

Academy of Principals (Singapore)

PRINCIPIA

SPECIAL EDITION
The Untold Story

Celebrating a ground up
initiative

**Connecting
many minds**

Sharing the journey

The business of education

Proud of
the Relationships
😊😊😊😊😊

NURTURE OF
NEW MEMBERS

CELEBRATING A GROUND UP INITIATIVE

In January 2002, the Academy of Principals (APS) was formed with the amalgamation of three separate associations of school principals in Singapore. Today, we reflect on the significance of this milestone and celebrate the passion and collegial spirit that is the hallmark of the fraternity.

The founding of the Academy represented more than an amalgamation of three associations. It was testimony to the common ground that all principals share, and a story of innovation, entrepreneurship and the empowerment of principals.

Previously, there were three separate associations: the Association of Principals of Primary Schools (APPS), the Singapore Secondary Schools Principals' Association (SSSPA) and the Singapore Educational Administration Society (SEAS).

Each association had different roots, and was founded under different circumstances but even in those early days, the can-do spirit and the passion to build a stronger professional identity was evident.

The Academy's President, Mrs Belinda Charles recalls, "SEAS was started by a group of people who were passionate about teachers and educational leaders being a class of their own. We came together and decided that we must improve the efficacy of professional development. Mr John Yip and Mr Eugene Wijesingha were instrumental in the setting up of SEAS."



The Executive Board meets monthly to plan and provide strategic direction on the Academy's work.



Academy President Belinda Charles (centre), founding Executive Director Carmee Lim (left) with 1st Vice-President Lysia Kee (in red) and committee members.

"The rubbing of shoulders with the giants in the profession with many years of principalship experience encouraged me as there is no better place where I can serve as well as imbibe the wisdom and experience of the board members."

Michel Saw
Principal, Innova Primary

Over time, members of the three associations found themselves working closely together and gradually, boundaries were crossed. It soon became clear that efforts for professional development and sharing could be better served through consolidation.

Belinda says, "There was no challenge in coming together. That was the nicest bit. Some of us were already members of more than one association. When we organised AGMs and other events, we had to try to avoid clashes. After a while, we asked ourselves, 'Why don't we just do it all together?'"

It is this collegial spirit that has been the hallmark of the Academy.

Mrs Lim Chye Tin, the Academy's Dean and former chairman of SEAS says, "We had reps from all three organisations forming a Protem committee and we spent many meetings over many months deliberating. We drew up a constitution and had a lawyer run through it."

Mrs Lysia Kee, the Academy's 1st Vice-President and former President of SSSPA, was involved in drafting the constitution for the Academy. She looks back on it as one of the most significant moments. "I took the constitution from the three associations, put them all in front of me, and pieced together a draft constitution for the Academy based on what would work best for all of us. It was clear we wanted to involve everyone, and therefore had to have ex-officio members on the board to represent NIE and MOE. The objective was simple: we were interested in the professional concerns of principals and the way schools were managed. Based on this, we submitted a proposal to MOE, outlining our intent and programmes."



Building rapport and relationships strengthen the fraternity.

MOE was very supportive. Belinda is grateful to then PS (Education) Chiang Chie Foo for his unstinting support as principals embarked on a new chapter of learning and continual improvement.

"With his help, we were not just encouraged to amalgamate our professional associations, but to go on to a higher form of existence as an Academy," says Belinda. "To this end, he was instrumental in

"Principals often do not realise how valuable their experiences are. It's been so rewarding to discover such a treasury of expertise, and to share the many different pathways to success."

Belinda Charles (right), President Academy of Principals



securing a physical centre from which to operate as well as a grant to help us through the first few years of formation. Above all, he helped us clarify our core business while encouraging us to learn from beyond our own boundaries," she adds.

Peer learning, networking, and tapping on the tacit knowledge of principals have been high on the Academy's agenda. Belinda says, "Principals often do not realise how valuable their experiences are. It's been so rewarding to discover such a treasury of expertise, and to share the many different pathways to success. Everyone's journey is a valid one. Through *Principia*, we have celebrated the success of many unsung heroes, who have gone to the more challenging schools and did a good job of it."

