

contact

C(H)IP IN!

Schools get deeper into Community Involvement Programmes with innovative concepts

HELP FOR TROUBLED TEENS

Spot the signs and gain vital tips on how to help distressed youths

IT'S ALL WITHIN YOUR GRASP

Even if you're busy, you can still live well, dress well and get in shape



VOLUNTEER POWER

From environmental conservation to leading a troop of scouts, six inspiring individuals show how personal causes have transformed their own lives

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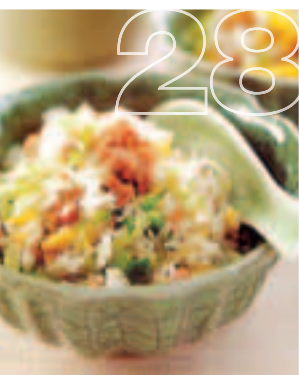
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Many things about the human spirit are worth celebrating. Thus, we find no better way to begin a wonderful new year than to share the spirit of altruism, paying tribute to those who have quietly contributed towards a meaningful cause and exemplified what it means to lead, care, and inspire. Aesop once said, "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted". It is in this spirit that a principal, three teachers and two EASes are actively giving back to society through their volunteer work. These six inspiring individuals devote their personal time and effort to care for the young, the old, the disadvantaged, and the environment to foster stronger community ties and preserve cherished values. Read about what motivated them to take the path of volunteerism and how their personal convictions have helped them contribute to education in a bigger way. Also, find out how three schools got off the beaten track to develop meaningful Community Involvement Projects that tap into the 'heartware' of both teachers and students.

As teachers, taking care of your students' affective needs is not always easy. On days when the skies are not the only things grey, you may find yourself trying very hard to figure out if that lingering sense of moodiness around your students might be a cause for concern. Get some useful tips from a psychiatrist and two full-time school counsellors on how to identify students who are emotionally disturbed and how you may help them.

At other times, helping students may mean taking them in hand. How good are you at 'teaching' your students a lesson? Do you think male teachers are better at it? Hear the views of two teachers on whether gender plays a role in instilling good discipline in students and judge for yourself!

Fancy bringing more ideas into the classrooms to spruce up your lessons? Log on to *edumall2.0* to bring the world of knowledge to your desktop. Check out the wide array of resources and videos that can give your students the much needed boost to sit up and pay attention. If you need to glean more inspiration, book the date on your calendar to attend the MOE Excel Fest, taking place on 5 and 6 March at the Suntec International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Unwinding at your workplace takes on a whole new meaning in this issue. Try the easy workout to recharge! You can take the cue from our *Gym on the Go* article and let all your tension roll off in minutes as you follow through those simple steps to stretch your muscles. To power up, take some carbohydrates in a plate of delicious fried rice or pasta. We have two recipes for a quick meal that guarantees to keep you going.

Check out the *The Elegant Style-phile* to get your fashion fix. We are offering two runway looks that you can strut around proudly in school and out of it. And for all book lovers, indulge a weekend at those specialty bookstores that are quietly tucked away and have fun discovering the treasures.

We hope this new year will bring you renewed inspiration.

Is there a particular topic that you would like us to discuss in *Contact*? Drop us a note at **contact_online@moe.edu.sg**

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On the cover:

The words "I Volunteer" epitomise the commitment and conviction of those who believe in a cause.



PROTECTOR

of the EARTH



Muhd Zaki B Jalil, HOD, Science, Cedar Primary School, volunteers as a Nature Guide at Chek Jawa in his own time. He believes that by educating our young on the importance of ensuring the good health of our natural habitat, we are preserving our historical and cultural heritage, and also our future as a nation.

“We should measure the quality of our lives through our contributions to life itself.”

Muhammad Zaki B Jalil's favourite memory as a nature guide at Chek Jawa revolves around a young boy and his grandmother.

“The boy was obviously not interested in nature, but his grandmother was very excited. Throughout the trip, she recounted everything she did when she was younger and living in the kampong. She also pointed out the flora and fauna that could be cooked and eaten. Her recipes were more interesting than my scientific facts!” recalls Zaki, who started volunteering seven years ago after learning about Chek Jawa from his Geography lecturer at the National Institute of Education.

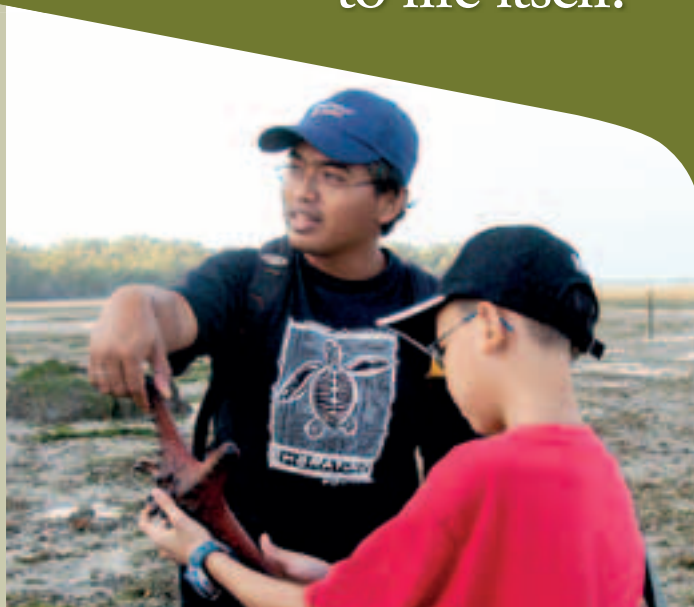
“Most importantly, her grandson became very fascinated by her stories and the surroundings. At the end of the trip, he said, ‘Grandma, I didn’t know you were so cool!’ I believe he discovered a lot that day – not just about nature, but also about Singapore, his culture and his grandmother.”

For this self-described “kampong boy at heart”, being a nature guide stems from his desire to help others experience, appreciate and respect the natural environment.

“I believe that the quality of my life should only be measured by my contributions to life itself. If we do not take care of nature and our environment, we will eventually move towards an ecology of destruction and death. I cannot imagine a world without nature – the trees, the rivers and the animals – because it is nature that makes our world more meaningful, and I want to do my bit to help save it,” says Zaki.

And he has been working hard to instil the same passion for nature in his students at Cedar Primary School, where he spearheads a range of diverse activities to experience nature. This includes Gardening For Wildlife, where students plant flora that attract wildlife such as butterflies and bats to the school garden.

Besides incorporating environmental education into the academic curriculum, he and his colleagues constantly revise their programmes to keep up with new developments. To date, students have joined international coastal clean-up campaigns and gained hands-on experience in learning about the effects of soil erosion.



“Environmental education is more than just outdoor education. It should also ensure that students understand the connection between the surroundings and other aspects of our lives, for example, culture. Environmental issues can be a good platform to prepare future generations of Singaporeans to become informed, responsible and participative citizens,” explains Zaki.

“An education that does not inform our young of the consequences of practices that pollute our waters, deforest our land, and threaten our natural habitats will damage our shared sense of nationhood, our historical and cultural heritage and our future as a nation.

“Only when students understand the ecology around them and the diversity they have inherited from their forefathers, can they appreciate the soil they must defend. So environmental education cannot be confined to activities; there must be a pedagogy for deep reflection, of responsible argument based on evidence and exposure to local issues. The way I see it, environmental education is also national education.”

Zaki is also an avid reader, especially books by Syed Hussein Alatas, who wrote about colonial politics, social psychologist Erich Fromm and cultural critic Henry Giroux. To him, juggling between work, personal interests and volunteering is all about prioritising. “My students come first. I believe that an environmental educator must try to be effective in instilling in students a love and passion for nature within and outside the school. We live in a world full of constraints, so we have to prioritise and make the best of every opportunity to achieve our dreams.”

MAIN PICTURE: Zaki brings his students from Cedar Primary School on regular nature explorations.

ABOVE: Chek Jawa has a treasure trove of natural resources for expeditions.

LEFT: The students are always piqued by Zaki's explanations.



Chua Ee Ling, HOD, Student Development, Broadrick Secondary School, enriches her travel experiences by sharing her knowledge and contributing her effort to less privileged children living in the rural areas of Chiang Mai, Thailand. As a pioneer who established the Overseas Service Learning Project there, she brings a big group of students over for service volunteering every year.

SHARING



beyond our
SHORES

For the past three years, Chua Ee Ling has been spending part of her June break in Chiang Mai, Thailand. But these trips were no relaxing resort holidays – instead, she was at Mae Salak Village School, overseeing the Overseas Service Learning Project she helped to kick-start in 2007.

