

# PRINCIPIA

Vol. 6 No. 2 December 2013 Academy of Principals (Singapore)

## Partnering for Learning



**1** LIVING THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

*Adrian Lim*

**5** BUILDING UPON THE LEGACY OF LOVE

*Tan-Soh Wai Lan*

**9** SOWING SEEDS OF CHANGE

*Tan Chor Pang*

**13** BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

*Yeo Kuerk Heng*



# President's Message

With all that is going on in education and beyond, even the most reclusive will feel that things are not the same anymore and in fact cannot be the same especially when we want to remain relevant. Education is not just the purview of the principal and the teachers and the creation of a school community is not just the work of those within the school grounds.

As a result, we thought it timely to hear stories from our principals about the Partnerships they have forged. It has been an eye-opener not because of the idea itself but the many unexpected angles and insights that the principals interviewed shared with us.

So I trust you will likewise enjoy reading about how Adrian Lim has learnt to pay it forward, how Tan-Soh Wai Lan keeps true to her own personality when surrounded with family, how Tan Chor Pang has turned lower grades into high opportunity and how Yeo Kuerk Heng sees that helping Pathlight has made his school community richer not poorer, more energised not more tired.

Nor are these insights the result of one set of factors but the result of many other life experiences which have brought each principal to this season in his or her career. The frightened child, the band player, the youth leader, the chess player are memories and lessons that bear out in each respective school leader's life and leave an impact on the school he or she leads.

May you all continue to leave that meaningful imprint on your school and community in the year to come.

Chan Poh Meng  
President, Academy of Principals (Singapore)



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ISSN 1793-4699





# LIVING THE Spirit of Giving

*Adrian joined his teachers and students in a 42 km relay run to raise funds for the Tampines East CCC Bursary and Needy Pupil Fund.*

*Adrian Lim*

*Adrian Lim spent his early childhood days living in a kampong-type house in Geylang Lorong 25 where the entire community shared one common toilet. Sewage from the bucket-system toilet was manually removed by “night-soil” workers in 32-door container trucks. He ate chee cheong fun wrapped in opeh leaves (from the betel nut palm), played tikam tikam, and watched ge tai performances during the Hungry Ghost Festivals. When he was five years old, his mother jolted him awake from sleep at 3 a.m. one morning, grabbed the children’s birth certificates, and pulled him out of the house. He stood on the streets, speechless, as he watched a raging fire swallow his rented house and all the others.*

The 42-year-old calls himself a product of meritocracy, and a recipient of many mercies. When he could not afford the examination fees for his O Level examinations, his then Principal, Mrs Doreen Chan of Geylang Methodist Secondary School, paid for him. Her only message was simply to “work hard, become successful, and pay it forward.” That he did. As a teacher in Tanjong Katong Girls’ School and later Vice Principal of Victoria School, Adrian had the chance to return the favour on two students in need. Now, as Principal of Ngee Ann Secondary School, Adrian continues to champion the creation of opportunities for students and the cause of giving back to the community.



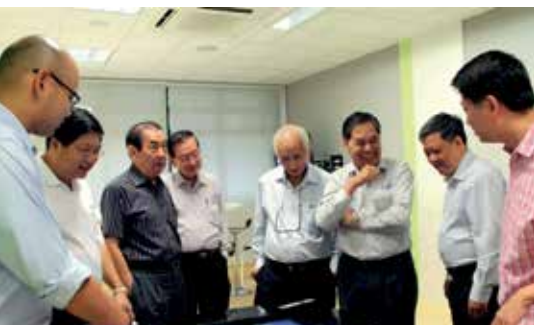
*Adrian’s humble beginnings have awakened in him a desire to contribute back to society in gratitude of the many opportunities he has been given.*

## BONDING OVER TEOCHEW MUAY AND ORH NEE

After graduating from the Leaders in Education Programme in 2008, Adrian was invited to an interview with the Board of Management of Ngee Ann Secondary. The school has strong ties to the Ngee Ann Kongsi which was founded by prominent Teochew leaders in 1845. “The Kongsi was started with two aims: to promote and observe rites, customs and religious beliefs of the Teochews in Singapore, and to look after the welfare of poor Teochew immigrants.”

