

# PRINCIPIA

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 2 • 2019

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Building to Last



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## EDITORIAL

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DR SHIRLEEN CHEE, PRESIDENT, ACADEMY OF PRINCIPALS (SINGAPORE)

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As educators our eyes are always set on the future. Beyond mastering skills and knowledge, opening minds and building character, what is the ultimate purpose in education but to prepare our students to face the world? Much has been said about the future and what it will take to thrive. Buzzwords like innovation, technology, adaptability and change have become commonplace in our vocabulary. As school leaders we constantly hold a mirror to examine ourselves, checking if what we do will really prepare the next generation for what lies ahead. In our other hand, we hold telescopes to look afar. As we look to the stars, we see the vast and boundless universe before us, ushering in the hope and destiny that await every child we teach.

In our pursuit of what lies ahead, let us not forget our past. In this issue of Principia, we commemorate Singapore's Bicentennial, celebrating our tremendous progress since our nation's founding as a British settlement on a jungle-covered island in 1819. In the span of 200 years, our city-state has transformed beyond words. Education has also developed and changed by leaps and bounds. I believe Raffles would not have conceived what this island would become a mere two centuries later. What has the past to do with us today? Confucius said, "Study the past if you would define the future". As we plan for the future, we have to reflect on and learn from the past.

As you browse these pages, you will hear from principals for four schools which have had a rich heritage and long history. They share how they treasure the foundations laid in the past, and build upon them to progress into the future. This issue, themed 'Building to Last', will give us valuable insights on what is needed to establish firm foundations so that what we build will stand the test of time. Enjoy the read and celebrate how far you have come!

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# MR TAN KUO CHEANG

PRINCIPAL OF XINMIN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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BUILDING TO LAST

## Foundations For The Future

*“This idea of handing over the baton has been apparent with every succeeding principal who carried on building upon the foundations laid by their predecessors...”*

When our founder Mr Yap Fun Hong established Sin Min School in 1945, he began with the dream of providing an education for the predominantly Chinese community in the Hougang area. He sold five of his pigs in order to rent three bungalows along Upper Serangoon Road so that he could accommodate the first cohort of 620 students. Many years after the founding of the school, his vision was continued by Mr Goh Tong Pak, who reached out to the community for help in his effort to transform the school. This idea of handing over the baton has been apparent with every succeeding principal who carried on building upon the foundations laid by their predecessors. Xinmin grew from strength to strength and became the first neighbourhood school in Hougang to turn autonomous. From its humble beginnings, Xinmin has grown to become ‘a finishing school for leaders’.

I inherit the school with a sense of gratitude. I am grateful for my predecessors who in various ways, in different seasons, laid a firm foundation from which we could grow as a school. As with my predecessors, my goal is to continue to build upon what our school pioneers established – holistic education, character development (with the continued emphasis on timeless values such as integrity, humility, respect, perseverance and gratitude), cultivating a mindset for excellence, and promoting a culture of care, and where teachers are willing to go the extra mile for their students.

### **HOLDING ONTO THE GOOD**

Helping a school with a strong heritage and history has its advantages – our past successes are a source of pride and spur us on to continue the pursuit of excellence. Moreover, it also engenders in staff and students a strong sense of identity and belonging. These strengths are key foundational qualities of the makings of a good school. However, holding on too tightly

to tradition can sometimes hinder progress, especially when we become resistant to change. Today’s educational landscape is very different from the past and if we just keep to tried, tested and safe ways that previously worked, we could become irrelevant or be ineffective in our endeavour to support our students’ growth and development. As school leaders, we have to constantly ask ourselves if we are adequately preparing our students to navigate the kind of future they will inherit when they graduate. It is not good enough to just bring a child to the next level. Will the school experience we give them serve them well after they leave our gates?

### **KNOW OUR IDENTITY**

Having joined Xinmin as principal in 2018, I spent a good part of my first year just understanding the history of the school. The key question that occupied my mind, and still does, was what our school identity was. We had to understand what we believed and stood for before we could collectively map out our next steps as a school.

To accomplish this, I spent the year talking to past principals, reading school publications, and talking to the staff in groups. The generative conversations I had with all staff over sixteen 3-hour sessions helped me tremendously in making sense of the school identity. In addition, I also seized any opportunity I had to engage current students and alumni to understand what they appreciated about the school and how we can better meet their needs. Heeding the oft shared advice by more experienced principals, I did not implement any major changes as I wanted to assure the staff, especially the long serving ones, that I did not come with the intention to upset and overturn things.

Why should we invest so much time in clarifying our school identity? My belief is that a clear sense of identity will better

help the school navigate our journey ahead. It will give all staff and students a greater sense of purpose and consequently, energise everyone to bring the school to a higher level. Conversely, without a clear sense of identity, it might be easy for the school to be pulled in many different directions or to jump onto trending bandwagons. It might also eventually result in the organisation spiralling downwards, ultimately leading to exhaustion and disengagement among staff and students.

### **GETTING ALL ON BOARD**

New school leaders often face the challenge of engaging or winning over staff who are resistant to change for various reasons. This challenge is a common one, especially for schools with a long history. That being said, I firmly believe that all teachers, regardless of their profile, have the same desire to make a positive difference in their students' lives. Harnessing this desire to do right for our students and prepare them well for their future, I felt it was important to help my colleagues appreciate how the post-secondary education landscape and the world of work have evolved. For this reason, I brought them on learning journeys to the ITE, a junior college and a polytechnic. This was an eye opening experience for us and we became even more convinced of the need to shift our collective mindsets away from learning for examinations, to learning for life.