“I wanted to inculcate the spirit of volunteerism in my students. This initiative provided many opportunities for them to share their knowledge with the children in Thailand, and to learn to lead and inspire the less fortunate,” she reveals.

Encouraged by the response in 2007, the volunteers (which included 18 students and three teachers), who taught English to the children through handicraft, music and PE sessions and refurbished their medical infirmary, decided to turn it into a long-term programme.

The following year, Ee Ling returned with a bigger group of 45 students and five teachers. This time, they completed building a dormitory for the children, who otherwise, had to travel five kilometres by foot everyday to attend lessons. On their most recent visit, she brought along her colleague, Subject Head of Broadrick Secondary School’s Character Education Programme, and 20 students, who shared with the children at Mae Salak Village School their IT skills in open source software such as Open Office Writer and Linux.

Ee Ling, who has been teaching at Broadrick for six years, says, “As a teacher, my responsibility is more than just imparting knowledge within the classroom. I believe there are many opportunities for learning outside the classroom too. I seek to develop the values of sincerity, passion, integrity, compassion and enterprise (collectively known as SPICE) in my students, and it is so much easier to bring across the message through activities rather than textbooks. Experiential learning also allows students to learn to persevere in their tasks.”

Ee Ling fully understands the benefits of experiential learning, especially after attending a Youth Expedition Project herself when she was training at the National Institute of Education. Before travelling to Vietnam, where the volunteer programme took place, she had spent six months developing the planning process, including team-building, recce trips and how to learn new languages. The experience, she says, made her appreciate volunteer work better.

MAIN PICTURE:
Ee Ling is still very much involved with the Overseas Service Learning Project that she helped to kick-start in 2007.

RIGHT:
Ee Ling always makes her lessons a fun challenge.



That’s why she hopes to promote volunteerism among her students. Pointing out that many lack awareness on how and where they can contribute, she adds, “As teachers, we must introduce the right organisations and communities to students so they can continue to volunteer even after they have graduated. For example, one of our CCAs ‘adopted’ an old folks home, so members can visit regularly to spend time with the elderly, assist in cleaning up the home, and more.”

Sharing her volunteering experiences during classes and on socialising platforms such as Facebook has helped too. After she talked about her first trip to the Mae Salak Village School with her class, during which she also showed photographs and videos, several students expressed interest to join the 2008 project.

“I believe the values which students have picked up from volunteering have helped to shape their character very well, and have built resilience and a never-give-up attitude in them. One of them eventually became the school’s top scorer for the GCE O-Level examinations and was awarded a scholarship from the Singapore Polytechnic. And he is still part of the Overseas Service Learning Project,” informs Ee Ling, who started volunteering since her junior college days, when she visited old folks and children’s homes and helped raise funds by collecting old clothes and newspapers.

She has also picked up important skills from volunteering, “The learning takes place when we are trying to overcome challenges. So we must always maintain our team spirit and morale to find the strength to move forward. Nothing is too difficult when we stay together as a team.”

“I believe the values which students have picked up from volunteering have helped to shape their character very well, and have built resilience and a never-give-up attitude in them.”



HITTING

the

TOP SPOT

Elangovan V Muthoo, HOD, Normal Technical, Marsiling Secondary School, puts his athletic ability to good use by volunteering as Head Coach of badminton to students of the Special Olympics Singapore.

“Our lives become more purposeful when we make a difference in the lives of others.”

It was eight years ago, during his final year at university, when Elangovan V Muthoo discovered volunteering and all the benefits it can bring to others' lives.

“I wanted to do something meaningful, something that I would enjoy and which would allow me to meet more people. I searched the Internet and learnt that Special Olympics Singapore needed volunteers for their badminton training programme. So I've been with them since,” he says.

As Head Coach of badminton with Special Olympics Singapore, Elangovan spends two hours every week training athletes with intellectual disability or special needs. Clearly, he enjoys every moment with the group, whose age ranges from eight to 30 years old.

“They love this game; they always give their 100 per cent for every training session and continue to work hard even when they are very tired. Whether they eventually win or lose a game doesn't matter at all, because they are still happy. Moments like these give me great satisfaction,” says Elangovan, who, together with a team of volunteers, oversees the development and progress of 22 badminton athletes.

Elangovan, who has been teaching at Marsiling Secondary School for the past eight years, attributes his teaching philosophy to his experience with volunteering. For one, he reveals, he has learnt to be more patient.

“Before I started volunteering, I did not have any experience working with persons with special needs. So I worried whether I could understand or meet their needs. I overcame that by doing my homework – I read up about their medical condition and got more information from their teachers and parents,” divulges Elangovan.

“In my work, I interact with students, most of whom are less academically inclined and come from dysfunctional families, and therefore lack self-confidence. I have to understand their problems so that I know how best to help them. With both my students and the badminton athletes, I have to be patient and be willing to wait to see the results of my efforts.”

With the badminton training sessions now held at Marsiling Secondary School, sharing about the benefits of volunteering has become easier. There are students among his team of volunteers, including members of the school badminton team, whom he has roped in as training and running buddies for the athletes.



MAIN PICTURE: Elangovan teaches Johannes Cheong the finer points of badminton.

ABOVE: Elangovan at the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Ireland.

Elangovan says, “When I discuss community service with my students, I highlight to them that helping others will help them to improve themselves. I believe that volunteering is a strong platform for students to pick up important life skills.

“It offers them many opportunities to share knowledge with the less fortunate, and make a difference in the latter's lives. In turn, they become encouraged to learn communication and leadership skills. Their own lives will then become more purposeful.”

Spreading the word about his experience is something he strives to do constantly. Sharing with family, friends, colleagues and students, he says, provides them with a better insight to volunteering, so it becomes easier for them to get involved.

Describing volunteering as a “responsibility”, he says it is important for a volunteer to have passion for a cause, since he or she must make time for it – which can be a challenge, given most Singaporeans' hectic schedules.

“Passion turns an interest into a priority, and in the long run, a lifestyle. To promote the spirit of volunteerism, it is important to create a platform that can motivate a person to contribute in an activity he enjoys. For example, if I know a student likes dogs and taking care of them, I'd encourage him to explore volunteering opportunities with, say, SPCA,” offers Elangovan.

KEEPING

the flame

ABLAZE



Having been a Scout since he was young, Vincent Lim, Assistant Director, Administration, Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, has kept the flame of his passion in the Scout Movement burning by becoming an active Group Scout Leader and Trainer. To him, it is all about passing on the spirit of the Scout method to future generations.

“The Scout Laws – emphasising trustworthiness, loyalty, friendship, discipline, consideration and courage – still offer a universal and timeless set of values that has great, if not greater, relevance today.”

Mr Vincent Lim still recalls vividly and with great fondness, the many Scout campfires he has attended since boyhood – the smell of the smoke fire, the crisp crackle of wood as well as the animated faces of his peers around it.

“Camping provides tremendous opportunities for not just learning, but for bonding and the development of long and enduring friendships. There’s nothing quite like the scent of wood smoke and the warmth of the Scouting Fellowship around a simple campfire at the end of a day’s activities,” he reminisces.

Vincent’s passion for Scouting stems from a long-upheld family tradition. “I represent the third generation of Scouts in my family,” he smiles. “Both my grandfather and father contributed significantly to the development of the Scout Movement in Singapore. My father, Mr Lim Eng Hooi, was Vice-President of the Association from 2000 to 2002, which was when he retired from active service at 72 years old. Prior to that, he had held senior Commissioner appointments – he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the Chief Scout (the President of Singapore), the highest good service decoration of the Singapore Scout Association. My father encouraged me to participate in the Scout Movement during my early school years, and I’ve never stopped being a Scout since.”

At his alma mater, St Andrew’s Secondary School, Vincent plans and prepares for various activities, including camps and youth programmes such as training courses for Scout Leaders, and guides about 150 students from all levels in the ways, traditions and principles of the Scouts. At the Scouts headquarters, Vincent has also assisted in training the Scouts’ marching contingents in their footdrill for a few National Day parades.

“As Group Scout Leader, I chair the Scout Leaders’ meetings, in which we discuss and work out plans and programmes for the units, and ensure consistency with the aims and principles of the schools. I would help the leaders secure resources where necessary, provide guidance and sometimes make operational decisions. Occasionally, I will need to handle disciplinary or behavioural issues or provide counselling to the students,” he adds.

Vincent remembers his mentors, who while being kind and nurturing, could also be firm and assertive, never losing their temper, thus exemplifying grace under pressure. Thus, Vincent himself has tried to emulate these virtues throughout his years as Scout Leader. “[Our mentors also] paid personal attention to our learning. Their passion, commitment and dedication left a big impression on us, shaping our aspirations, as well as our character, outlook and values.”