Reflecting on the roles that APS could take on in the future, Belinda's wish is for the Academy to grow a more research-oriented culture in schools. "We could be a lot more research-focused in some of the educational decisions we take. Our schools produce a lot of results, but we do very little research on our processes and outcomes. One of my long term

"I'm absolutely delighted to see the Academy doing so well. It has come a long way and I'm thrilled to see the Academy grow under the leadership of Belinda, the President and Ezra, the Executive Director. I love challenges and so I took up the invitation to be involved. We initiated programmes to provide principals with a broader vision of leadership."

**Carmee Lim, founding Executive Director
Academy of Principals**

ambitions would be to grow the research base in schools. To do that, principals need to give teachers the space to do research, so that we're thinking practitioners, not just achieving practitioners.

Another area that is close to Belinda's heart is for principals to make more global connections and to better understand the challenges that their overseas counterparts face. "When looking for overseas partners, principals



The Academy's programmes provide members with a broader view of leadership. A principal meets with Mr Ngiam Tong Dow, former Head of Civil Service.



Clockwise from this photo: The Academy marks its first year in 2002 with its Heart Bus for President's Challenge; the official opening of its home at Teachers Network; welcoming members to its first AGM.



either consciously want to partner with top schools to leverage on their reputation, or with schools that are in need, so that they can assist as a CIP project. I think we are missing out by not linking up with more ordinary, average schools. There are many ways we can learn, and the average schools might help us see gaps in our own system, which we may not be aware."

The appointment of the Academy's first Dean, Mrs Lim Chye Tin, in 2008 was another boost for the Academy in spearheading the leadership development of the fraternity. Having retired as principal, Chye Tin relishes her current role, alternating her schedule between attending to business meetings at the Academy, sourcing for talented trainers and speakers to conduct workshops for teachers and principals, and extending the Academy's international network.

"My work is to look into areas that promote the professional growth of principals and to see how the Academy can service principals in the running of their schools. For a long time, these were looked after by a committee of principals, but because principals nowadays are so busy, it is thought that a Dean would help manage this area," explains Chye Tin.

"The Academy has made a considerable difference as a representative body of principals in Singapore. While the number of principals we have in Singapore is small, the impact principals have on nation-building as well as in nurturing our young is tremendous. The Academy has begun to help stakeholders have a better understanding of the roles which principals play."

**Puvan Ariaratnam, Deputy Director
National Education & Planning, MOE**

Reflecting the passion that binds all educators, Chye Tin says simply, "The Academy exists for the connectivity of the fraternity. When we have conferences and talks, it's all for the purpose of connecting and building relationships with our peers. Even when we receive a copy of our newsletter *Principia*, we experience the sense of connectedness."



Behind the scenes

From 6 to 10 July, the Academy was proud to host the largest-ever gathering of principals in Singapore – the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals (ICP). *Principia* takes a look at what went on behind the scenes to make this event a resounding success...

1 BE spontaneous and creative

Academy President Mrs Belinda Charles, who led a delegation to the ICP Council in Cape Town in 2005 to present the Academy's bid for ICP2009, said Singapore won the bid with a song, and had Mrs Carmee Lim to thank for this.

"In Cape Town, we were up against Toronto and Cairns. Like them, we made our case with powerpoint slides. But we went one step further, and literally sang and danced our way into the bid with a song that Carmee composed when we were on the plane to South Africa."



International delegates sharing ideas.

Sung to the tune of *Singapura*, the song is based on the Malay word *Jumpan hati* meaning "with one heart". It won the hearts of the ICP Council, which awarded the host venue for the 9th ICP to Singapore, bringing the event to Asia for the second time in its history.

Carmee recalls, "We were on the plane and Belinda was thinking of the theme for the bid. I rewrote the lyrics of *Singapura* to tie in with Belinda's theme. *Jumpan* is a place to gather or to meet. So *Jumpan hati* would metaphorically be a place where our hearts meet."



Singapura, Oh Singapura,
Where our hearts meet, Jumpan Hati,
Singapura, Oh Singapura,
Land of beauty, peace and harmony.
Join the 9th ICP World Convention,
Jumpan Hati, in mind and spirit
Singapura, Oh Singapura
Land of beauty, peace and harmony.

