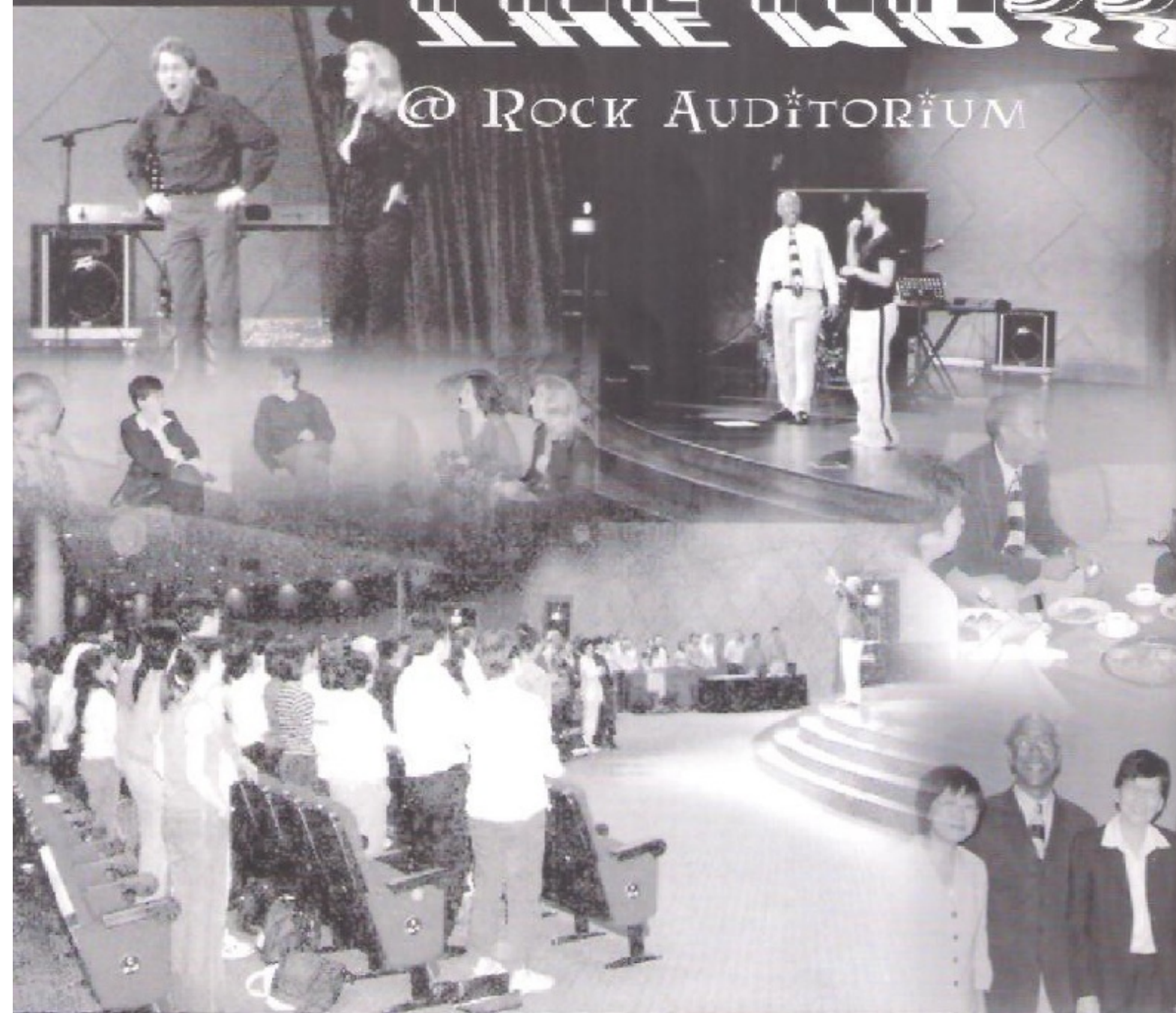
Colin Marsh Workshop

@ Teachers Network, MOE



THE MASS

@ ROCK AUDITORIUM



Comments by Wave

Mike Myers

"Singapore has been an education for us even though we came to teach. It's been great to see how 'no child is left behind' because the government, parents and teachers know the goals of the schools from the beginning of life. Bravo Singapore!"

Brendan Kelly

"The investment Singaporeans have made in nurturing the whole child through education is inspiring in its wisdom."

LECTURE



ngth Musical Staff

Kara Kesselring

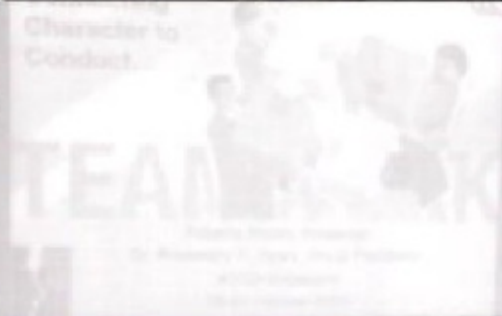
"Singapore! What a spectacular country with a remarkable education system. The positive emphasis on education is truly inspiring!"

Anne Smith

"This beautiful melting pot has been an exciting place to visit! The structure and spirit of education has restored my faith in the possibilities for education in the United States. Singapore has set an example for the rest of the world."