If we are serious about preparing our students to thrive in further education and their workplace, we must be more proactive in inculcating and developing in them a strong value system, together with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies (21CC). As these values and skills cannot be taught or learnt just by the tried and tested pedagogical approaches, it is essential for our teachers to teach differently.

### **GEARING FOR THE FUTURE**

While we build on the heritage of our past, our focus remains to prepare our charges for the future. With this in mind, we streamlined and redesigned our signature programmes to provide a balanced and all-rounded education that develops our students into leaders of hearts and leaders of minds.

Coding@Xinmin develops computational thinking in our students through coding. In addition to developing 21CC like critical and inventive thinking, students are also exposed to the Design Thinking process through a cumulative task of creating a product that serves a need in the community. Complementing this programme, RefleXions@Xinmin is our Lower Secondary Drama programme that goes beyond drama as a form of self-expression and platform to develop self-confidence. Students learn to explore different perspectives (reinforcing what they learn in English Literature) and cultivate empathy through purposeful play. They also develop critical thinking skills as

they learn to evaluate their own performances along with those they watch.

Xinmin began as a village school built on resources drawn from the community for the community. The community forms an important part of our heritage and our mission to contribute back to the community has not changed. It is this mission to serve our community that resulted in the birth of XinminCares. Knowing that we have a large proportion of elderly residents in our neighbourhood, many of whom have limited social interaction with others, our students reach out to befriend them through regular visits. Through these visits, they build relationships with our elderly neighbours, and develop life skills such as listening, empathy and communication.

Lastly, we want to develop our students into leaders who are empowered to create a positive impact to the school community and beyond. In addition to developing leadership competencies in our students through our four-tiered student leadership development framework, Xinmin's Student Leadership Academy also offers students many opportunities to develop their student voice and take ownership of some school events. For instance, our student leaders have regular dialogues with the school management on school policies and student life. They are also given the autonomy to plan and organise school events such as our Xinathon (annual cross-country) and the Leadership Adventure Camp.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING HUMAN**

Although education today is vastly different from the past, our emphasis on character development and values inculcation remain unchanged. At the heart of it all, my predecessors and I share a common understanding of the purpose of education – which is to shape the future of Singapore, and perhaps even the world beyond. Education and the betterment of society are inextricably linked. Educators from past and present hold on to the same belief that every child wants to and can learn, and that our role is to prepare every child who comes to us for the future. However, with technology pervading our lives, I am concerned that our students might grow up forgetting what it means to be human. A lack of ability to empathise, connect and communicate deeply can lead to a society that is cold and individualistic. Singapore began as a kampong and it is this same kampong spirit that kept our people united through the ups and downs of our history. As a nation, we cannot afford to lose that kampong spirit. Therefore, above and beyond the future-oriented curriculum at Xinmin, we strive to emphasise what we are at the core – a school rooted in shared values, with a strong sense of community. In essence, it is this kampong spirit that birthed Xinmin, and our nation, that we do our best to build upon, believing with all our hearts that no matter what the future brings, this spirit of community and care will pull us through.

## MY THOUGHTS ON SINGAPORE'S BICENTENNIAL

I believe that in order to know where we are going, we have to know where we come from. The Bicentennial acknowledges the contributions of our forefathers towards the development of Singapore. It also gives us the opportunity to explore our identity as Singaporeans and to reconnect with the Singapore story. Our heritage tells of our diversity and multi-culturalism which was forged way before Independence. The fragile social fabric that we have woven in Singapore is many centuries in the making. It is thus imperative that we keep building on what we have and strengthening it.

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SINGAPORE

I love our diversity and can-do spirit. I am also proud that Singaporeans do not only come together to celebrate (such as when Joseph Schooling won our first Olympic Gold Medal), but also have the ability to band together in trying times. There are many examples of the latter, including how we overcame the 2003 SARS crisis as a nation; spontaneously joined others to help lift a truck and free a man pinned underneath in a traffic accident; and mourned the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew in 2015. These examples never fail to inspire and convince me that as a nation united, we are a force to be reckoned with!



## APS PRIZE FOR LEADERSHIP LEARNING LEADERS IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME 2017



Kuo Cheang was awarded the APS Prize for Leadership Learning in the 2017 Leaders in Education Programme (LEP). This award is given to the LEP participant who exemplifies the highest level of learning through his/her reflection journal during the programme. The recipient of this prize is jointly selected by a panel of representatives from both MOE and NIE.

## MY LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

### Always keep our students at the centre of everything we do

- Respect students' voice and give them the time and space to be themselves
- Empower them to make a difference
- Role model!

### Believe in your people

- Know your team – what are their 'superpowers' and what is their 'kryptonite'?
- Empowerment and trust.
- Be mindful of how we respond to failures or less-than-perfection.

### Patience

- A single change may take years to take root.
- Be prepared to wait things out.

### Ask why, but more importantly and why not

- Be clear about your purpose.
- Look for new ways to overcome existing challenges.
- Do not be content with the status quo. Always seek to do things better.