Even as the Scout Movement has evolved to include new topics such as robotics, IT and conservation, in addition to the other traditional skills such as knot-tying and wilderness training, the Scout Laws – emphasising trustworthiness, loyalty, friendship, discipline, consideration and courage – still offer a universal and timeless set of values that has great, if not greater, relevance today, Vincent goes on to explain.

Vincent believes the Movement, which encourages the involvement of adults, is also a great way to build parent-child bonding. “Many of the fathers of the Scouts whom I guide were ‘my’ Scouts – I guided them when they were boys!” he laughs, acknowledging the strong parental participation he has seen, which has been a great help and influence.

Between work and volunteering, Vincent, a father of two girls, admits that things sometimes get a little hectic. But they have a way of working themselves out: “During my training sessions with the Scouts at St Andrew’s, I’m often joined by my family – my wife is a choir teacher and also teaches at St Andrews, in fact, she’s there seven days a week; my daughters practise singing there every weekend.” However, he stresses that it is important to put aside personal time for loved ones, “It is critical to our credibility as a leader that we demonstrate that we do know how to prioritise and balance competing demands for our time and resources. We place a lot of emphasis on meal times, family outings and holidays together, and on Sundays, we are all actively involved in church together.”

To Vincent, this is thanks to the wisdom of yet another Scout motto, ‘Be prepared’. “It is important to know how to set priorities in order to anticipate and prepare for the challenges ahead, so that we will not be overwhelmed by them. It certainly helps when you have an understanding family, wonderful colleagues and in my case, strong support from the school principals,” he says.

MAIN PICTURE: Vincent has been a part of the Scout Association all his life.

ABOVE: Besides being a Group Scout Leader, Vincent also trains young Scouts personally.

Widowed at a young age, May Chew, Corporate Support Officer, South View Primary School, picked herself up and channelled her time and concern to those who needed them. She now spends much of her personal hours doing community work as the Chairperson of the Zone 5 Residents' Club in Choa Chu Kang and is an active volunteer in grassroots work.

TURNING SORROW into

STRENGTH



The youthful-looking Mdm May Chew loves extending a helping hand to as many residents as she can, offering her friendship and cheery smile to everyone she meets. From her chatty and open demeanour, one would be hardpressed to guess that May has suffered a great personal loss. In 2004, her husband passed away. May, who had been a homemaker, was only 36 years old. Although she was reeling from the blow, the young mother of three picked herself up and was determined to get on with life. One of the first steps she took was to re-enter the workforce to provide for her children.

And instead of withdrawing from people, the devastating personal tragedy turned out to be the doorway to May's community involvement – she became an active member in her community, spurred on by the memory of her late husband. "My husband was an active Residents' Committee (RC) member and he really enjoyed the work," she relates. "After he passed away, one of the members asked if I'd like to join (the RC) and after consulting with my mother-in-law, I agreed."

Undeniably, carrying on her late husband's passion also keeps him close in her memory. "I feel close to my husband in continuing his legacy. Even though he is not physically around, I feel his presence," May reveals. Her late husband had received a five-year award for community participation, and had once aimed to attain the 10-year award, she relates. "It is now up to me to fulfil his wish."

It has been an empowering journey for the once-homemaker, who now juggles work, motherhood and volunteerism. "Doing all these has helped me to find my strength and stand on my own feet. Actually, if it were not for my community work, I don't know what I would be today!" she declares.

MAIN PICTURE: May plays a key role co-organising various community and charity events.

ABOVE: May, at last year's Mid-Autumn Festival at the Red Cross Home For The Disabled, jointly organised by Lions Clubs and CCK GROs.

With the voluntary work, May confides that she is also able to develop her capability and find a sense of achievement, "I now know how to assist those who are in need and can point them to the right forms of help. I also better understand government and policy decisions, and can explain them to others." Being so connected with the community has made her an asset to her school, as she can keep an eye out for needy students and render assistance where needed.

While her active involvement with community work has meant that she has had to sacrifice some time with her children, particularly her youngest 14-year-old son, she acknowledges that her children (including two daughters aged 22 and 20) have independent streaks and prefer to



pursue their own interests. "I am grateful to my mother-in-law, who has been very supportive of my RC work," she goes on in a rather wistful tone, "Maybe it's because she knows how much my late husband loved the work. It reminds her of him."

In meeting residents, helping the needy, organising visits to old folks homes and other community outreach activities, May has found great personal fulfilment and a sense of meaning. "As a housewife previously, I had always been a 'homebody'. But now that I have been out in the community, I feel more connected with the world and my neighbours," she shares.

"Doing all these has helped me to find my strength and stand on my own feet. Actually, if it were not for my community work, I don't know what I would be today!"

BUILDING

enduring ties of FRIENDSHIP



Sam Wong, Principal, Canberra Primary School, has taken the joys of travel to a group of old folks in Toa Payoh. This has given them new adventures to look forward to, and they show their appreciation by gamely taking on the challenges of each trip.

“The aim is to create moments, have fun, share friendship and warmth, and encourage them to do things they would otherwise not believe that they can do anymore.”

A group of retirees between the age of 62 and 75 years old has been making trips around the world – climbing the Great Wall of China, trekking in Taman Negara, Malaysia, and putting up at a *kelong* in Kusu Island. But they were not such adventure-seeking old folks merely a few years ago.

It all changed when Mr Sam Wong decided to walk into their lives and encourage them to join him in his travels. Sam had heard from a former teacher at school of a group of old folks, who would gather at a coffeeshop in Toa Payoh every weekend to catch up and plan for their activities, including karaoke sessions. With a keen affinity for the elderly, and a desire to know more people, Sam decided to approach them one day and they became fast friends. Noting that many of his new senior friends actually have comfortable means, but are living alone, Sam decided to engage them in some overseas trips to add more spice to their lives.

“I found many of these older folks still quite able-bodied,” he reveals. A firm believer in active ageing and making the best of one’s silver years, Sam, together with his wife and two other couples, decided to organise affordable trips for the group. With each trip comprising a group of 20 to 40 participants, Sam could negotiate bulk deals with travel agencies for cheap travel.

The trips are also unique because Sam and his friends ensure that considerations for elderly needs are well taken care of. Restaurants are picked based on healthier menus, more time is allocated for rest breaks, and unnecessary stops that sometimes form part of the packaged tours are done away with.

“We customise the trip to suit their needs,” Sam says.

Sam recounts his travels in recent years with great relish. Other than the joy of seeing the world, the valuable friendship and companionship that he shares with this group of retirees have made his extra efforts worth the while. In the last few years, Sam has organised numerous short trips, and what had started off as a wish to add more excitement to his friends’ silver years has now become a ‘hobby’.

To Sam, there is no greater motivation than simply having the personal satisfaction of seeing genuine bright smiles light up the old folks’ faces as

they savour their new experiences. And he confides that he has been very inspired by what he has learnt from them, which are useful knowledge that he can pass on to the students, “There is much wisdom, especially good values, that they have passed on to me from my interaction with them. One value that impressed me the most is how they cherish friendship and life, and believe in community cohesion. They are living proof to our students that community spirit is important to us right up to our ripe old age.”

For himself, Sam sees it as a great way to see the world, live an active life, prepare for his own retirement and help embody the message of inter-generational bonding to his younger staff at school. “It has really helped me personally – because I get to enjoy trips with friends instead of strangers, and witness the joy on their faces. Professionally, I’ve also culled many ideas from these trips for learning journeys for my students,” he reveals.

Ultimately, it is all about bringing more fun into the lives of the old folks he has come to befriend. “We want to bring back happy moments for them, help them connect with the world, and inject adventure into their lives,” Sam elaborates.

Most of the trips are taken over weekends, while others are longer. During the long Hari Raya Haji weekend late last year for instance, Sam arranged for a vacation to a resort on Cebu Island in the Philippines. “It was like something from that old television series *Paradise Island*!” he says. There, the seniors didn’t just lounge by the beach, but went trekking. “Some even went on the flying fox!” Sam reveals with a hearty chuckle.

Last year, Sam and his friends organised a trip to Kuching, Malaysia, for a group of elderly couples, giving it a twist with a honeymoon theme. They even set up a formal dinner and gave away towels that had been custom-embroidered with the couples’ names. And upon hearing of an island in Thailand called Betong, which is famed for affordable bird’s nest, Sam arranged for a trip there, much to the delight of his senior friends.

“The aim,” he says, “is to create moments, have fun, share friendship and warmth, and encourage them to do things that they would otherwise not believe that they can do anymore.”

YOU CAN
CHIP IN
TOO!

Singapore International Foundation (SIF)

To facilitate the development of overseas communities through capacity-building programmes including organisational and personal capacity development, and programmes for disadvantaged children.