Adrian recalls his surprise at the invitation, for he is not a Teochew





*Adrian regularly shares good news and updates Board Members on the latest developments in the school.*



*Adrian believes that partnerships with stakeholders and the community open up opportunities for the students and make education truly uplifting.*



*Adrian transforms conventional classrooms into interesting and inviting learning spaces.*



*Ngee Ann Kongsi's strong support and generous funding have enabled Adrian to set up purpose-built facilities with up-to-date technologies.*



*Adrian supports his teachers' creativity in redesigning learning spaces to enhance learning outcomes.*

(he is Hokkien). Nonetheless, his humble beginnings and his passion for education resonated deeply with Ngee Ann Kongsi's cause to provide quality education as a means to uplifting lives. The Board saw in Adrian the desire to level up students in need of opportunities and support, and he saw in Ngee Ann Kongsi a true sincerity in giving.

Adrian identifies with the Kongsi's conviction to "give children a good life through strong education". Many of their early members were poor immigrants who invested in education to secure a better future for their children. The Kongsi now continues this legacy by generously supporting Ngee Ann Secondary, in the hope of elevating the neighbourhood community it serves.

With such an alignment of educational goals between Adrian and the Board of Management, the relationship between the two is a harmonious one built on mutual respect and trust. Adrian maintains open, honest communication with the Board members, often bonding with them over Teochew *muay* and *orh nee*. He sends them WhatsApp messages regularly to share good news and update them on latest developments in the school. "It's like being in a family, you are excited to share good news and tell them what's happening. So the Board knows what's going on in school, and when we meet, we don't have to spend a lot of time updating one another, and can quickly get down to the agenda at hand."

Another factor for the amicable partnership between the school and the Ngee Ann Kongsi is the Kongsi's respect for the Ministry of Education (MOE). "They have absolute faith and trust in MOE. They trust that MOE has the interest of the students at heart, that they have good people making the decisions, and will send good people to run our school. So they always respect the school's decisions."

## SHAPING BEHAVIOUR BY TRANSFORMING SPACES

A firm believer that attitudes and behaviour can be shaped by the physical environment, Adrian is supportive of his teachers' creative ideas to redesign learning spaces to enhance teaching and learning. With the generous funding from the Ngee Ann Kongsi, Adrian has, over the past five years, turned some of these innovative ideas into reality.

He writes several grant proposals a year to Ngee Ann Kongsi, each requesting a small sum of money to enhance a particular programme or facility. With the additional funds over and above the usual School Management Committee funds, Adrian sets up purpose-built facilities with up-to-date technologies. He talks passionately about giving the students a chance to learn in first-class facilities. "Many of our students, especially those in the Normal Academic and Normal Technical streams, never thought they would ever have lessons in rooms that they may have only heard about in better-known schools. We give them the chance here. We show them that they matter."

Adrian wants his students to approach learning with energy and enthusiasm. For this to happen, the facilities have to be interesting and inviting. Hence, there is a cookery room for Home Economics that resembles a professional kitchen with see-through glass walls where teachers demonstrate techniques from a huge island in the centre of the kitchen. The recently completed Gastro Lab has already inspired many students and teachers to cook, and Adrian has received numerous requests for cooking competitions. "All Secondary 1 and 2 students study Home Economics, and cooking in a nice kitchen is an enjoyable experience. And when they enjoy it, they grow to love it. Even better, it encourages them to cook for their families and they can bond over food."





*Adrian connects with his teachers over staff bonding activities.*



*Ngee Ann Kongsi sponsors an overseas retreat for executive, administrative and support staff once every two years.*



*Adrian constantly reminds the students that because they have received so much, they must be grateful and give back to the community.*



*Adrian also wants to teach his students to show appreciation to the people who have contributed to their growth.*



*Adrian's desire to level up students resonated deeply with Ngee Ann Kongsi's cause of elevating lives through education.*



*The relationship between Adrian and the Board Members is a harmonious one built on mutual respect and trust.*

the school with high human traffic, enabling spectators to see the student artists in action while they in turn draw inspiration from the energy and vibe of the school. His teachers have noticed a transformation in the students' behaviour and attitude towards Art - they are eager to go to the Art Studios after school to work on their pieces, and the quality of their artwork has improved.

The Design & Technology (D&T) room is another product of his teachers' creativity and boldness in redesigning spaces to enhance learning outcomes. The designing and tooling processes which traditionally both take place in the workshop are split up. Students now do the design work in classrooms modelled after professional design studios and equipped with computers and 3-dimensional projectors.

Because Adrian sees the teachers as the brains and muscles behind the redesigning of rooms and learning spaces in Ngee Ann Secondary, they take great ownership of the facilities, using them both regularly and effectively. They are the ones who conceptualise the rooms and work with interior designers and consultants

to ensure that they are purpose-built to achieve desired learning goals. To his delight, Adrian can now say that it is the teachers who breathe character into the spaces, which would otherwise simply be empty shells.