### Always leave the organisation in a better state than when you inherited it

### Keep reflecting, learning and growing





# MRS CHAILLAN MUI TUAN

PRINCIPAL OF ANGLO-CHINESE SCHOOL (JUNIOR)

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BUILDING TO LAST

## Valuing The Past

*“We strive to inculcate in our boys the same spirit as our pioneers. ....”*

When Bishop William Oldham dreamt of building Anglo-Chinese School in 1886, he expressed a deep wish that every boy entering its gates would have a lifelong sense of belonging. This sense of belonging to the ACS family and the notion that one is part of a bigger whole is planted in every ACS boy from the moment he walks through our gates. He belongs to one of eight school houses which are named after ACS pioneers and old boys. He then embarks on a Methodist education that focuses on faith, character, leadership and service. Every ACS boy knows that 1 March is Founder’s Day, he remembers his heritage and has the school motto engraved on his heart to scale new heights and to remain undaunted in the face of challenges. When he leaves school, he can become part of the active Old Boys’ Association, doing his part in supporting his alma mater and helping a new generation of boys, so that they too will grow up to serve society and country. The seeds of family, serving one another, leading and making a difference in society are all sown from Primary 1. This sense of belonging, which Bishop Oldham dreamt about, extends beyond ACS to his family, his fellowmen and country.

Anglo-Chinese School (Junior) belongs to the ACS family of schools. Today, 133 years after our founding, we continue to pursue the same goals of academic excellence,

character development and service based on Christian values envisioned by past principals. In our aim to make ‘every ACSian a young gentleman of character, ready for the future, to lead and to serve’, we strive to inculcate in our boys the same spirit as our pioneers. This includes the character traits of generosity, resilience, excellence, love, loyalty and hope. As a school leader, understanding the core purpose of the school helps me to navigate the present and plan for the future.

### MAKING SENSE OF THE PRESENT

Thirty-one years ago, on 1 March 1988 at the 102nd Founders Day of the ACS schools, Dr Tay Eng Soon, then Minister of State for Education said : *“My vision is that ACS should not just be a good school but a great school. My yardstick for a great school is one which produces leaders for all sections of our society.”* As we reflect on these words, our team of staff at ACS(J) remember that we have boys with different dreams, different talents and different strengths. We remain steadfast to our mission of stewarding these boys to excel in character, sports, aesthetics, academics, entrepreneurship, leadership and service. As such, we provide opportunities in these areas to educate our boys for life. Our curriculum is built on four pillars which contribute to a holistic education, namely Aspiration (ACSian Thinker), Character (ACSian Gentleman of Character), Service

(ACSian Servant Leader), and Joy (ACSian Joyful Learner).

To develop our boys to be thinkers and creators, we provide them with many learning opportunities to nurture in them an aspiring mindset, a strong sense of curiosity and desire for excellence in all that they do. Our Primary 3 FUN (Find yoUr Niche) project is integrated into the English curriculum and students undertake a collaborative problem-solving process over a period of eight weeks, culminating in a group presentation through drama. In our aspiration to develop our boys to think creatively and innovatively, we also incorporate the value of inclusiveness and sharing with others ‘beyond our walls’. Recently, we extended the Creative Thinkers Programme to our school cluster so that the boys can interact and work together with their peers from other schools. Our Primary 4 boys form teams with students from cluster schools and work in groups to solve creative puzzles, while the Primary 5 and 6 boys facilitate the games and another activity called the “Escape Room”.

We also believe in a culture of co-creation to nurture a sense of responsibility and ownership. One example is providing platforms for students to exercise their student voice, where students are encouraged to express their views

about the school and share feedback and concerns through the student feedback system and surveys. Student leaders are also involved in the planning and running of school events like NE events, Teacher's Day celebration, cyber wellness week and Play@Recess. We also have a Primary 4 Speakers Arena as part of the Literature in English Programme. Our students have used this platform to share their views on topics ranging from protecting the environment, bullying and even the use of personal mobility devices!

The spirit of being a servant leader is cultivated by encouraging all students to desire to make a difference around them. In 2018, the prefects initiated the 'Adopt-the-Canteen' project to raise awareness of the work of school cleaners. Classes were rostered to take responsibility for the cleanliness of the canteen throughout the year. In 2019, the prefects spearheaded 'Teacher-student' Games Day to foster bonding between the P6 boys and the teachers. Additionally, as part of our Science programme, the children are given the responsibility to grow and water their air plants (tillandsia). Even as they learn about Botany, they are also mastering responsibility.

### **BUILDING BEYOND WALLS**

Today, most primary schools in Singapore have modern facilities under the PERI Upgrading Programme. As we design and construct school buildings, we bear in mind that we build beyond walls. What is the purpose behind these structures? An indoor sports hall serves the purpose of contributing to the all-rounded education of our students through physical activities that can be conducted in all weather conditions. What about the teaching and learning laboratory? Besides just providing space for students to enjoy experiential learning, they give teachers the chance to unobtrusively observe students at work, allowing them to understand how their charges are engaged and hence contribute to staff professional growth. Our school building projects and facilities do not just serve

practical purposes, but also contribute to higher goals which match the vision and mission of education. As a school leader, I build my school bearing in mind that I build beyond the walls of my institution.

Building beyond our walls also means extending our reach to our community. We build up our boys so that when they grow up, they can build our home, our country. Besides internal programmes, ACS(J) actively participates in national programmes such as the SG75 competition organised by the People's Association. A group of students envisioned what Singapore would be like in the future and produced creative pieces of work based on the theme 'Singapore our New Home in SG75'. We displayed their work in our school foyer during the National Day celebrations last year to inspire the rest of our students to come together to build the future of Singapore.