Tel: 6837 8700 **Fax:** 6837 8710
www.sif.org.sg

National Parks Singapore (NParks)

To help create the best living environment through greenery and recreation in partnership with the community.

Tel: 1800 471 7300 **Fax:** 6472 3033
Email: Adelle Wang at wang_shumin@nparks.gov.sg
www.nparks.gov.sg

Special Olympics Singapore

To provide sports training and organise competitions for persons with intellectual disabilities to develop their physical fitness, self-esteem and confidence to become productive and respected members of society.

Tel: 6293 3182 **Fax:** 6293 8497
www.specialolympics.org.sg

Lions Befrienders Service Association (Singapore) (LBSA)

To aid in the social, psycho-emotional and physical well-being of lonely seniors through community participation.

Tel: 1800-3758600
www.lionsbefrienders.org.sg

Grassroots Work

You can also be a PA Grassroots Volunteer by signing yourself up on www.pa.gov.sg

MAIN PICTURE:
Sam regularly meets up with this group of old folks to plan for trips and view one another's photos.

Getting on the Ground

More than just the occasional flag days and one-off visits to old folks' homes, schools today have embarked on sustainable Community Involvement Programmes (CIP) that teach the value of service to the community. Three schools show how they have put it all together.



PERFORMING ACTS OF KINDNESS

Like a Shakespearean tale, it was literally a dream – a play named *Dreamweavers* – that brought CHIJ's (Kellock) Children for Children (CfC) project from its original incarnation as a school performance during its 2008 Open House to become an annual charity project. The CfC is an initiative that involves students in the planning, staging and celebration of Children's Day with 1,000 underprivileged children at a different iconic spot in Singapore every year.

It all began when Mr Alvin Tay, Editor of *The Business Times*, saw the original *Dreamweavers* and invited CHIJ (Kellock) to be part of *The Business Times*' 32nd Anniversary celebrations. Principal Mrs Clara Lim-Tan, Mr Tay and Mr Colin Goh, General Manager of The Arts House, took the idea further by making it a 'children doing something for other children' project that tapped students' creative talents as they brought joy to less fortunate children.

The first CfC event was held at the Singapore Flyer on October 1, 2008 when students from CHIJ's (Kellock) invited 1,000 underprivileged children to celebrate Children's Day there. In 2009, the CfC concept took place at the Singapore Zoo – complete with *Into The Wild*, an interactive zoo adventure that took 1,000 children on a quest of games and craft activities that were woven together into an adventure story. The adventure was wholly conceptualised, designed and choreographed by CHIJ (Kellock) students and teachers. As a partner, *The Business Times* helped to raise some \$230,000 through donations and sponsorships, with proceeds going towards ChildAid (in aid of the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund and the Business Times Budding Artists Fund).

According to teacher-in-charge, Ms Jean Lim, CfC is a unique partnership that leverages on the strengths of each partner: *The Business Times* in fundraising, publicity and



location scouting; The Arts House in event coordination, logistics, safety, finances and donations; and the school in providing the manpower and executing the performances and activities. And in the "true spirit of enabling children to reach out to other children," students begin to gain insight on societal issues and understand the role they can play in the community.

"They learnt that despite their age, they are able to make a difference in their own way," Ms Lim explains. Every pupil contributed stationery sets – some even bought them with their own savings – for the goodie bags. In addition, the exercise empowered pupils to volunteer and participate in training and brainstorming sessions as some of them took on leadership roles.

"As for the staff, we were happy to be able to play our part once again in this meaningful project," she adds, "And we had fun organising and working with our pupils to make the event as special as possible for the participants. In the process, we bonded and got to know each other better as well. Like the girls, we were happy to be able to put a smile on the faces of these children. We knew our efforts were worth it."

FROM TOP:
Yuying Secondary School students distributed anti-dengue fever brochures during their Love Our Community Day (LOCD) in 2008; CHIJ (Kellock) students gave personalised postcards and goodie bags to children in need.

RIGHT:
Lesson time in Cambodia during the Pioneer Junior College students' trip.



CHARACTER BUILDING IN CHARITY

At Yuying Secondary School (YYSS), their CIP, which they named Love Our Community Day (LOCD), has had a long history – ten years, to be exact.

From selling handicrafts and sweets to recycling projects and organising outings for the less fortunate, YYSS has held various activities to raise funds for the needy and to engage the community in order to create a more sustainable environment.

According to teacher-in-charge Mrs Pang Wee Abh, the beneficiaries of the funds raised at each year's LOCD vary, as they are selected based on the needs of the community. For example, the beneficiaries included the victims of the 2005 tsunami in Sri Lanka, and in 2006, the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS).

DEVELOPING COMPASSION BEYOND NATIONALITY

In the spirit of taking CIP beyond the norm and Singapore shores, Pioneer Junior College (PJC), has been involved in a project with Metro Pte Ltd, in collaboration with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), since 2006 to raise funds yearly for needy children across Asia. Each year, PJC student volunteers go to various Metro stores to ask for donations or to raise funds with activities such as balloon-sculpting and photo-taking.

According to Ms Usha Kumar, Dean of Corporate Development at PJC, the funds go to needy children and an annual capacity-building and community service project overseas, where students get a personal experience helping those in need. "[The 2009] trip to Cambodia for 33 students and four staff during 24 to 29 November was funded from fundraising completed in December 2008," Mrs Kumar elaborates. There, the students and staff refurbished an orphanage kitchen, conducted English lessons and organised games and activities. Through these trips, the students developed a greater sense of empathy and altruism, she reveals, "We wanted them to learn the interpersonal skills needed, and have the day-to-day experience of living in a less developed country so as to empathise with the orphans."

According to PJC teacher Mr Loh Seow Boon, "Our students reflected that the overseas CIP in Cambodia was different from local CIP. The need to adapt to a new environment, which was outside their comfort zone, and to show

Mrs Pang notes that LOCD is a neighbourhood affair, where the school, together with partners such as the Yuying School Management Committee (SMC) & Alumni, Yuying Parent Support Group, Paya Lebar CCC, Bethesda Care Centre, Aljunied Town Council, Kovan City Merchants' Association and the Hougang Sheng Hong Family Service Centre, identify the community's needs so as to organise and facilitate events and other fundraising activities. YYSS's efforts are also concerted at the school level – the Secondary Ones focus on the environment, Secondary Twos on elderly, Secondary Threes on disadvantaged, and Secondary Fours and Fives on giving back to society.

Mrs Loretta Goh, HOD Student Development at YYSS, explains, "[YYSS's CIP] is in line with the school's mission to develop students to be confident, upright and resilient individuals who possess the ability to face future challenges and the commitment to contribute selflessly to school and society." As one of the main programmes in the school's Character Development Framework, she adds, "The CIP is one of the school's main avenues to inculcate the value of love in the students and to internalise Social-Emotional competencies." It also boils down to making LOCD an "excellent opportunity" for bonding and for YYSS teachers to be role models.

For their ongoing community service, YYSS was recently awarded the People's Association Youth Movement (PAYM) Service Learning Club (SLC) Project Accolade (at the Community Level Category) at the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI) camp's PAYM Service Learning Festival. There, the students also attended workshops on topics such as service learning. Attending courses on leadership and understanding the needs of the hearing-impaired, Secondary two student Sheryl Sher, new Chairman of the SLC, says. "The sessions were very useful as they teach us new skills and ways to improve our community work."

concern for their schoolmates as well as the orphans, brought out the best in them."

Through the orphans' genuine joy and laughter, despite their poor living conditions that were in stark contrast to the environment in Singapore, the PJC students learnt to appreciate simple gifts and became more enthusiastic in learning as well.

Fellow teacher Mdm Betty Tong found that the students took true ownership of the project, which translated into pride and a sense of belonging to the school. "As a teacher, I learnt that giving students such opportunities to grow and be empowered is the way to prepare them for the 21st century. The students developed compassion, leadership ability, collaboration, resilience and adaptability – key qualities essential for future success," she says.

To conclude, Vice-principal Mdm Chong Choon Lee says that PJC's CIP is aligned with the school's goals to nurture lifelong learners and proactive, compassionate leaders, and through the process of service – within and beyond the boundaries of Singapore – come away with valuable life skills.





Teen Depression —

Signs, Symptoms and How to Help

Adolescence, the age of discovery and wonder, can sometimes be overwhelming. Learn to detect signs of distress and how to help the young cope with their problems.