Talk by *Roberta Richin*
**Connecting Character to Conduct:
 Helping Students Do the Right Thing**



26 October 2005
 Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School



Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Singapore)

c/o Tele-Temps Pte Ltd 1002 Toa Payoh Industrial Park #06-1475 Singapore 319074
Tel: 6250 7700 Fax: 6257 9500 Email: ascd@work-solutions.com



MEMBERSHIP FORM

NEW APPLICATION **RENEWAL** **UPGRADING MEMBERSHIP**

If this application is for renewal or upgrading, please provide previous Membership No: () . Thank you.

Name (as in NRIC): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Contact No: (Home): _____ (Handphone): _____ (Office): _____

(Fax): _____ Email: _____

Organisation/School: _____

Occupation: _____ Sex: _____ Nationality: _____

Areas of Interest (please tick all which apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum Differentiation Workshops |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching Subordinates | <input type="checkbox"/> Handling Difficult Colleagues / Students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Habits of the Mind | <input type="checkbox"/> Pedagogical Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum Design | <input type="checkbox"/> School Assessment / Appraisal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Related Talks | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Needs Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____ | |

What length and type of programme do you prefer? (please tick all which apply)

- | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full day | <input type="checkbox"/> Half Day | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Days Conference |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Morning | <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch Time Talks | <input type="checkbox"/> Seminars | <input type="checkbox"/> Workshops |

Membership Category (membership is not transferable): (please tick against type of membership selected)

Types of Membership	Fees Payable	Please tick
ORDINARY: For those interested in supervision, curriculum & instruction	S\$30.00 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>
INSTITUTIONAL: For schools, institutions, libraries & educational societies	S\$300.00 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>
LIFE: For individuals	S\$500.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

My payment for ASCD (Singapore) membership of S\$ _____ is enclosed.

Payments by CHEQUE: Please cross and make payable to ASCD (Singapore).

Payments by IFAAS (no invoice will be issued): please process the payment immediately.

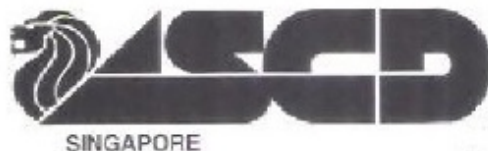
Ensure that either the Principal or Vice-Principal signs and rubber-stamps the application form, indicating that payment is through IFAAS before forwarding it to us. Our MOE Vendor ID is: MOE0100648.

Please post to:

The Secretariat
ASCD (Singapore)
c/o Tele-Temps Pte Ltd
1002 Toa Payoh Ind'l Park #06-1475
Singapore 319074

For official use only

Date Received:	<input type="text"/>
Data Update:	<input type="text"/>
Card Issued:	<input type="text"/>
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Membership No:	<input type="text"/>



MEMBERSHIP WITH ASCD SINGAPORE BRINGS BIG BENEFITS!

Never before has membership with ASCD Singapore been so worthwhile! The year 2005 will bring speakers of international renown to your doorstep. Be among the first in this region to have Education Experts show you how to give yourself the edge in teaching and learning.

Membership has its privileges! In the pipeline:

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Enjoy worthwhile discounts on books from ASCD International
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Selected issues of ASCD International's Educational Leadership Journal
Access to "Ask the Expert" on our new website!

**Get all these for a very reasonable membership fee. Fill in the form
(on the reverse of this page), send it together with your fees and
give yourself the edge in teaching!**

For more information and additional forms, contact

**ASCD (Singapore) Secretariat
C/o Tele-Temps Pte Ltd
1002 Toa Payoh Ind'l Park #06-1475
Singapore 319074
Phone: 6250 7700 / 9681 6704
Fax: 6257 9500
Email: ascd@work-solutions.com**

ASCD Courses

Available for Teachers and MOE Officers

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has acquired some ASCD courses for its officers. These are accessible through VITAL, the e-learning portal that provides teachers and MOE officers an alternative mode of training for their professional development and personal growth. MOE officers can access the courses on the Internet @ www.vital.moe.edu.sg.

➤ The ASCD courses on VITAL are

Title	VITAL Course Code
The Reflective Educator	G0114
Classroom Management: Building Relationships for Better Learning	G0115
Multiple Intelligences	G0116
Surviving & Thriving in Your First Year of Teaching	G0117
Memory and Learning Strategies	G0118
Student Portfolios: Getting Started in Your Classroom	G0119
Differentiating Instruction	G0120
Teacher Behaviour That Promote Assessment for Learning	G0121
Effective Leadership	G0122

- MOE officers can access and register for the above ASCD courses directly through VITAL by clicking on the register button under the General Courses in the Course Catalogue. Certifications of completion will be issued upon successful completion of these courses.
- As VITAL is linked by an interface to ASCD in the U.S., officers who register for these courses are able to interact with the ASCD trainers there as well as participate with other international participants in discussion on the ASCD portal.
- MOE has initially purchased 500 keys from ASCD for the 9 courses. Each key costs \$146 and allows the officer a place in one of the above courses. The key is valid for one year from 1 Apr 2003 – 31 Mar 2004 allowing officers a year to complete the course.
- Officers have to register for a course before they can browse through the course on VITAL. Should a decision be made not to start on the course, they should de-register from the course or they will be classified as "not completing the course".
- Officers can use the online feedback system to evaluate the courses completed. This will help STB determine whether these courses would be offered again the following year.
- Should officers wish to discuss with our local experts any issue related to any of the above ASCD courses, they can e-mail the following ASCD Executive Council members, Dr Ang Wai Hoong whang@nie.edu.sg, Dr Cheah Yin Mee learning@pacific.net.sg or Mrs Soo Kim Bee kbee@gmt.com.sg.

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