### **DEFINING THE FUTURE**

Mr T.W. Hinch, who served as Principal of ACS from 1929 to 1947, said "*The past we inherit, the present we create, but for those who hope, work and play, The Best is Yet To Be.*" In essence, he defines a principal's role as master builder. We inherit what our pioneers built in the past and continue to build upon the foundations they laid. Together with the staff, we are the master builder and designer, putting every brick and stone in place to create a strong building with a solid foundation that will stand the test of time. As a team of staff, we collaborate and design with a common purpose – to prepare our students for the future. As we build beyond walls, and build up our charges, we are indirectly laying the foundation for our nation's future, and defining it.

Preparing our children for the future is always multi-pronged and multi-faceted. Our boys are taught Christian principles of faith and hope, out of which develops resilience, determination and a positive mindset. Furthermore, we strive to anchor them in R2EAP (responsibility, resilience, empathy, adaptability and

passion) values while teaching them to make decisions based on truth and love. We then provide them with opportunities to discover and realise their interests in multiple programmes and a variety of CCAs.

More than that, we build our schools for a bigger purpose - to build our country. We continue to develop our boys so that they are able to see the wider issues outside of himself. Does he have a spirit of service and a willingness to put the needs of others above himself? Those who want to lead must be ready to serve first. In 2017, we launched the 'Knights of ACS' to motivate the boys in each class to collaborate and work with one another to reach character goals and desired behaviours. More than a class project, 'Knights of ACS' aims to inculcate a spirit of community among our boys, reinforcing the sense of belonging and awareness that they belong to a larger community. 'Knights of ACS' has transformed our boys. One of the Primary 5 classes received the 'Knights of ACS - Awesome Award' for initiating a service learning project for needy families in the neighbourhood. The boys continue to serve these families on a regular basis, having understood what it means to belong to their class, school, society and country.

In building to last, we foster collaboration, inclusivity and embracing of diversity by encouraging a sense of belonging to class, school and community. As we build beyond walls and build to last, we do our part in building our home, Singapore, where truly, the best is yet to be.



### **MY THOUGHTS ON SINGAPORE'S BICENTENNIAL**

I have a deep sense of gratitude to our pioneers who worked strategically and selflessly to put Singapore on the world map. They made difficult decisions and implemented sound policies to ensure the survival and growth of our nation. Most

of all, they had the spirit and drive to overcome immense setbacks and challenges. I hope that our young generation will embrace these attitudes. It is always easier to grumble and have a sense of entitlement, but if we look back and see what our pioneers achieved in those circumstances, we would be able to see how far we have come and be grateful.

I also see our Bicentennial as a check-point in our nation's history so that we can reflect on the past so as to build a stronger tomorrow. Like a pillion rider on a motorbike, I have no control over the direction or speed of the motorbike and it can be a frightening experience. However, whenever I lean forward and intentionally look in the rear view mirror, I see how far I have travelled and it gives me the assurance that I am moving ahead safely in the right direction and taking calculated risks. Our Bicentennial is like the rear-view mirror – it gives us a view of what the past was like so that we can progress forward with greater strength and assurance.

#### WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SINGAPORE

I love Singapore simply because it is home. It provides a sense of peace and belonging, and this home is shared with family and friends. Singapore gave me opportunities to grow and contribute, and I hope that as a nation, we will continue to build our home through valuing the past, making sense of the present and defining the future.



## MY LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

### Leadership Principles

- **Purpose will motivate** – knowing your core purpose brings order in chaos and turbulent changes
- **Leader as steward** – it is our responsibility to leave the organisation better than it was before
- **Leader as designer** – together with our school management team, we are the master builder and the key architect who integrates different parts of our organisation into a coherent whole
- **Leader as servant** – be more ready to serve than to be served
- In all our interactions, always hear, see and feel.

### Fostering a sense of belonging

- Valuing the past and transmitting good stories to understand heritage
- Making sense of the present in engaging students to discover their interests and strengths
- Creating opportunities to work in teams
- Defining a Shared Purpose for the team
- Having hope for the future



# DR CHIN KIM WOON

PRINCIPAL OF TAO NAN SCHOOL

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BUILDING TO LAST

## Building From The Past

*“Our original curriculum was influenced by the educational reforms in China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ...”*

Tao Nan School was established in 1906 as one of six schools under the Hokkien Huay Kuan. With a history of 113 years, we are one of the oldest primary schools in Singapore. Our school has a rich history that is steeped in Chinese culture and heritage. This strong cultural identity is something that we continue to emphasise. Our original curriculum was influenced by the educational reforms in China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the name 道南 (Tao Nan) means ‘moving south’. The whole purpose of Tao Nan’s founding was to spread Chinese culture and ideas southwards, to Singapore. I continue to build on the legacy of our school founders, embracing the mission to share lasting and valuable Chinese principles and values to the students under my charge.

Tao Nan’s school pioneers were also forward looking. In 1909, a mere three years after the school was established, it began to take in students from other dialect groups besides Hokkien. The idea of inclusiveness was already practised by our pioneers our pioneers more than 100 years ago. Furthermore, eight years later in 1914, when imperial rule in China ended, the curriculum was quickly modernised by the addition of English and Science in order to keep abreast with times. Additionally, in 1916, Tao Nan broke with tradition and made history by becoming the first Chinese school in the Straits Settlement to use Mandarin instead of Hokkien as the medium of instruction. Our founders

had the foresight to see that Mandarin would become a unifying language among the Chinese groups and that the school’s progress would be hindered if it continued teach in only one dialect. Their progressive thinking, willingness to break from the mould, as well as far-sightedness truly inspire me.