“Jason was always a quiet student who kept to himself, but was generally well-behaved and co-operative,” remembers Ms Julia Goh, full-time school counsellor at Sengkang Secondary School. However, towards the end of the term, the secondary three student started to exhibit sudden bursts of anti-social behaviour and began acting disruptively in class. Things came to a head one day when Jason detached himself from the main group at an excursion and was later found crying uncontrollably in an isolated corner. Further investigations revealed that the student was grieving over the loss of his father from several years past.

“There was a lot of unresolved emotional pain and anguish that he was unable to cope with. This, along with the pressures of adolescence and juggling with his studies, resulted in the eventual tipping point,” explains Ms Goh.

Fortunately, the tale ends well for Jason. Following several years of counselling, he is now a well-adjusted young adult who visits his alma mater regularly to counsel younger students. While this case ended successfully for Ms Goh, she acknowledges



that she doesn't allow herself to rest on her laurels. "Teens today face many different issues – from issues on their identity and self-esteem to worries over relationships with their friends and family. These are issues that can be very confusing for teens who require proper guidance during their adolescence. Furthermore, signs of distress can vary from student to student, so teachers and school counsellors need to be vigilant in order to spot early signs of problems and help students cope."

Ms Jothi Thyagarajah, full-time school counsellor at Ang Mo Kio Secondary School, agrees, "Teenagers face a host of pressures – from the changes of puberty to questions about who they are and where they fit in. The transition from childhood to adulthood can also cause conflict with their parents as teens start to assert their independence."

"With all these drama," Ms Jothi adds, "it isn't always easy to differentiate between depression and moodiness. And it can get even more complicated as teens with depression or emotional distress do not necessarily appear sad, nor do they always withdraw from others. Instead, they may show irritability, aggression and rage, all of which mask underlying problems."

Dr Daniel Fung, Senior Consultant and Chief Adjunct Associate Professor at the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), explains that as teenagers grow socially and connect with the world around them, they may encounter difficult friendships or bullying, or face family problems.

"These social issues can be responsible for changes in emotional states, and they can lead to problems," Dr Fung explains. In rare instances, traumatic events such as abuse or trauma can lead to emotional upheavals. "Genetic predisposition, such as having a family history of depression, can also be responsible for psychological problems," Dr Fung adds.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS

Dr Fung tells us that signs of distress such as being easily irritable, aggressive and angry are usually caused by external factors often having to do with relationships. Taken in perspective, only about 1 per cent of all teenagers will exhibit the first signs that indicate a mental illness.

"It is important to also see any perceived changes in behaviour in context," Dr Fung emphasises. "Those so-called 'sudden' behavioural changes could be due to a change of environment, such as a move from primary to secondary school." As such, school counsellors play a very important role in keeping an eye on problems and taking preventive and intervening measures when necessary," he advises.

Some other signs to look out for, say Ms Goh and Ms Jothi, are unexplained changes in academic performance, increased absenteeism or tardiness and behavioural transformations, such as listlessness, poor concentration or loss of interest in daily activities.

"Some students may complain of physical symptoms, including nausea, stomachaches, headaches, or problems with eating or sleeping," elaborates Ms Jothi. Unexplained crying or laughing to oneself, very rapid speech, disorganised thinking, paranoia, among other symptoms, may also indicate a problem.

Some signs are subtle, so providing proper guidance to and building rapport with students – such as through concerted school wellness programmes including camps, wellness and life skills workshops – are ways to be on top of things. "An open-door policy also helps," Ms Goh says, "so that students know someone is always there to listen."

SYMPTOMS TO SPOT

Dr Daniel Fung, Senior Consultant and Chief Adjunct Associate Professor at the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), highlights some of the symptoms of depression, which may differ from person to person:

- Significant changes in academic performance, including a deterioration in the quality of work, frequently missed assignments, excessive procrastination, or avoidance of classroom participation
- Increased absences in class or tardiness
- Listlessness or falling asleep in class
- Difficulty in concentrating, making decisions and carrying on a conversation
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Complaints about physical symptoms including nausea, stomachaches, headaches, or problems with eating or sleeping
- Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness or suicide
- Bizarre behaviour including unexplained crying, laughing to self, very rapid speech, and suspiciousness
- High levels of irritability, including angry outbursts or unruly behaviour
- Drastic changes in patterns of eating, sleeping or even internet use
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Marked changes in personal hygiene or dressing
- Social isolation, social withdrawal or excessive dependency on someone
- Restlessness or agitation
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Visible signs of anxiety or depressed mood

THE DANGERS OF DEPRESSION

As with other illnesses, early detection and intervention are crucial. If not diagnosed early, what may seem like mere growing pains may lead to chronic emotional problems such as depression.

“Depression can destroy the very essence of a teenager’s personality,” says Ms Jothi. Other unresolved emotional issues may also affect a child’s social and psychological development – he or she may become reclusive, anti-social or have anger management issues.

Ms Goh explains, “If a teen does not learn coping mechanisms, he or she may carry these burdens and negative feelings into adulthood, have problems forming positive relationships and develop self-esteem and other associated issues.”

In the worst case scenario, untreated depression can lead to suicide. Ms Jothi notes, “Teens who are seriously depressed often think, speak, or make ‘attention-getting’ attempts at suicide. Suicidal thoughts or behaviour should always be taken very seriously.”

HOW TO HELP

Dealing with a student who is experiencing some form of emotional distress takes some tact and requires a level of understanding. It’s important not to trivialise or judge their problems. Ms Goh highlights, “It is very crucial to be accepting and non-judgmental.”

Ms Jothi advises, “Talk to the student about what you have seen and express concern. Ask: ‘I’ve noticed that you seem to be less interested in your work these days. Is everything ok?’ Be prepared for denial as the student may not be ready to open up. If the student is ready, allow him to speak freely about his current situation.”

Above all, the act of listening cannot be underestimated. “Sometimes a student may just need to vent their emotions in one big outpouring so that they can move on,” Ms Goh says. Apart from listening, it is also important to acknowledge the problem or emotion, express concern and when necessary, offer solutions.

Ultimately, Ms Goh emphasises, the most important act is for teachers, counsellors and other role models to “offer hope”. She says, “Sometimes, the student may just need a listening ear or someone to tell them that it’s going to be alright.”

*Name changed.



How to talk and deal with a student who is in distress, according to Dr Fung

SHOW THAT YOU CARE

Troubled individuals may behave in ways to distance others as they think that others won’t understand what they are going through. If you think someone is in distress, approach the person in a non-confrontational manner and indicate that you are concerned and willing to talk.

Express your concerns in a specific way: “I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned,” rather than, “Where have you been lately?” or, “You should be more concerned about your results.”

Don’t give up if you get shut out. Be respectful in maintaining the student’s comfort level, but show that you are willing to listen.

LISTEN ATTENTIVELY

Sometimes, just having a listening ear can bring relief.

- Ensure that this conversation is held privately so as to give your student patience and undivided attention.
- Let the student talk with minimal interruption.
- Be respectful of the opinions and values expressed.
- There is no need to offer solutions right away. Instead, show that you are actively listening by repeating what you hear in your own words or asking for clarification to show that you are listening and making an effort to understand.
- Acknowledge the student’s thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, compassionate way.
- Assuring with your body language also shows that you are listening. Do not cross your arms or be at a distance.

OFFER HELP AND HOPE

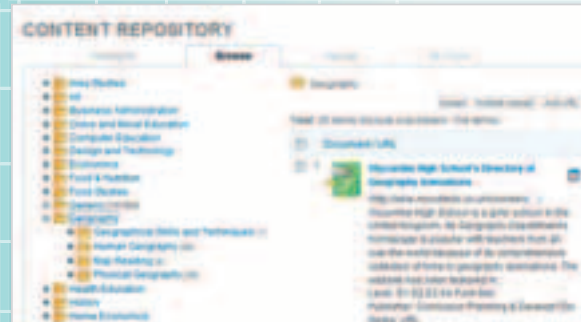
When the student shares with you what is troubling him or her, gently offer some solutions or reassure the student that things can get better. Help them realise that they have the options, resources and inner strength to cope, and that things will not always seem hopeless as they are now.



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Make your students' learning experiences more engaging and effective with a host of interactive digital resources in edumall2.0 – MOE's online resource portal.

Online learning resources for Singapore schools have been given a significant boost – thanks to the introduction of edumall2.0 at www.edumall.sg.

All teachers have been provided with their edumall2.0 account, with which they can easily access a wide range of educational digital resources and an array of visual, aural and textual content, such as full-length videos, audio clips, interactive websites, and multimedia resource packages. Carefully screened for quality, all the resources are either produced by MOE divisions or procured from trusted providers such as Discovery Education and BBC Motion Gallery.

edumall2.0 also offers an array of easy-to-use online communication tools, which enable teachers to interact and share with one another. Through forum discussions and wiki-sites, teachers can freely discuss ideas, debate issues, share resources and teaching tips as well as collaborate in designing lessons. A special module “KnowBlog” also allows teachers to post articles of interest.