The song which helped Singapore win the bid to host ICP 2009, with lyrics by Carmee Lim

Connecting many minds

The 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals brought together educational leaders from all over the world for networking and professional sharing in Singapore.

2 WOW with student performances

Way back in 2007, the Steering Committee had decided that there would be performances to kick off each day's events, and a welcome concert at the Esplanade to open the conference, graced by the President of Singapore.

The programme committee worked closely with CCA Branch of MOE to select the best groups which participated in the Singapore Youth Festival.

Mrs Lysia Kee, Chairperson of the Programme Committee, knew exactly what would impress. "I knew I wanted the welcome concert to end with a performance by a primary school band," she says.

Her persistence in making sure that the best performances were showcased even kept her awake till 2am one night, in her quest to contact the principal of one of the schools she had in mind.

Delegates also enjoyed a diverse display of artwork by students from various schools in the main convention foyer.



3 THINK big picture, but don't forget the details

Delegates were all praise for the hospitality they enjoyed and the professionalism of the organisers.

Keynote speaker Michael Furdyk told his audience about his pleasant surprise on receiving a birthday cake upon his arrival in his hotel, thanks to the thoughtfulness of the organising committee!

Surprises such as lucky draws held every day of the convention also delighted delegates, who won prizes such as mini netbooks and digital cameras.

4 PLAN early

The convention venue was booked three years in advance, and the Steering Committee met regularly to update each other on progress made.

VIPs, speakers and sponsors were identified and invited two years before the event to secure attendance. Schools were also identified early to host learning journeys.



5 HAVE international representation

When bidding for the convention, it helped that Singapore promised to get more South-east Asian representation from participants. As a result of this success, the Academy has been appointed the regional representative for ICP.

Right from the start, the Steering Committee also decided to have a good representation of speakers from the region, as well as one from each continent. The choice of keynote speakers won many accolades from delegates and Prof Kishore Mahbubhani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, received a standing ovation for his address on the final day.



Clockwise from this photo: Belinda Charles chairs a symposium on *Identification & Development of School Principals*; lucky draw winner receives his prize from Mrs Lim Chye Tin; a rousing finale at the welcome concert; colourful dancers from Nanyang Primary School; drumming up on Day 1 of the convention; ICP Singapore 2009 mascot; delegates mingling over reception; keynote speaker Prof Andy Hargreaves; "Let's Celebrate With One Heart".

6 NEGOTIATE discounts

Hotels were secured and discounts negotiated for overseas delegates.

The Academy also arranged for restaurants close to the conference venue to offer special discounts for delegates, and discount coupons were included in the kit prepared for participants.





7 BE prepared for medical contingencies

Just a week before the event, the Steering Committee had to deal with an unexpected development - the spread of H1N1 flu in Singapore. Measures were put in place to ensure that containment measures were adhered to, without compromising a warm welcome for delegates.

A medical centre was set up at the convention venue, which provided delegates with easy access to medical assistance – thankfully for minor ailments and not H1N1!



8 ENGAGE and create awareness

Extensive press coverage generated buzz and excitement for the event. To support the media interest, the Steering Committee set up a dedicated press room for interviews and Chairperson of the Publicity Committee, Ms Yeo Hong Mui was appointed the press liaison and spokesperson.

Student roving reporters from Innova Junior College were also present to cover stories for a daily newsletter produced by the organizers.

9 BE connected

Aside from a dedicated website, ICP 2009 also had a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Delegates could share photographs and reflections on Facebook and a microblog on Twitter updated delegates with the conference's latest updates.

A commemorative website was also set up after the convention to share speeches, photographs and feedback from delegates.



Above: Principals from different countries gather for a memorable evening against the Singapore skyline; ICP Steering Committee finalises preparations for the convention.

10 VISIT schools

Nothing beats seeing the real thing. After three days of discussions and reflections at the conference, delegates were most impressed by what they saw in the classrooms and playing fields of the schools they visited.

The sight of students listening attentively to lessons in class, teachers passionately speaking about their work and principals articulating their vision for their school truly showed the delegates what makes Singapore's education system tick.