Today Tao Nan has an enrolment of 2200 students. If our founders had not embraced change and taken risks, we certainly would not have grown so rapidly. I constantly encourage my staff to cultivate a mindset of readiness and growth – we need to be ready to change and grow in order to move with the times and with the needs of our nation. After the school was upgraded in 2017, we had to adjust by combining the morning and afternoon sessions into one single session. It was a massive change and the staff had to adapt. Like our pioneers, we had to be ready to seize opportunities and be willing to step out of our comfort zone.

In the midst of change and progress, some traditions should always be upheld. These traditions include the values that are transmitted down the generations from the past. Our pioneers emphasised teacher commitment to pupils, high academic and non-academic standards, character building and the promotion of Chinese culture and heritage. I consciously retain these same areas of focus as they are principles and practices that will always last.

### THE VALUE OF HERITAGE

Besides our founding as a Chinese school, Tao Nan has been a SAP school for more than 40 years. As such, the values of a SAP school, namely the appreciation and learning of Chinese culture and language remain a key focus. I want all our students to be bicultural and bilingual. With the continued and growing importance of China in the interplay of this day’s global political, economic and social environment, having a strong understanding of Chinese ethos and philosophy is essential. Students with the ability to appreciate and grasp the nuances of Chinese thinking will stand them in good stead. More importantly, I want to pass on the virtues that are emphasised in Chinese philosophy such as respect for elders, caring for others, humility, hard work, and putting the needs of society above the individual.

There is a saying ‘饮水思源，服务社会’ , which literally means ‘When we drink water, never forget where its source comes from and be prepared to serve the society( water source) in return’. As a school leader, I see it as my responsibility to remind my staff and students to appreciate the work our pioneers did to benefit the future generations that they never lived to see. These same pioneers who built Tao Nan also contributed to laying the foundation for the growth of our nation. When we remember and are grateful, we will be more willing to contribute our talents and resources to serve society.

## LIVING OUR PURPOSE

Tao Nan's motto is 'Sincerity and Perseverance'. These qualities were demonstrated by our predecessors and we strive to make this our mantra today. Following their example, my teachers and I continue to forge the path to provide our children with a holistic and quality education, with all sincerity and whole-heartedness, while persevering through the challenges that come our way. When the Japanese Occupation ended in 1945, many schools could not cope with the overwhelming number of students who wanted to resume their education after missing out during the war years. Tao Nan teachers resourcefully conducted night classes to meet demand. They overcame obstacles and worked passionately to fulfil the goal of giving every child, regardless of age, an opportunity to receive an education. These teachers in the 1940s carried on working in the same spirit as Tao Nan's pioneers in the early 1900s. Now years later, we continue the work with the same ethics, pursuing the same noble goal. We put in our utmost effort to give every child at Tao Nan a quality education that will prepare them to succeed in the future.

## EMBRACING OUR VISION

Besides possessing strong ethics, our founders had vision. It is imperative for school leaders to lead with vision. Tao Nan's vision comprises two parts - 'Love to Learn, Learn to Love'. First and foremost, we are a learning institution. Our work gears towards developing our students to become self-directed learners who have the knowledge, skills, attitude and values to face the challenges of the future. Besides 21CC skills, I believe that our children have to be grounded in solid values that will serve as a compass to guide and enable them to make the right choices as they grow up. Personally, I like the second part of our vision more than the first, because learning to love reflects the value of character. I hope that after six years at Tao Nan, every child will learn to care for others-- beginning with family, radiating to neighbours, the community and to the nation and environment as a whole.

School leaders need to take the lead in

embracing this vision, and encouraging staff and students to internalise what it means. It takes effort to constantly remind our pupils to appreciate what our pioneers have bestowed upon us and to uphold the time-tested values that they possessed. With these values serving as a moral compass in our lives, we can then serve society to the best of our ability. To me, character building is the ultimate goal in education. All children can achieve academically, but learning to love is a greater challenge and a higher call.

How do I encourage my staff and students to live out our vision practically? I try to create a culture of care and love in Tao Nan where the children are encouraged to do one good deed a day and to share it with others. I also strongly believe in role modelling. For example, it is more meaningful to demonstrate what service and humility means than to just talk about it. I have a habit of standing at the Transport Hub every morning when students get dropped off. When the children see me open their car doors and greet them, they learn what it means to care, love and serve. The staff embrace and live out our vision to 'learn to love' to the point that it becomes evident in their daily interactions with the children. Whether is it through storytelling, teacher-student relations, and even in the way we interact with our parents and stakeholders, we consciously demonstrate an attitude of care and service.

The value of living out what we say cannot be underestimated. Let me share another example. At Tao Nan, the students are taught to raise their hands when crossing the road for safety. My staff and I do the same whenever we cross the road so that our children can see that we practise what we preach. On one occasion, I was going to cross the driveway in the school and there were no students in sight. I was tempted to just cross it as any person normally would, but checked myself and decided to raise my hand even when I assumed that there was no one around to witness my act. Little did I know that a parent outside the school had seen me doing that and shared it on social media. I walked the talk that

day and my actions were consistent with my words. This incident simply illustrates the high standing that school leaders have in the eyes of all stakeholders whether parents, students or the community. When we fully embrace a vision, we do not just talk about it but live it out so that it becomes a habit and eventually a part of our culture. Programmes and activities are short-lived, but culture lasts for centuries.