Also, for teachers who are looking for a private online space, the MyEdumall module in edumall2.0 allows users to customise and present personalised content including a personal blog. It can also serve as a repository of useful edumall2.0 resources. Links can be created to connect the user directly to specialised individual subject web pages where he can learn about the latest curriculum updates.

Ms Nurul Suhana Sulaiman, who teaches Social Studies at Juying Secondary School, regularly taps into the wealth of digital teaching resources in edumall2.0.

“I’m sure Social Studies teachers can attest to the fact that our biggest challenge is to motivate our students because they tend to find some topics dry. To better engage my students, I began incorporating video clips into my lessons. For one lesson on Venice, I showed them Francesco’s Venice, a documentary by the BBC,” she says.

“The video clip brought to life what my students have read in textbooks, helping them gain a clearer understanding of the conditions that led to the rise of Venice. Also, it effectively consolidated what they have learnt. With their interest piqued, I went on to incorporate co-operative learning strategies to make the experience more meaningful.”

Nurul now regularly reaps the benefits of edumall2.0. “I no longer have to scour educational materials for learning tools – which I used to do in the past. And my students can recall or explain a concept better after watching a video. Most of all, they look forward to my lessons! I find myself actively looking for new resources every week.”

At Tampines Junior College, Tamil Language teacher Mr S Nalluraj frequently uses videos to better engage his students so that they not only gain a good grasp of ideas, but also reflect more thoroughly on macro issues, rather than just reading or memorising a passage.

“Once, I showed a video on Tamil folk arts, which featured a traditional game played in Tamil Nadu. My students expressed surprise at how similar it was to some of the traditional games in Southeast Asia. It certainly was effective in helping them see that there must have been cross-cultural exchange between these two regions in ancient times,” explains Nalluraj, who uses edumall2.0 every fortnight.

Another regular user is Mr Eugene Lee, who teaches Mathematics at River Valley High School. When edumall2.0 was launched in May 2009, he decided to set up a blog, which he updates once or twice a month.

“I want it to be a platform for personal reflection and for sharing ideas and resources with other teachers,” Eugene shares. “For example, I blog about useful video clips I chance upon, such as Discovering Math, which is helpful in teaching Statistics. If I come across a resource that I feel would be useful to my colleagues, I’d recommend it to them.”

Eugene, who is one of the top 50 active users of edumall2.0, hopes that more teachers will come onboard edumall2.0. “Increased participation in the forums or discussions means there will be greater synergy between the teachers and within the education sector as a whole” he explains.

For Nurul, Nalluraj and Eugene, as well as many more teachers, sharing and exploring ideas and resources on edumall2.0, has provided both teachers and students with more stimulating and meaningful learning experiences. So start exploring your edumall2.0 account, if you haven’t done so.

LEFT:
Teachers can access a wide range of resources from the content repository. The Discovery Education videos from edumall2.0 can be used directly or downloaded to be used with other resources.

GET STARTED NOW!

All teachers have been provided with their edumall2.0 login details (Login-ID and password) via e-mail. However, if you’ve inadvertently deleted this email, not to worry. Here are some easy steps to retrieve your login-ID and password.

1. Go to the edumall2.0 homepage at www.edumall.sg.
2. Click on “I’ve forgotten my password” to bring up the password activation page. Enter your NRIC or FIN number as your Login-ID and click on “Submit”. An Account Activation page will be displayed to inform you that you will receive the “edumall2.0 Account Activation” email in your MyEDUmail2 shortly.
3. Upon receiving the above e-mail, click on the Account Activation link in the e-mail. An Account Activation page will be displayed to inform that the activation is successful.
4. Click on the link in the page to proceed to login again. For first-time login, go to the Update Profile page to set your profile and change your password. For subsequent login, visit www.edumall.sg and enter your Login-ID and password.

Are men better at instilling discipline?

Corinna Chua, a School Staff Developer, and George Danapal, Head of PE at an all-boys' school, discuss who exactly are more effective at instilling discipline. And they come to realise that gender may indeed, make a difference. Yet, there are other important criteria that one must first meet to be able to help students learn the important lessons in life.

“It is not just about setting rigorous rules, but about reinforcing positive behaviour, setting boundaries and communicating consequences too.”

CORINNA CHUA CHIN

School Staff Developer, St Anthony's Canossian Primary School

When I was young, my mum was the disciplinarian at home. Dad was the passive character when it came to discipline; in fact, he was uncomfortable in meting out punishment whenever we misbehaved. Mum was the one who communicated the boundaries and consequences, which included caning or removing my privileges such as watching my favourite cartoon on TV. However, mum made me understand why such behaviour was inappropriate and made me take responsibility for my actions.

GENDER DOES NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Men are not necessarily better in upholding good discipline just because women have always been referred to as the fairer sex. In fact, there may be gender-specific traits that give women an edge in reforming students' misbehaviour. But to make a real difference, it's about connecting theory to practice – understanding the principles behind good discipline and applying it.

WHAT EXACTLY IS DISCIPLINE AND THE PRINCIPLES BEHIND IT?

Discipline is a form of teaching and education. And it is important to note that discipline is not punishment, but the transfer of values of what is right and wrong, making decisions and staying grounded in our principles. Effective discipline defines the limits, focuses on the situation instead of the child, and uses rewards and intrinsic motivation to reinforce positive behaviour.

THE QUALITIES TO MAKE IT WORK

The teacher has to be consistent in setting the boundaries, firm, logical, and show genuine concern for students while communicating the consequences of ill behaviour effectively. Such teachers gain students' respect because they are good role models. They manage students' misbehaviour and transform them through the use of different reformatory measures according to the severity of their offences.



SET EXPECTATIONS OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Some students may have anger management issues, attention-seeking behaviour and perhaps, are disengaged in class because they complete their work faster than the rest. To maintain discipline in class, it is not just about setting rigorous rules, but about reinforcing positive behaviour, setting boundaries and communicating consequences too. I communicate my expectations of my students' behaviour to them at the beginning of the school year to set the record straight right from the start. Also, when I build rapport and establish mutual respect with my students, discipline is no longer such a tough issue. Partnering parents through close communication about their child's behaviour in school is also crucial in effective discipline. By using a multi-pronged approach, it is not difficult to be effective in managing a class.

MEN AND WOMEN CAN BE EQUALLY EFFECTIVE

Throughout history, women have often been portrayed as being nurturing and loving. Yet, most of us can agree that being nurturers does not equate to having discipline thrown out of the window. When a student goes astray, a female teacher may manage the situation differently from a male teacher due to the very nature of their differences in gender and personality, but that does not mean either is any less effective.

One should judge the teacher by how realistic and consistent the boundaries are set and enforced; how trust is established; how positive reinforcement is constantly used; and how much quality time is spent with each child. It certainly does not take a masculine figure to discipline a child. As long as we teachers portray the attitudes and values we want to imbue in our students, maintain our impartiality and always act in the best interest of our students, men and women alike can be effective in teaching students discipline.

GEORGE DANARAJ DANAPAL NAIDU

Head of Physical Education, St Andrew's Secondary School

Discipline is not about standing in front of the class and screaming your head off. It is not about banging the tables and threatening the students. Discipline is an art that requires both tact and guile – effective discipline, that is. In our profession, discipline is of utmost importance. Without it, there is no order. And without order, it is extremely difficult for learning to take place.

DISCIPLINE IS KEY TO LEARNING

Having discipline does not mean that students must shake and quiver at your sight, because if that happens, learning is not going to take place either. That is why I say, to be a teacher who is good at discipline does not necessarily mean you have to be the meanest-looking teacher on the block (though it does help). In my opinion, gender is irrelevant – my mum was Head of Discipline for a good twenty years.

AN EXCEPTION TO CONSIDER

In an all-boys' school, however, men are generally better at disciplining errant students. This is because the boys tend to be more boisterous. So for some of these perennial mischief-makers, a more hard-nosed approach to discipline may be required. Furthermore, having been boys before, we know almost every trick in the book and can pre-empt what the boys are thinking or going to do. This, in a funny way, gains their respect and once that respect is gained, the discipline process becomes so much simpler and easier.

DISCIPLINE IS ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, PRIMARILY

If one can control the class within the four walls, it becomes easier to manage their behaviour when they are outside of them. To be effective in instilling discipline, teachers must be able to 'read' and interact with a broad spectrum of students, and tailor their style to suit different profile. This comes back to having tact and guile. If a teacher can interact with a wide spectrum of students, he/she holds the key to effective discipline.