A demonstration on robotics projects by students impresses delegates visiting SJI Junior.

Many Minds, One *Heartbeat*

The 9th World Convention of the ICP brought together...

- 1500 participants from 40 countries
- 169 presenters in concurrent discussion sessions
- 131 principals and vice-principals who contributed to the success of ICP 2009
- 46 schools with 600 student performers in performance and visual arts displays
- 21 schools which hosted learning journeys
- 31 exhibition booths featuring educational publishers, IT providers, and more



Notes from a small island



"My view is that the most critical person in a school is the principal. You put a good principal in and the school blossoms. The teachers are enthused, the students enjoy coming to school and many good things happen."

PM Lee Hsien Loong in his opening address to the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals

Impressions of ICP 2009

Inspiring and impressive

This is the most impressive and inspiring start to any ICP convention I've ever experienced. To have both the President and Prime Minister at the opening highlights the seriousness of the Singapore leadership on education. The programme was absolutely professional and I have come here to learn what Singapore has achieved. Truly an inspiration to me and other headmasters!

Johann Burger, Headmaster
Bredasdorp Primary School, South Africa

Setting benchmarks

I am absolutely impressed by Singapore. I was here four years ago for the Asia-Pacific Math Olympiad with students from the Australian team. We stayed at the Chinese High Hostel and worked and interacted with students from Singapore, China, India, and other Asia-Pacific countries. I'm back to learn more and be part of this international network of sharing and learning. The benchmarks here are really high. Here I am, looking at this artwork, asking myself, can my Year 2 students do this?

Michele Beal (right), Principal
Doncaster Gardens Primary
Australia



Singapore's Education Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen speaks at ICP's Conversation with Education Ministers.

Knowing Your Student

As teachers, we have the whole world in our hands. One of the messages I heard from this conference is the importance of knowing your student. Every child is an individual. If you don't understand the individual, you won't be able to reach out.

Hadiza Yem (left), Principal
Ecwa Staff School, Nigeria



Sharing a vision

APS as the host has gone out of its way to provide a diversity of sessions for participants. I've learnt as much in between sessions as during the sessions, just by engaging in conversations with other delegates. We come from different lands, but all of us share a similar vision in education.

Kathy Perez, Programme Director
School of Education, St Mary's College of California, USA



Camaraderie and unity in mission

Having so many principals and educators from different lands coming together, learning, thinking and exchanging views, left me with a profound sense of professionalism, camaraderie and unity in mission. And to see all this happening in Singapore, knowing that we have organised this conference, and hearing many glowing references to Singapore's education philosophy and system, gives me an immense sense of pride.

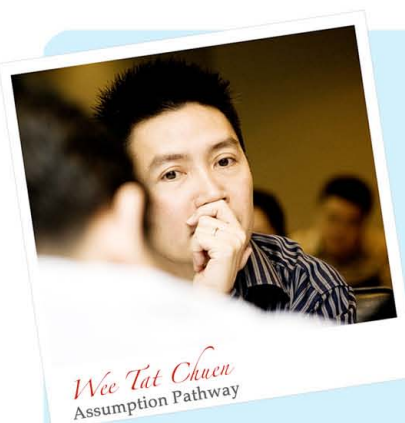
Boo Chong-Han, Principal
Bedok View Secondary School, Singapore



Sharing the Journey

What do pets, plants and paintings have in common? They're all ingredients in stories that inspired principals to learn from each other.

Three years since the launch of the mentoring programme, principals pay tribute to colleagues who have shared their journey and recount stories of simple ideas that led to lasting change...



My mentor is...

Tony Low, Principal, Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary.

I chose him because...

He was the vice principal when I was a Head of Department at Fairfield Methodist Secondary School. He is a leader who is a people developer, possesses a keen sense of humour and can always be counted on to provide his thoughts on various leadership situations. I was looking for a mentor who would provide a listening ear and is willing to share his personal leadership stories.

What I admire most about him is...