## MAPPING THE FUTURE

Beyond celebrating heritage, building culture and living out a vision, school leaders need strategy as a road map to bring us from the past to the future. At Tao Nan, we have defined five 'strategic thrusts' - learner-centred teaching and learning, character development, enhanced SAP development, staff development, and administrative excellence - as areas of focus.

Learner-centred teaching and learning falls in line with our vision and aligns us to the goals of MOE to promote the lifelong learning and the joy of learning. We fully utilise the resources provided to develop our ALP (Applied Learning Programme) in Mathematics for Lifelong Learning and LLP (Learning for Life Programme), where we specialise in badminton and basketball. In addition, we have a school initiated programme called Adventure World and Adventure Week. These programmes are designed to cultivate 21CC skills and social emotional competencies in our students. They are taught presentation skills, communication skills, teamwork, and media literacy through project work and learning journeys.

In the area of character development, we constantly refer to our vision and our school values of love, respect, integrity, perseverance and responsibility. We promote the value of good manners and respect when children are taught to acknowledge and greet the principal, vice-principals, teachers and other school staff they meet in school. When they arrive in school, there is a time for silent reading before flag raising. On Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays, English books are read and the remaining days focus on Chinese books. This habit of silent reading



## MY LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

### Qualities of a leader

- **Knows his or her calling:** the position of a leader is not just a job to fulfil
- **Visionary:** one who upholds and drives vision
- **Culture builder:** inculcates school values and internalises culture in staff
- **Networker:** establish and maintain ties with community and stakeholders
- **Change maker:** drive and manage change to move with the times
- **Curriculum leader:** lead in curriculum implementation and innovation
- **Strategist:** know what the priorities are and what to work on

### My life principles

- Embrace my heritage and appreciate heritage of others
- Live out the values of our pioneers
- Never rest on our laurels
- Treasure what we have
- Give back to society
- Pass on to the next generation – we are their pioneers!

encourages children to be responsible and well-mannered while promoting a culture of reading and bilingualism.

As a SAP school, we fully embrace the philosophy of SAP schools and cultivate an environment promoting its values. By focussing on bilingualism, the SAP education allows students to appreciate the multi-cultural and multi-racial society they live in. We also reinforce to students that they should not take what they have been provided for granted, and seek opportunities like VIA (Values-in-Action) and other community involvements to give back to our multi-racial society.

Even in the early 1900s, our first SMC Chairman Mr Tan Kah Kee realised the importance of staff development. He said that a school could only be as good as its teachers, and if we wanted to produce quality students, we needed quality teachers. I fully subscribe to this belief, and place a high emphasis on staff welfare and staff development. When your staff feel cared for, you have a happy and motivated team, and the rest of the work should fall easily into place. Staff development forms another critical pillar in our strategic thrusts.

Lastly, we need administrative excellence to enable us to carry out all our plans. Our admin support structure like finance, operations and human resources have to be well-positioned and equipped in order to keep up with the progress that we strive to make.

### HISTORY IS OUR TEACHER

There is a well-known phrase of Tang dynasty that reads:

以铜为鉴，可以正衣冠，  
以人为鉴，可以明得失，  
以史为鉴，可以知兴替。

By using a mirror of brass as a reflection, you may see to adjust your clothes;

By using human beings as a reflection, you can understand personal gain and loss;

By using history as a reflection, you can learn to foresee the rise and fall of empires.

This phrase illustrates the importance of learning from our past so that we can avoid pitfalls and understand the principles and strategies which worked. Culture, vision and values are transmitted to us from the past and it is this heritage that we build upon so that what we establish today

will endure. In fact, we ourselves are the pioneers for the generations that will come after us!



### MY THOUGHTS ON SINGAPORE'S BICENTENNIAL

The Bicentennial reminds me of how Singapore began and how far we have come. In the face of many difficulties and great challenges, our nation's pioneers demonstrated resilience and perseverance to overcome the odds. They passed down values of hard work, respect, discipline and a spirit of excellence. Most of all, they devoted themselves to serve society and make our nation a better place. We have benefitted from their sacrifice and it is our mission to continue to build on what our pioneers established, following their example of serving others before ourselves.

### WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SINGAPORE

Singapore is a place I call home. I have great pride in our country and what our forefathers built – a city that is multi-cultural and multi-racial with a strong appreciation and respect for heritage.





# MRS JASWANT SROYA

PRINCIPAL OF JUying PRIMARY SCHOOL

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BUILDING TO LAST

## Principles That Last

*“These values were established by our school pioneers and we build upon them today ...”*

I joined the education service more than 40 years ago in 1976 as a trainee teacher at the Institute of Education. Over the years, the landscape of education has changed significantly, adapting to the changing characteristics of each generation. As a teacher and school leader, I learnt to adapt with the times.

In the early years, employment choices were limited and many of us remained in our jobs through thick or thin. Job hopping was seen in a negative light and we just pressed on in our work no matter how tough circumstances were. It was my passion for teaching and learning that kept me going year after year. I believe my generation was very resilient because of the hardships we went through. Teachers today have a lot more choices to decide their career path and greater opportunities to develop and grow in their strengths and specific skillsets. Work-life balance is also more encouraged compared to the past. I find that the younger generation of school leaders are also more open to take risks and strive for self-actualisation.