GROUND RULES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Firstly, we must walk the talk. If we are going to tell a student to do or not to do something, we must set the right example and rules right from the beginning. Students must know that you are unwavering in your stand and approach. Be consistent and, the hardest of it all, is to be firm but fair. Being good at instilling discipline takes time. We evolve and our methods change as we gain experience. There is no one successful blueprint to follow. Each of us has a different style that suits our personality and persona. Use your eyes, which can be quite expressive, and other body language, rather than rely on the volume and tone of your voice all the time.

I usually start off as a no-nonsense teacher. One of my lecturers in NIE advised me: "Don't smile till March," and it actually works. As time progresses, I'll soften up to some of the students, especially as they grow and become more mature. I am still quite strict with those in secondary school, just to let them know what my expectations are and what is required of them in school. As they move up the levels, I ease off.

"Discipline is an art that requires both tact and guile – effective discipline, that is."

I am still learning how to be effective at managing discipline, but I am slowly getting the hang of it – every day, there is a new and different incident that tests my skills. I just need to remember the basic principle: just like when you want to fly a kite or to fish well, you must know when to cut some slack and when to reel them in. After all, the key to being a good teacher is really to earn the respect of the students.

Gym on the Go

There's no more excuse for you not to get some stretching and exercising into your routine. Here are some tips on how to stretch your muscles at your workstation, and have a quick workout without leaving the school grounds.

It really only takes 30 minutes of activity done at least three times a week to meet the recommended level of exercise, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Health Promotion Board (HPB). Exercise should address three areas of fitness – stamina, strength and flexibility via different aerobic exercises, resistance training and stretches. Such 30-minute activities can help to stave off mid-afternoon lulls, stiff necks or sluggish evenings.

WHAT THEY CAN DO FOR YOU

Try stretching every hour. It can lengthen your muscles, stave off creaky joints, reduce muscle tension, increase range of motion, enhance muscular coordination and promote a sense of overall wellbeing from the increased circulation.

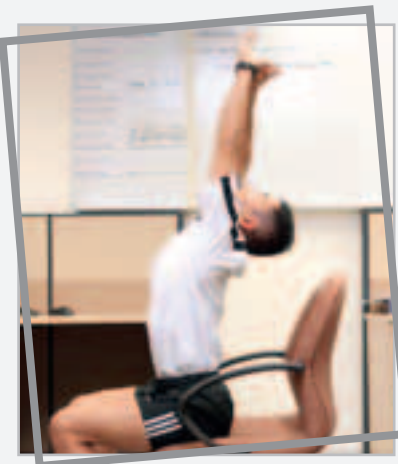
When it comes to cardio exercise, studies show that a 15-minute stair climb offers the same benefits, but less impact as a 30-minute run on flat ground. Regular stair-climbing of just six minutes a day can make you 10 to 15 per cent fitter. And as a weightbearing activity, walking and stair-climbing builds bone strength, reducing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures later in life.



Normal Neck Stretch

This is good for anyone with tight, aching muscles in the upper back and neck, especially one who works at a computer.

HOW: Look straight forward without letting your chin drop. Then move an ear towards the left shoulder without the latter lifting up, and hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Extend the stretch by using your left hand to apply gentle pressure to the right of the head, and vice versa.



Abdominal Stretch

This relieves the lower back ache that occurs from sitting too long in a chair.

HOW: Sit on the edge of the chair. Interlock the fingers and turn the palms upwards, stretching your arms straight upwards. Lean your body back gently and hold for 10 to 30 seconds. To add on, you can place both palms at the back of your seat, gently lean your body backwards and extend it. Feel the stretch at the front of your body and hold for 20 seconds. Repeat three times.

Standing Quadriceps Stretch

This is one of the most recognised stretches for the quadriceps.

HOW: Stand on one leg and pull the other foot up behind your bottom. Keep your knees together and push your hips forward to increase the stretch, and hold for 10 to 30 seconds.



Brisk Walk

Studies show that one should take 10,000 steps a day to get fit.

HOW: For a more heart healthy workout, the trick is to walk very briskly, landing first on your heels while swinging your arms to get the blood pumping.



Single Leg Squat

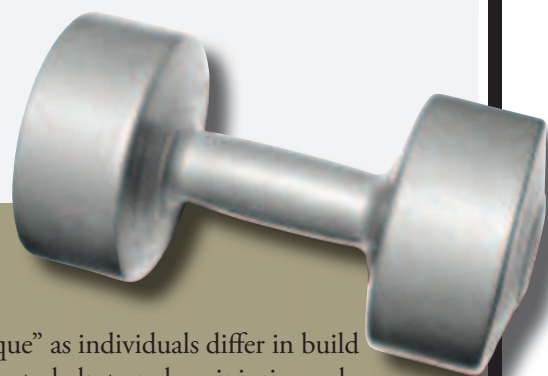
This strengthens the quadriceps using the body weight itself.

HOW: Face the railing with your right hand clutching it for balance. Stand with the right foot flat down on the first step, and stretch the left leg out in the air at 30 degrees to the ground. Bend the right knee slowly until left leg is as near to the ground without touching it as possible. Repeat five times, and gradually increase to 15. Turn to the other side and repeat process by stretching out the right leg. Rest for 30 seconds before moving on to next exercise.

Climbing on the Spot

Stair climbing burns calories and fat while strengthening leg muscles.

HOW: Climb on the spot by taking two steps at a time. Start with the left leg up, joined by the right leg, while swinging the opposite arms upwards at right angles, and land back on the flat ground with the left leg first, followed by the right. Start with five repetitions, and slowly increase to 15 when you're comfortable. Repeat with the other leg and arm. Rest for 30 seconds before moving on to next exercise.



RUN RIGHT

Dr Ben Tan reveals that there is no "perfect running technique" as individuals differ in build and size. However, there are certain important things to note to help to reduce injuries and increase efficiency. Here are three important points from Dr Tan's book, *Run for your Life: The complete marathon guide*:

1

Knees should be slightly flexed (i.e. higher knee lifts) and the leading knee should be slightly bent just before contacting the ground. Knees should never be locked – the whole leading leg should not be fully extended.

2

Land with foot directly aligned with the respective shoulder (or just slightly behind it, but not in front of it.)

3

Do not 'bounce' too much during the run. A slight lift is necessary to recycle energy, but excessive bouncing will waste energy, which could be used to propel the body forward.



Quick Solutions

Here are two scrumptious yet nutritious recipes that you can whip up quickly for your lunchbox or dinner.

◀ Fried Rice with Ground Beef and Lettuce

INGREDIENTS:

150g ground beef • 2 tbsp oil • 1 egg, beaten • 300g cooked rice • 1 tbsp soy sauce • ½ tsp pepper • 100g sliced lettuce • 1 tsp thinly sliced green onions (scallions) • 1 tsp sesame oil

Marinade:

2 tsp soy sauce • 1 tsp sugar • 1 tsp rice wine • 1 tsp cornstarch • 60ml water

METHOD

- 1 Combine all the marinade ingredients in a bowl. Add the beef, stir well, and set aside to marinate for 10 minutes.
- 2 Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a wok and fry the ground beef until just browned, breaking it up with a spatula as it cooks. Remove from the pan and set aside.
- 3 Clean and dry the wok, then heat the remaining oil and scramble the egg for 20 seconds. Stir in the cooked rice and stir-fry well.
- 4 Add the soy sauce and pepper, ground beef and lettuce. Stir-fry to combine evenly. Add the sliced green onions and sesame oil. Transfer to a serving dish and serve hot.

Preparation time: **20 minutes**

Cooking time: **20 minutes**

Serves 2

Recipe extracted from *Chinese Cooking Made Easy: Simple and delicious meals in minutes*, \$20 before GST, published by Tuttle Publishing. Available at leading bookstores.

Pasta Carbonara ▶

INGREDIENTS:

300g penne rigate • 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil • 200g piece pancetta, cut into short, thin strips • 200ml cream • 1 clove crushed garlic • 6 egg yolks • 150g grated Parmesan-Reggiano cheese • 1 tbsp finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

METHOD

- 1 Cook the penne in a large saucepan of rapidly boiling water until pasta turns al dente (with a firm bite). Drain well and return to the pan.
- 2 Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat and cook the pancetta for three to four minutes, or until crisp. Remove and drain on paper towels.
- 3 Beat the cream, garlic and egg yolks together in a bowl, and season with salt and pepper. Stir in half the Parmesan. Stir the pancetta into the hot pasta, allowing the oil from the pancetta to coat the pasta. Add the egg mixture immediately, and stir to combine – the heat from the pasta will cook the eggs. Stir in the chopped parsley.
- 4 Serve sprinkled with the remaining Parmesan and some freshly cracked black pepper.