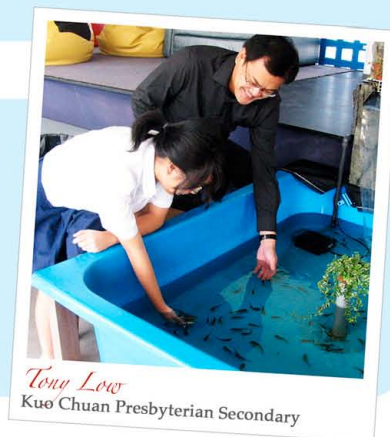
His belief in his staff and his dedication to building up his team not just for the sake of the school, but also to develop them according to their strengths and passions.

My advice to Tat Chuen...

To set the stage for others to taste success. To do that well, we must know our people, build relationships based on mutual trust and respect, look beyond the obvious and the now.

What I have learnt as a mentor...

I have learnt a lot from just listening. Tat Chuen often asks thought-provoking questions and shares insights on issues of common interest. The mentoring sessions have turned into sparring sessions where iron sharpens iron, allowing me to crystallize my own thinking and take on various issues.



A Story on Growing People

Tat Chuen shares a story from his mentor Tony Low



Many of Tony's stories revolve around growing people.

Once, Tony's school counselor had an idea to reach out to at-risk students via animal and horticultural therapy.

Each student would take charge of a pet or grow his/her own plant. Apart from learning about responsibility, the students also opened up to the counsellor as they talked about their projects.

This idea supported and built upon by Tony soon had the unused rooftop space of the school transformed into a garden of activity called Innofishion where students looked after their fishes, hamsters, rabbits and plants.

The idea has since evolved to reach out not only to the at-risk group of students, but also to grow young entrepreneurs and responsible leaders. What started out as a simple idea by one teacher has turned into thriving opportunities for all students.



Project Innofishion transformed an unused rooftop space into a garden of activity after Tony Low supported a teacher's idea for a project to help at-risk students.



My mentor is...

Wai Yin Pryke, Principal, St Andrew's Junior.

I chose her because...

I knew Wai Yin when I was a Special Assistant in Schools Division and she was a newly appointed principal. I remembered her to be an energetic and confident school leader.

What I admire most about her is...

She has absolutely no airs, she never fails to acknowledge and greet everyone she meets with her chirpy voice and a happy smile. As school leaders we must be cheerleaders and energy-givers to our pupils and colleagues. I also appreciate her sincerity in her interactions with others, her sense of humour and the ability to see goodness in everyone. Our profession requires a balance of both head and heart.

My advice to Ai Ling...

The first piece of advice I gave myself is never give advice, because the context of every school is different! What I try to do is to encourage Ai Ling, keep in touch and be there for her. Beginning principals need a listening ear. My role is to help them attain clarity through a questioning process.

What I have learnt as a mentor...

I've learnt to ask good questions and help my mentees move towards the answer for themselves. When I first started, I was anxious and wanted to impart my experience. I've learnt to be more patient. It's important for them to go through the thinking and struggling process in order to learn.



Walking Together

Wai Yin Pryke, thrilled to share the journey with mentee Thian Ai Ling.

Walking along with someone who has just begun her journey, I'm reminded of what it's like to be a new principal again. It spurs me on because she's so creative. Just listening to her makes me start looking at things in a different way.

It's exciting to share her success and see her school being transformed. One of the first things Ai Ling did was to spruce up the school canteen. It's more colourful and cheerful now, you can even feel the energy of the kids as they bounce into school!

It's inspiring to see Ai Ling's creative use of space, for example having an art gallery under the staircase. Small changes can make a big impact on the learning environment.



My mentor is...

Grace Chua, Principal, Deyi Secondary School.

I chose her because...

I was captivated by her clarity of thought and her rich ideas on developing her students in the aesthetics.

What I admire most about her is...

Her drive for personal development. She has demonstrated that as school leaders, we need to be connected with new knowledge through reading, interaction and new experiences. An effective leader then translates passion and new knowledge into the school context and makes a positive impact. Grace has helped me to see that in the way she leads Deyi.

My advice to Mui Tuan...

To be clear of what guides her decision-making. Knowing what is important to her as a school leader and the current reality of her school and stakeholders' needs may help to identify strategies to meet her challenges as a new leader.

What I have learnt as a mentor...

Mui Tuan come with a wealth of knowledge, the passion to learn and a commitment to serve. I am heartened and inspired to learn and lead.