Nowadays, we have to inculcate dispositions in our younger generation of teachers and students in order to prepare them to face a VUCA world. We need to give them opportunities to develop grit and resilience, while fanning the passion to keep learning for life.

### **CULTIVATING A GROWTH MINDSET**

While exams and grades are de-emphasised

compared to the past, the intrinsic values behind these tests – the push for excellence, discipline and hard work – remain unchanged. In fact, these values were established by our school pioneers and we build upon them today. As school leaders and teachers, we continue to cultivate the habits of mind that enable students to develop the positive character qualities needed to succeed in life. I also encourage my team to adopt a growth mindset - Carol Dweck's 'Mindset' is a must-read for my school staff.

We also teach our students to embrace a growth mindset by adopting the principles shared in the book 'Habits of Mind' by Art Costa. Our teachers provide them with strategies to apply these principles. For example, we start by telling the children that 'intelligence can be developed', changing their mindset to believe that their brain grows and gets stronger when they put in effort to learn. At Juying, we place so much importance on cultivating the right mindset that I even appointed the Year Heads to work with external trainers to specifically develop lesson plans based on 'Habits of Mind'. We use tools like videos, stories and lively activities to engage the children. For example, in order to demonstrate the value of putting in effort, the team came up with an 'effort meter' where students could indicate and reflect on the amount of effective effort they put in any task given to them. The teachers themselves also serve as role models on the dispositions that we want to cultivate.

### **A CURRICULUM FOR THE FUTURE**

Juying adopts Michael Fullan's 6 Cs to help us structure our curriculum such that our students are future ready. The four skillsets of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity are integrated into the curriculum and explicitly taught. The other two Cs – character and citizenship - are taught through the explicit teaching of dispositions identified with 'Habits of Mind' and 'Growth Mindset'.

To nurture the 4Cs, the school adopts pedagogies that provide students with opportunities to relate what they have learnt in the curriculum to the real world and acquire essential 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies. For example, teams of teachers have led and promoted ICT-enabled curriculum innovations to accelerate and deepen students' learning. Two such curriculum innovations are the Flipped-Team Based Learning and Phenomenon-Based Learning. These innovations have been shared with other schools both locally and internationally.

Juying also runs an Integrated Programme for Lower Primary students so that children at this level are creatively engaged. This play-based programme is rooted in the MOE PAL (Programme for Active Learning) which incorporates visual arts, outdoor activity and sports, but we have adapted and extended it to suit our goals. I appointed one of our music teachers to develop this curriculum to ensure that active learning is pervasive in our whole

Lower Primary curriculum. Language, art and music are linked by a common theme to encourage interest and reinforce learning. Our children are encouraged to explore, create and communicate confidently. We have also embarked on the one-to-one i-Pad initiative to foster greater engagement, creativity and joy in learning. In addition to all of these, we have two distinctive programmes, Environmental Education, which is our LLP (Learning for Life Programme) and tHinkABITS, our Applied Learning Programme (ALP) which provide pupils opportunities and platforms to learn beyond the classroom. Our teachers also leverage on technology and all students have access to i-Pads and chromebooks to encourage self-directed learning.

### **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

Many of Juying's projects are created and developed by our staff. As the principal, my role is to encourage active participation and ownership by continually sowing seeds. I leave the watering and fertilising of these ideas to my teachers. How do I get them to contribute and take up projects for the good of the children? It all boils down to establishing a strong relationship with each of my staff, while respecting the culture of the school.

When I first joined Juying eight years ago, I made one-on-one appointments with staff to hear them out personally and to sense the heartbeat of the school. I met about 90 staff over a period of three months. This conscious act of non-judgemental listening was very powerful - the teachers felt heard and cared for. My next step was to arrange for EXCO meetings where I addressed what could be changed immediately. For example, one issue raised was the lack of work-life balance. To change this habit, we came up with a rule that the gates would be locked at 6 pm so no one could stay in late. I even encouraged my staff to leave by 3 or 4 pm if they could. When people are rested and have sufficient time to recharge, they will return to school the next day more motivated and energised. Besides implementing new policies, we removed programmes developed in the past that were no longer relevant. We kept asking ourselves how these

programmes benefited our children and made decisions accordingly.

Once I had built relationship, it was easier to get things done. In my second year as principal, I continued the one-on-one meetings and because I had already won the trust and confidence of the staff, our conversations were deeper. More changes could be made. One change that was unanimously echoed was to add colour to the school environment, so I empowered the staff from the various departments to conceptualise the content and artworks. To my surprise, they created a heritage corner, green corridor, gardens and health zone, to name a few. When the staff felt cared for, they were willing to contribute their talents. All this happened because I chose to invest time to build relationships. I strongly believe that more than anything else, every principal needs to make the time to hear and talk to his/her staff. After five years, I asked my staff if they were tired of my annual one-to-one informal chats and almost every single one of them said they looked forward to these meetings! So the conversations continue today and my teachers continue to freely volunteer their time and effort to make our school a better place. Not only has the workplace become friendlier and more productive, some have even said that Juying is like their second family!

I never see my staff as just employees to get the job done. They are people with needs, aspirations, and challenges. During our coffee chats, we talk about our families, experiences, interests and topics beyond work. When our staff perceive that their leaders are willing to be vulnerable to them, they begin to trust us. Once we have gained their confidence, we can then motivate them to attain greater things at work. It is also important to continually affirm and recognise good work to keep up their motivation. I always send thank you notes to show my appreciation. Finally, while I am very relational with my staff, I also hold to the principle that we are hired to do a job well. Candid conversations are necessary especially when someone is not performing to expectations.