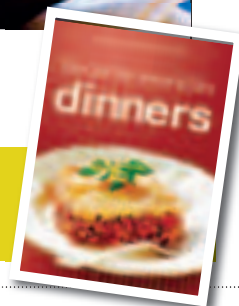


Preparation time: **10 minutes**

Cooking time: **15 minutes**

Serves 4

Recipe extracted from *Periplus Mini Cookbooks: Favourite Everyday Dinners*, \$5.25 before GST, published by Periplus Editions. Available at leading bookstores.



TIPS

To look more pulled-together, keep to tailored choices. Alternatively, pair jacket with jeans to turn it into a smart weekend outfit.

Silk tank,
Nicholas

Acrylic and cotton jacket,
Bebe

Cotton pants,
Adidas Slvr.

COUNTRY CHIC

The barnyard aesthetics inspired by *Little House On The Prairie* may seem difficult to pull off, but you can play around with materials and textures to get the look.

Monogrammed
vinyl shoulder bag,
Braun Buffel

Leather and wood pump,
J Shoes

Chanel Spring/Summer 2010

The Elegant Style-phile

Classroom attire takes a sophisticated turn with these looks from the Spring/Summer '10 runways.

TIPS

You can also layer the dress over a shirt with a different coloured collar, or pair it with a ruffled-collar blouse. Add a slim belt to complete the look.

Nylon and
polyester trench dress,
Nicholas

Cotton
sleeveless shirt,
Nicholas

Sheepskin shoulder bag,
Raoul

Leather heels,
J Shoes

SHIRT-DRESS

The popularity of TV drama series *Mad Men* has spawned a resurgence of the classic '60s look, of which the shirt-dress is one of the most ladylike and polished.

Chloe Spring/Summer 2010



Expand Your World

Specialised bookstores catering to niche interests are treasure troves of knowledge for both personal and professional gain. Here are seven reasons why you should indulge in your inner geek at the independent havens.

1 ACHIEVE GREATER CULINARY HEIGHTS

You can find in specialised bookstores a feast of cookbooks that cover everything, from drinks to cake decoration and easy dishes that you can create in minutes. Home economics teachers can tout recipes from celebrity chefs and spread the joy to their students in the kitchen. For starters, try *Gordon Ramsay makes it easy* – it has surprisingly simple recipes from the Michelin starred chef, and *Jamie at Home* for Jamie Oliver's no-nonsense recipes inspired by the natural produce in his own farm. What's more, their gorgeously photographed covers and recipes will make impressive additions to your bookshelves.

2 LITERATURE AND HISTORY ARE NOW COOL

Not only do these shops sell well-known titles, you would also have better luck finding less popular titles, such as George Orwell's *Down And Out In Paris And London*. These stores are also full of charm: often, you'll hear soothing music that may even be accompanied by the occasional clattering of vintage typewriters – so you can share with your students that bookstores can offer more than mere mainstream blockbusters.

At these stores, you can also find a wide range of books to supplement reading lists or to add interest to the current syllabus. These include little known up-and-coming writers, some of whom are local or Asian. You may find great potential in a number of these books for your school library collection. Share them in class and your students may be inspired to try their hand at some literary writing.

3 RELIVE YOUR CHILDHOOD

If you're a Design and Technology teacher, you may remember childhood days when you used to chase toy cars, tweak toy robots and stalk the school bookshop for new stationery products to build your next model. Nowadays, you can do so much more with the dazzling array of accompanying merchandise at some of these niche shops. From tin toys to toy cameras and enticing paper products, the quirky selections also make great samples for case studies if you're teaching topics involving product design, or those of the historical and artistic genres. Photo books are also a great resource to glean inspiration for design and art classes so as to add variety and perspective to your teaching.

4 SPEND A WEEKEND LEARNING SOMETHING

Some of the specialised stores organise workshops such as those in cooking, bookbinding and writing from time to time. Learn to perfect your hobby, and pass on a new craft to your students.

5 GET FREE ADVICE

If you're into writing, photography or music, the shopkeepers of such niche bookstores are usually the best people for tips, since they will happily share their passion with you. You might also meet like-minded enthusiasts and form a discussion group to increase your knowledge of the subject. In time to come, you might even start a similar group among your talented students in these areas.

What's more, these little bookstores are often carefully curated as their owners are specifically interested in one or a few genres only. The friendly storekeeper will come in handy when you want to know more about a specific topic, but don't know where to start searching. Even if you can't find what you want at the tiny local bookstores, the owners will, more often than not, try to source and locate that book for you – just because you share his passion.

YOU CAN READ IN A CAFÉ, AND GO TO AN EXHIBITION OR A PERFORMANCE AFTERWARDS

With cafés and lounges attached to some of these cubby bookstores, they can be the perfect haven for days when you just want some peace and quiet reading all day. Located at the laidback enclaves of Bras Basah, Keong Siak and Ann Siang, this also means that owners, shopkeepers and other patrons are less wont to give you the evil eye for hogging that table for hours. What's best is that some of these independent bookstores are housed alongside cultural exhibitions, gallery exhibitions and ad hoc concerts or parties so you can go from solitary hours at the bookstores to more visual or aural excitement, all in one precious day on the weekend.

BECAUSE MONEY CAN'T BUY STYLE

Drop the names of these niche bookstores you visit every now and then in class, and your charges will probably be impressed that their teacher is cooler than they had imagined. Better yet, plan a weekend excursion with some of your students to these stores and let them experience the edgy vibe and outstanding rare collections that they stock. And if you're looking for a good gift idea for your friend or any of these students, you're bound to find a one-of-a-kind or limited edition book, some of which are original handmade art forms.



Cat Socrates



25 Degree Celcius

25 DEGREE CELCIUS

Specialises in:

Cookbooks, from mainstream to obscure trade books. This shop cum restaurant also features a test kitchen where workshops are sometimes held.

What you can find:

Mainstream fare; specialised texts from the Spanish Montague Group, which are rarely available in Singapore, such as Quique Dacosta, a cookbook by the famous Spanish chef of the same name, which provides a passcode that allows readers exclusive access to his private website full of recipes and videos; and Atius, a haute cuisine trade journal for chefs.

Location:

At 25 Keong Saik Road #01-01, where a selection of eateries and restaurants abound. The People's Park Food Centre is also a short walk away. Alternatively, you can browse your new cookbooks at the bookstore's adjoining café.

BOOKSACTUALLY, POLYMATH & CRUST

Specialises in:

Literature and non-fiction books

What you can find:

Sylvia Plath, famous poet and children's author, famed fiction author Franz Kafka, Haruki Murakami, who was critically acclaimed for both his fictional and non-fictional works and the sixth recipient of the Franz Kafka Prize, and many talented local scribes.

Location:

At 86 Club Street, where you can visit the neighbouring F&B outlets or the Maxwell Food Centre afterwards.

CASUAL POET

Specialises in:

Non-mainstream books, magazines and music. This shop, with an adjoining café, sometimes lends itself to events and exhibitions too.

What you can find:

Mogu, a rarely seen Taiwan lifestyle magazine, among others.

Location:

At 273A New Bridge Road, where coffeeshops and food centres abound.

CAT SOCRATES

Specialises in:

Paper products, tin toys, CDs of independent music groups and of course, books.

What you can find:

Young Asian authors and auteurs such as Ryu Murakami take centerstage among its well-curated selection.

Location:

Unit 03-39B at the Bras Basah Complex, where you can also hop into the other shops in this traditional book haunt. Other than Cat's in-store café, you can indulge in the eateries in and around Bugis, Purvis Street and Raffles City.

LA LIBRERIA

Specialises in:

All things unique. The shop stocks book art in limited runs and the occasional CDs of independent music groups.

What you can find:

Little-known artists and their works, with some elaborate handmade finds, for instance, an egg-shaped book.

Location:

National University of Singapore, University Cultural Centre, NUS Museum, Level 3. Check out ongoing exhibitions at the museum and relax in the café on the ground floor. Holland Village is just a short bus trip away for a good meal afterwards.

MOE ExCEL Fest 2010



**EVERY CHILD READY
FOR THE WORLD**

Confident children, independent learners and caring citizens who are ready to take on the world! We strive to equip every child with the mindset, values and skills that will enable them to excel in the 21st century.

At MOE ExCEL Fest 2010, we showcase how our schools are preparing our children for life and for the world through innovative teaching and classroom practices.

5 March 2010 | 10am - 7pm | MOE Staff only

6 March 2010 | 10am - 7pm | Open to Public

Suntec International Convention and Exhibition Centre, Levels 2, 3 & 4

For more information and to register for seminar talks/sharing sessions, log on to www.excelfest.com.