My mentor is...

Lak Pati Singh (aka Lucas), Principal, St Patrick's Secondary.

I chose him because...

I knew Lucas was very experienced but I had never worked with him. I therefore chose Lucas so that I could have the benefit of fresh perspectives from someone known for his wisdom.

What I admire most about him is...

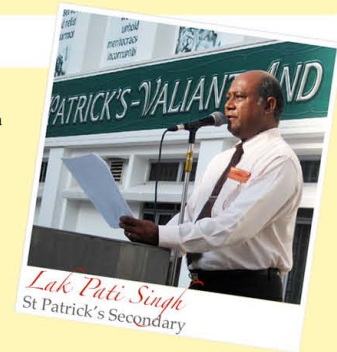
His willingness to share. He always has a smile and a hearty laugh which makes him extremely approachable. His ideas are very practical and it helps greatly that he is an excellent communicator.

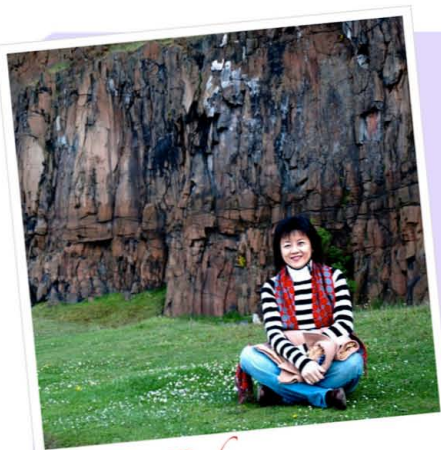
My advice to Martin...

You cannot save the world. There are some situations which you must detach yourself from. By the same token, you cannot make everyone happy. In this job it is not your objective to make everyone (or anyone) happy but to make the right decision no matter how unpopular that decision may be. You must place your pupils' well-being first as they are children who need guidance, care and motivation. You must be guided by your values in your decision.

What I have learnt as a mentor...

It has helped me re-evaluate my position as a principal. I want to help other young principals who are starting out. The complexities of the job can sometimes be overwhelming. Another benefit is that I found a friend in Martin Tan.





Loe Lai Pink
Farrer Park Primary

My mentor is...

Kok Chwee Kee, Principal, Woodlands Ring Secondary School.

I chose her because...

Mrs Kok was my principal when I took on the role as Science HOD. She painstakingly guided me to make educationally sound decisions by asking fundamental questions, so as to help me clarify my thoughts. Mrs Kok shares her views candidly yet she leaves you to reflect over the issues on your own. Her seeded belief that all children can learn has been translated into a compelling school tagline, "Through the gate, Walk the Best!" says it all. It motivates everyone, staff and students to strive harder.

What I admire most about her is...

She seizes challenges and turns them into opportunities. Without fail, she would ask you to reframe, use a different pair of lenses and value the perspectives. When Mrs Kok discovered that singing could potentially be a way to bring members of her PSG closer, she acted on it. Her legacy of 'singing PSG' still rings in my ears after all these years.

My advice to Lai Pink...

My first piece of advice to Lai Pink was the importance of being values-driven and having clarity of purpose in serving others.

What I have learnt as a mentor...

Mentoring has provided me with the opportunity to listen and share my personal experiences with Lai Pink. It has honed my listening and story-telling skills, and it has been a great learning experience!



Kok Chwee Kee
Woodlands Ring Secondary

If music be the food of love, play on...

Loe Lai Pink relates how a 'Singing PSG' forged new bonds in Broadrick Secondary

Mrs Kok Chwee Kee was instrumental in driving the formation of the strong Parent-Support Group (PSG) in Broadrick Secondary School. Understanding that music can bring people closer together, she seized the opportunity and tapped on the talent of a music director in the PSG. She created platforms for the PSG to have singing sessions during PSG meetings and sang along with them. This light-hearted interaction helped all to break the ice and with this, they began to enjoy their work in the PSG even more.