## BUILDING THE HEART OF EDUCATION

Apart from making a mark on the infrastructure, the magnanimous giving of Ngee Ann Kongsi has also touched the lives and nourished the hearts of the beneficiaries.

The funding from Ngee Ann Kongsi has opened up many opportunities for the students, especially those from the Normal Academic and Normal Technical streams. In fact, N(A) and N(T) students receive the most funding per capita in the school. Last year, all the N(T) students were taken to Marina Bay Sands to watch the musical, *The Lion King*. "It was such an eye-opening experience for the students! For most of them, it was the first time they watch a musical in a theatre. And they were transformed. Two of them are now in ITE pursuing a course in sound engineering because of this experience."



*The 'Honour A Teacher' initiative is one of the ways Adrian exhorts his staff and students to raise funds for charity.*

Supporting his teachers' call and commitment to help students discover and develop their talents, Adrian dedicated the most strategic location in the school to Art. With full height glass walls that let in plenty of natural light, the two Art Studios occupy the most central space in



*Students from Ngee Ann Secondary learn about the pioneering spirit of forefathers in Singapore's history at the Ngee Ann Kongsi Heritage Hall.*

In addition, all graduating students also get to attend a dining etiquette course conducted by the Conrad Centennial Hotel. "They learn how to behave properly at the table, how to use the cutlery, even how to eat rice with the back of a fork with the tines facing down!"

The generosity of the Ngee Ann Kongsi has also built the heart of the educators in the school. Every year, the Kongsi gives out bond-free scholarships to teachers to attend a Masters programme offered by the University of Adelaide. "The Kongsi believes in taking care of all the teachers and staff, so that we can take care of the students." Hence, the staff lounge is equipped with a coffee machine and a leg massage device. The Kongsi sponsors the annual combined Ngee Ann Primary and Secondary Schools Teachers' Day dinner every year. In appreciation of the contribution by the executive, administrative and support staff, the Kongsi sponsors an overseas retreat for them once every two years.

### **FREELY RECEIVE, FREELY GIVE**

Having given so much, one wonders: does the Kongsi expect anything in return? Adrian says the Kongsi stresses the importance of providing all students with a holistic education and hopes their support will provide the school with that leverage. "They are truly altruistic in giving. The mandate they gave me was simply 'take care of the students and give them a good education, and we will support in

whatever ways we can.'" The School's Board of Management respects Adrian's authority in leading the school and does not interfere in its operations.

Perhaps the most heartening outcome of this partnership between the school and the Ngee Ann Kongsi is that the school, having received, is inspired to give. No stranger to the receiving of goodness from others, Adrian constantly reminds the students that because they have received so much, they must be grateful and assume the greater responsibility of giving back to the community.

The school conducts fund raising every year, not because it needs to, but because it wants to give. The generous giving by the Ngee Ann Kongsi has awakened in Adrian a deep sense of conviction to pay it forward, just like his Principal exhorted him to, many years ago. The students and staff, having benefitted significantly in ways so tangible, approach giving to charity with joy and readiness. Every year, they raise funds for charity through the President's Challenge.

Even as Adrian instills in his students the value of giving, he also wants to teach them to show appreciation. In collaboration with the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, every student in the school who gives a donation of \$10 and above can nominate a teacher to receive a very special award - that "in honour of their nobility and contribution to the teaching profession", a donation has been made in their name by a grateful

student. Many of the students name their primary school teachers, and respective primary schools present these awards to the teachers on Teachers' Day. Adrian is heartened that many teachers are touched and encouraged as a result.

### **UPLIFTING THE NEXT GENERATION**

At a time when the significance of clan associations is diminishing, the relevance of the Ngee Ann Kongsi continues to flourish through its contribution to education. This inspiring partnership between Ngee Ann Secondary and the Ngee Ann Kongsi through the school's Board of Management bears testament to the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child".

Adrian's personal conviction to open up possibilities for every child to find his place in life is in harmony with the mission of the Ngee Ann Kongsi to give the young a good education. His childhood experiences help him to connect with the cause of the Kongsi, and his own belief and desire of giving back to the community are echoed in its public-spirited philanthropy. Such resonance lays the foundation for great respect and amity between the school and its founding association. And Adrian, with such strong support, is poised to give the students in Ngee Ann Secondary a better edge in life.

Adrian Lim may have grown up with little, but because of that, he now has much to give.