### **KEEP THE END IN MIND**

In my initial years as a school leader, I tried to take on more than I could manage. I felt tired and frustrated because I wasn't achieving much. I made mistakes and many a time, cried silently to myself. However, it is through all these knocks, challenges and pitfalls that I learnt to do my job better and to change the way I did things. A leader is only as effective as her team and I am blessed to have excellent VPs and staff who strongly support me. One of my VPs is very structured and she complements me, as having structure is one of my shortcomings! I trust my team and ride on each individual's strengths.

As a leader, I learnt to take different positions at different times. For example, since technology in teaching is not my strength, I let others spearhead this area. I have had to challenge my own assumptions and to check myself from constantly wanting to give direction. Truly, when we empower others, we free ourselves. Our middle management team has also been renewed as the older members moved on. I strongly believe in renewal. The old may be good but holding onto the past keeps us stuck in our comfort zone. In order to grow and move with the times, we must always inject new blood and new life in our structures.

### **PRINCIPLES THAT LAST**

Our education landscape will continually change and adapt with time, but some leadership principles remain the same. It is of utmost importance for leaders to have clarity, be passionate about making a difference and be visible. I believe every child can learn, wants to learn and is unique. This conviction forms the foundation of my leadership philosophy and will never change. My leadership principles are guided by William Purkey's 'Invitational Education' and I have built upon the areas of People, Places, Policies, Programmes, and Processes (5 Ps) over the years.

- **People** are key and serve as our strongest lever. I strive to build relationships, rapport, trust, respect and autonomy with everyone who works with me.

- **Places** – the environment at school has to be vibrant and safe for children. It is said that the first teacher is the parent, the second teacher, the educator, and the third teacher is the environment. With this in mind, Juying's Learning for Life Programme (LLP) is all about environmental education.
- **Policies** – Juying embraces the ethos of MOE and all our school policies are created based on principles of fairness and shared values.
- **Programmes** – our teachers develop programmes which ensure that our children have a holistic education. All Juying students look forward to their first camp in Primary 3 which is an overnight stay at the Singapore Zoo. In Primary 4, they attend the MOE designated adventure camps, and in Primary 5 the whole cohort experiences a two night stay in Malacca. The objectives of these trips are to widen horizons, cultivate independence and develop life skills. Besides these, all our children are involved in some form of art, dance or music programme that provides them with a platform to perform and build self-confidence.
- **Processes** – every process in place has to be clear, monitored and relevant to ensure that teachers are assessed effectively, feedback is timely, and the children are indeed learning.

Once these 5 Ps are in place, the school automatically becomes a happy place and a home away from home! More significantly, we would have laid the foundation for the future and what we build will last.

### MY THOUGHTS ON SINGAPORE'S BICENTENNIAL

It is an opportunity for me to reflect on how our nation came to be, how far we have come and how we can go forward together. It is about the journey of our forefathers, their humble beginnings and how they came to settle in Singapore. Looking to the past also rekindles memories of my childhood living in a kampong that had none of the comforts of today. There was no electricity, water or gas, and I remember studying for my PSLE under the street lamp! But despite the hardship and inconveniences, those were one of the happiest years of my life!

### WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SINGAPORE

Meritocracy – I am where I am today because of meritocracy, which gave me an equal opportunity to grow and learn. Despite my disadvantaged background, I never felt less than any of my peers. I also appreciate our safety, greenery, cleanliness and good governance.



### SCHOOL HISTORY

Juying Primary School began as Ju Eng Public School in Jalan Kayu in 1940. The school was founded by Mr Ang Oon Hui as a Chinese-aided school. 'Juying' is the Hanyu Pinyin translation of 'Ju Eng' which means 'a gathering of talents'. Due to dwindling enrolment, the school closed its doors in 1987, but this did not stop Mr Ang from continuing to serve the community. He converted the building into a home which up to this day continues to provide welfare services to the elderly and needy. The new Juying Primary School officially reopened its doors as a government English school in 1997 and is well-regarded for its holistic and innovative programmes.

### MY GUIDING PRINCIPLES: THE 5 PS *(based on William Purkey's 'Invitational Education')*

**People** – rapport, relationships, empowerment, autonomy, trust, respect

**Places** – vibrant environment, safe, second home *(autonomy-supportive environment)*

**Policies** – fair, shared, aligned with the ethos of MOE

**Programmes** – wholesome

**Processes** – clear, monitored, relevant

### TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP *(by Spears, L.C.)*

- Listening
- Empathy
- Healing
- Awareness
- Persuasion
- Conceptualisation
- Foresight
- Stewardship
- Commitment to the growth of others
- Building communities

### HABITS OF MIND *(by Art Costa and Bena Kallick)*

- Persisting
- Listening with empathy and understanding
- Thinking about your thinking (Metacognition)
- Questioning and problem posing
- Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- Creating, imagining and innovating
- Taking responsible risks
- Thinking interdependently
- Managing impulsivity
- Thinking flexibly
- Striving for accuracy
- Applying past knowledge to new situations
- Gather data through all senses
- Responding with wonderment and awe
- Finding humour
- Remaining open to continuous learning

### THE 6 C'S OF EDUCATION *(by Michael Fullan)*

- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Character Education
- Citizenship



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