Chwee Kee leveraged on this passion for singing and supported the PSG in the creation of a motivational song which encompassed

Broadrick's vision, mission and values. Together with the PSG, the teachers performed and taught the graduating classes the song. The students were touched and encouraged by their parents' involvement. The 'Singing PSG' also performed to distinguished guests who visited the school. Their singing often lightens the mood and eases everyone comfortably into social interaction. During the inaugural Partners Award Ceremony, the PSG was also invited to present one of their signature pieces on stage. It has been seven years since Chwee Kee left Broadrick but the 'singing PSG alumni' still gathers annually at her house during Chinese New Year for a round of sing-a-long.



The Broadrick PSG serenaded First Lady Mrs S.R. Nathan during her visit to the school in 2002.

THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION

Few outside the teaching fraternity might be aware that principals started up a business enterprise known as the Principals Academy Inc (PAI).

Incorporated in 2003 as a joint venture between the Academy and Singapore's Economic Development Board, PAI has been instrumental in pioneering initiatives to position Singapore as a global educational hub.

One of the most successful projects started by PAI is the Principals Academy Certification Test (PACT) - a centralised admission test for international students who wish to study in Singapore.

“The PACT test is one of the most novel and innovative projects which we are very proud of, and which has served schools well.”

Ezra Ng (right), CEO
Principals Academy Inc.



CEO of Principals Academy Inc, Ezra Ng wants it to be premier educational resource in the region.

Not only does the testing service considerably ease the once-laborious administrative process for schools, it also helps to save costs and time for international students in their school admission process.

CEO of PAI, Mr Ezra Ng, is proud of what has been achieved so far, and wants to build PAI to be the premier educational resource in the region.

“When we first started out in late 2003, our initial focus was to draw on the strengths of Singapore's education system to promote training and development among our regional education colleagues. Currently, we still run courses designed by our own principal consultants, who have first hand experience of running schools in Singapore, and they have been very well received.”

“Encouraged by the enthusiastic response, we have since extended our training services to

Singapore educators in the form of specialized workshops conducted by leading educators in their respective fields. Since then, thousands of principals and teachers have benefitted from regular workshops by experts including Dr Kathy Perez, who is known for her research on brain-base teaching, and Dr Robin Fogarty for her experience in curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies.”

“Furthermore, the PACT test is one of the most novel and innovative projects which we are very proud of, and which has served schools well,” adds Ezra.

Excited about the possibilities, Ezra looks forward to actively pursuing new education-related business opportunities within the Asia Pacific region. “This may take the form of joint ventures with reputable institutions, collaborative tie-ups with strategic partners, or collaboration with universities, examinations and assessment boards to administer and offer professional qualifications,” he says.



A hall full of candidates sit for the Principals Academy Certification Test (PACT).

A story of educational entrepreneurship

Once, if an international student wanted to study in Singapore, he had to take a different admissions test for every school he applied to.

This process was time consuming, expensive and laborious for both the applicant and schools, which had to set, administer and mark their own entrance tests.

Academy Dean Mrs Lim Chye Tin recalls, “The idea of a centralised test germinated when a group of us were commiserating how inefficient the decentralised tests were. We asked ourselves: ‘Why not have a centralised one?’ The idea was implemented in June 2004 and about 30 students registered for the first Principals Academy Certification Test (PACT) held at St Andrew's Junior College.”

“Principals soon realised the benefits of the new tests, which allowed them to compare individual applicant's scores with mean scores. The initiative was also welcomed by international students.”



By November 2005, more than 1000 applicants had registered for the test, which had to be held at a much bigger hall at the Singapore Expo. The registration fees for the test generated revenue for PAI, which roped in retired teachers to administer the tests.

More than 100 schools have participated and 10,000 students have received certification from PACT since its launch in 2004. PACT was a win-win situation for all concerned.



Dr Foo Suan Fong engages educators from Zhengzhou, China.

Leading and learning from the best of both worlds

Dr Foo Suan Fong is one of many Singapore school leaders who are increasingly sought after for consultancy and advice by their international counterparts.

He is the principal consultant for a leadership training programme designed for teachers from Zhengzhou, China, organised under the auspices of PAI. Effectively bilingual and an avid reader, he relishes integrating western-style approaches to leadership and management with ideas gleaned from Chinese philosophy.