*Wai Lan is inspired by the dynamism and visionary leadership of Mrs Hwang-Lee Poh See, then Principal when Wai Lan was a student in the school.*

# BUILDING UPON THE Legacy of Love

## Tan-Soh Wai Lan

*When Tan-Soh Wai Lan entered CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' School in secondary 1, she did not know music; neither could she play any musical instrument. By the time she was in secondary 3, not only could she play the trombone competently, she was also the drum major, and had performed in the Southeast Asian Games as part of the Combined Schools Band. Her seniors in the band valued her despite her initial lack of musical knowledge, embraced her and coached her. They taught her to be confident and resourceful, and most of all, they role-modelled the spirit of sisterly love, team work and dedication.*



*Wai Lan developed very strong bonds with her friends during her time in St Nicks.*



*Wai Lan (standing in front, with a mace in her hand) was the drum major in the band in Secondary 3 and 4 despite her initial lack of musical knowledge.*

Wai Lan's connection with St Nicholas Girls' School came a full circle when she returned to the school as Principal in 2012, 29 years after she graduated from the school. She was warmly welcomed with a banner, “校友姐姐回家了。我们一起努力!” which when translated into English, reads “Our alumna sister is home. We will work together for progress.”

As the Principal as well as an alumna, Wai Lan is in a unique position to consolidate the longstanding partnership between the school and the alumnae association and parent



support group (PSG). She plays her role as educator and school leader to the staff and students, as well as compatriot to her sisters in the alumnae and partner to the parents with ease and fortitude, effortlessly switching hats between the two and bridging the perspectives of both.

## POISED TO LEAD

Almost 10 years earlier when Wai Lan was just a year into her first principal's posting in Anderson Secondary School, the then president of the St Nicholas Girls' alumnae association broached the subject of her coming to St Nicks as principal. As a young principal then, Wai Lan felt that she was not yet ready. Now, after having completed one tour as principal and served as Deputy Director of National Education and Psychological Services as well as superintendent of an East cluster of schools, Wai Lan feels that the experience and perspectives she brings with her will enable her to contribute even more substantially to the school.

The school has had many capable

leaders in its 80 years of history. The one who made the deepest impression on Wai Lan was her Principal then when she was a student, Mrs Hwang-Lee Poh See. Wai Lan remembers Mrs Hwang as a dynamic and visionary Principal. She counts it a "real honour" to follow in Mrs Hwang's footsteps, and admits that she has big shoes to fill. However, she believes that she can still contribute significantly. "I guess with age, and hopefully more wisdom, I'm more centred and comfortable in my own skin. I know what I stand for, and I lead who I am."

In that way, Wai Lan brings her own character into her role as Principal of St Nicholas Girls' School. She focuses on doing what is good for the girls, and not on what she wants others to think of her. She shares several instances of how, while she respects the advice of well-meaning members of the St Nicholas family, she is clear that her own personality would guide the way she interacts with people. For example, when Wai Lan was first appointed, some suggested that she address her students as 宝贝 (precious ones), as Mrs Hwang

did. Mrs Cheong Wan Mui, her Vice Principal then (now retired) when she was a student, and who was also an alumna, advised her to "learn to hug the girls", and promptly gathered a few in front of Wai Lan for initiation into the practice. Wai Lan graciously obliged, but the episode triggered a deep reflection of her own leadership style.

Aware of her own temperament and strengths, Wai Lan relates to students in her own way. She encourages them in her capacity as big sister and shares her own experiences to instill values. Her weekly sharing at Family Time and the inspirational stories and videos she has shown to the girls are starting to bear fruit. Recently, an old girl who is actively serving in the school affirmed her approach and her influence on the girls. "She said I should not worry about having to fill big shoes for I have my own. She sees me bringing a different dimension to the ideal of the St Nicholas girl, one that strives for excellence, who dares to lead, who is at the forefront of changes. This dimension complements the celebrated ideal of the St Nicholas girl



*Wai Lan returned to head St Nicholas Girls' School 29 years after she graduated from the school.*



*Wai Lan's own personality guides the way she relates to her students.*



*Wai Lan credits her seniors for role-modelling the spirit of sisterly love, team work and dedication.*



*The Parents Support Group works in synergy with the school to provide a good quality education for the girls.*



as an obedient daughter and virtuous woman.”

An avid reader, Wai Lan, who confesses that she has visited almost all the public libraries in Singapore, says reading causes her to reflect upon her own thoughts and actions. As she reflects upon how she engages with her stakeholders, the book, *The Four Agreements: The Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* by Don Miguel Ruiz comes to her mind. She feels that the four guiding principles outlined by Miguel in his book put into words what she has been trying to put into practice - speaking with integrity and saying what you mean; not taking what others say personally and not being too hard on yourself; not making assumptions but communicating clearly; and always giving your best in every moment, even as your best may be different from moment to moment.

## ANCHORED IN VALUES

Wai Lan credits St Nicks for imbibing in her the values of 姐妹同心 (sisterly love) and 饮水思源 (remembering the source, showing gratitude). She remembers that

in all aspects of school life, successes were attributed to everyone who had invested time and effort, no matter how much or little. She recalls with great fondness her time in the St Nicks band plotting formations on graph paper and teaching themselves mass display, the 周会 (weekly assembly) where classes took turns to perform a theme on good character or value for the whole school, and the camps in Sentosa and St John's Island. Even though three of her four years in secondary school were spent in various holding schools while a suitable venue was being sourced to replace the old campus on Victoria Street, Wai Lan developed very strong bonds with her friends and a deep sense of belonging to the school. “It is really not about the building, it is about the people that we are with.”

Hence, now as Principal, she is resolute about continuing the strong school spirit and the values of 姐妹同心 and 饮水思源. She wants to partner the alumnae and the parents to sustain the culture and environment for these values to flourish.

Indeed, the hallmark of St Nicks’

partnership with her alumnae and parents is this: the symbiosis is anchored in values and driven by the desire to serve. Throughout their school years, the girls in CHIJ St Nicholas Girls’ School are immersed in a culture that espouses and expresses the values of sisterly love, gratitude and service, in tangible ways that make a difference to their lives. As these values become internalised, they eventually find meaningful expression through service to the school.

Many of the alumnae who return to contribute to the school either have sons but not daughters or are unmarried. “They come back not for personal gain, but to continue their relationship with the community they call family, and to be good role models to their 妹妹们 (all their younger sisters).” When they have daughters of their own, they become members of the PSG too. In this way, their relationship with the school continues to deepen, and the virtuous circle of serving continues for the generations of girls who come through the gates of St Nicks.

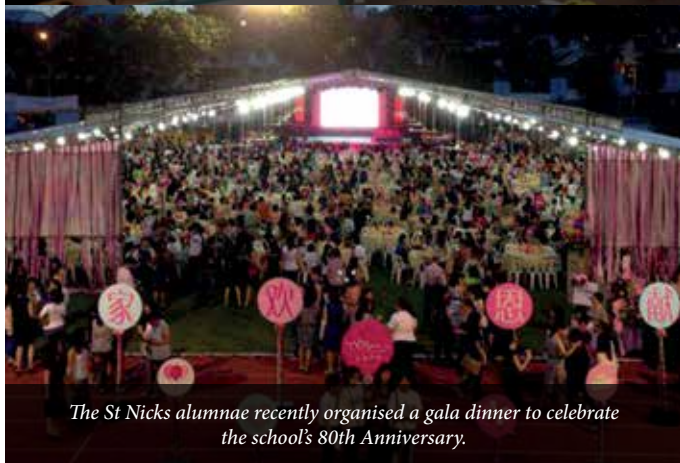
That is why there is such great synergy and giving. This is also why,



*The parents are actively involved in many aspects of school life, including the Family Fiesta in August 2013.*



*Wai Lan sees herself as the bridge between the alumnae and PSG, and the school.*



*The St Nicks alumnae recently organised a gala dinner to celebrate the school's 80th Anniversary.*



*Wai Lan with the school's alumnae, parents, students and former Principals, celebrating the close-knit ties of the St Nicholas family.*



*Wai Lan enjoys exercising, chatting over meals and visiting libraries and bookshops with her family.*



*Wai Lan is grateful to St Nicks for imbibing in her the values of sisterly love and showing gratitude.*

Wai Lan maintains, the partnership will continue regardless of whether or not the Principal is an alumna. The heartware and hardware are already in place for this partnership to endure and to abound.

### **BRIDGING GAPS, CONNECTING HEARTS**

Even as Wai Lan welcomes the support and suggestions from the alumnae and PSG, she is also constantly mindful and keenly aware of the voice of her teachers.

The mother of three girls sees herself as the bridge between the alumnae and PSG, and the school, facilitating mutual understanding and aligning efforts to achieve common outcomes. Many school leaders play this role in the partnership between the school and stakeholders, but what is most refreshing here is how Wai Lan plays it so naturally and joyfully. "It's like a natural extension of the family - the old girls and parents are part of our everyday life. I don't feel pressurised by them or that this is extra work." It is never a chore to engage with the alumnae and parents. She embraces it just like she embraces connecting with family.