Suan Fong says what most impresses educators from China is Singapore's policy of bilingualism and its holistic approach to student development, staff development and evaluation.

"Like Singapore, China's education system is exam-oriented. Teachers and students feel compelled to produce good results. But like us, China's school leaders are also aware that getting good grades does not equate to preparing students for life. Principals from different parts of China are increasingly coming to Singapore to learn how we provide holistic education for our students," says Suan Fong.

Suan Fong's interactions with principals and teachers from China have given him new perspectives.

"In Singapore, like in China, people are our focus. Managing and inspiring people is what leadership is about."

Dr Foo Suan Fong (above), Principal of Nan Hua High School and consultant for PAI's leadership training programmes

"For example, the notion of 'jing' is central to China's educational philosophy. There are three different characters with the same pronunciation: 静 which means 'peace/serenity', 敬 for 'respect' and 净 for 'purity/cleanliness'. The Chinese believe that all school environments must have these three aspects."

Building on this idea, Suan Fong developed his own philosophy on three qualities needed in a school leader, summed up in characters also pronounced as 'jing': "For a school to progress, a school leader needs to have 精 'strength' to continually seek improvement to reach a higher 境 'development phase', and to understand and actualise the 菁 'essence' of education."

What gives Suan Fong satisfaction is knowing that despite differences, the essence of education remains the same across cultures. "In Singapore, like in China, people are our focus. Managing and inspiring people is what leadership is about."



Professor at St Mary's College of California, Kathy Perez's enthusiasm for teaching is infectious.

Successful strategies cut across oceans and cultures

American educationist Dr Kathy Perez has been conducting PAI workshops on brain-based teaching since March 2004. To date, she has trained almost 5,000 teachers in Singapore over the past five years.

Kathy recalls how she was 'discovered' by Academy Dean Mrs Lim Chye Tin.

"I was a featured presenter at the National Staff Development Council's conference in Boston in 2004," she says. "Chye Tin had signed up for my session on brain-based teaching. At my workshops, I have an interactive communication board for participants where participants can post their comments, questions and concerns on sticky-notes. Chye Tin posted: 'Would you like to come to Singapore?' At first, I thought it was a joke, and I inquired who had posted this and please meet with me after the session. We met and exchanged contact information. She contacted me soon after and I was booked for my first week of training that March in Singapore."

Kathy explains her interest in brain-based learning, "The most effective learning occurs in an environment that accommodates and fosters various ways of being intelligent. Therefore, teachers need to use a variety of strategies and techniques to engage their students' brains."

Kathy's enthusiasm for teaching is infectious with the audience. She usually conducts a week of training in Singapore during the March, June and September school holidays, either at open-registration workshops or school/cluster-based ones.

"I firmly believe that successful strategies cut across oceans and cultures. What works, works everywhere. When you consider high-quality school systems, it really depends on the quality and competence of the teachers. Teachers are lifelong learners (as I am) and they need to continuously challenge themselves to provide the most relevant education for their pupils."

"I consider it an honor and privilege to work with the teachers and principals of Singapore. Quality educators are key to the academic success that Singapore is known for worldwide. I am so delighted to be part of this!" says Kathy.



A sea of colourful post-it notes and comments capture the sharing of diverse ideas and connectivity that the Academy of Principals provides through its many programmes that bring together local and international educational leaders.

ACADEMY OF PRINCIPALS (SINGAPORE)

51 Grange Road Block 2 #01-04A Singapore 249564

tel 68387337 fax 68387339 email info@aps.sg web www.aps.sg

president BEI LINDA CHARLES

hon secretary VERONICA NG

committee members PUVAN ARIARATNAM, HENG BOEY HONG, LIM BOON CHENG, NG HIWEE HENG, SHIRLEEN ONG, ELSIE POEY,

TAN KEK LEE YONG, TEO KHIN HIANG, YEO HONG MUI ex-officio DAVID NG (NIE), LEE ONG KIM (NIE), MICHAEL DE SILVA (MOE)

academy dean LIM CHYE TIN

1st vice president LYSIA KEE

asst hon secretary MICHEL SAW

executive director EZRANG

2nd vice president YEO CHIN NAM

treasurer LIM YAN HOCK