While she admits that she is blessed to inherit a strong partnership with the alumnae and PSG, Wai Lan also acknowledges that there are many

complexities and challenges. The relationships between the school and the alumnae and PSG are intertwined - many of the old girls are parents, aunts or sisters of the students, and some of the teachers are old girls and/or parents. "Everyone has a different expectation and preconceived notion of what school is and should be like. So there is a constant need for communication and understanding."

Yet, Wai Lan is somehow able to interface seamlessly amongst the alumnae, the PSG, and her teachers. Her disposition seems to facilitate this. Peace-loving by nature, Wai Lan is sensitive to and respectful of different viewpoints and interests. She says it is also what St Nicks has taught her: "Loving and giving is part of our DNA." Perhaps, this is why, despite having to constantly balance the expectations and concerns of both her staff, the alumnae and parents, Wai Lan feels no annoyance nor mental fatigue.

### **NURTURING GIRLS OF GRACE, WOMEN OF STRENGTH, LEADERS WITH HEART**

Besides the many fond memories, St Nicholas Girls' has left an indelible mark on Wai Lan's character and calibre, one that she carries with pride as she leads the school into a new chapter in its history. She does

not want to stop at preserving the school's rich culture and heritage; she wants to position it to resonate with the 21st century.

She initiated a visioning exercise in 2012, and invited all members of the St Nicks community to envision a future for the school that they could all be proud of. She felt that it was time for the school to build upon its cherished core values to seek new aspirations and to scale greater heights. The resulting vision is one that echoes the hope and confidence of the St Nicks family: Girls of Grace · Women of Strength · Leaders with Heart (娴雅少女 · 坚毅巾帼 · 仁爱领袖).

As Wai Lan works to give the girls a quality education, the alumnae and PSG continue to enrich the St Nicholas experience with an invaluable social capital. She hopes that they will be the "voice of reason, of wisdom and balance", helping the school to stay grounded while opening up possibilities, lending moral support when change takes time to see fruition.

In this season of her service in education, Wai Lan has been placed in CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' School. With her pedigree and personality, she is well-placed to be the pillar and pilot of the school's flight to new heights.



*Chor Pang believes that it is a privilege, not a right, to be in a position to influence a person and shape his mindset and perspectives.*



# SOWING SEEDS OF Change

*Tan Chor Pang*

***Tan Chor Pang is a man on a mission. As the Principal of Millennia Institute (MI) for the past eight years, Chor Pang's mission is to help the MI students discover their aspirations and realise their potential. His strategy is simple yet timeless: first awaken students to where they want to be and what they want to do in life, then work with them to see how they can get there.***

The seeds to Chor Pang's mission today were sown many years ago, soon after his GCE O Level examinations. "I decided then that what I really wanted to do was to teach. So I chose to study Mathematics." Over the past 29 years in the education service, Chor Pang has served as Mathematics teacher, Head of Department and Vice-Principal. He was Principal of Pioneer Secondary School before coming to head MI. And true to his mission, over the years, he has been a significant force in transforming lives and changing destinies.

## **A PURPOSE-DRIVEN APPROACH**

Through his encounters with the students in the schools he has served in as well as his experience working with youths in his church, Chor Pang

recognises that young people need to have a goal to work towards. Keenly aware that their behaviour and choices are influenced by their conviction, he wants to help his students discover their bearings in life so that they can direct their attention and energies towards their goals and aspirations.

And so, Chor Pang's approach to education in MI is clearly purpose-driven. While important, the A Levels are really just a means to an end. The students must first know what they want to achieve before they can be convinced of the need to study. Hence, all Pre-U 1 students spend the first week of school discovering their personal inclinations and career aspirations before choosing their courses. Using profiling and action-planning tools such as M.A.P., the

teachers help students to identify job types and industries that complement their strengths and personality. They then guide the students to choose subject combinations that will help to prepare them for their career choices, while continuing to monitor them closely, and guiding them to review their plans on a semestral basis.

Accepting students with L1R4 scores (the criterion for admission to a 3-year pre-university course in Singapore) of up to 20 which can include the CCA grade, the students in MI generally have a weaker foundation compared to their peers in the Junior Colleges. Having an additional year to prepare the students for the A Level examinations also makes Chor Pang more determined to add more value to the students' experience in MI. He



*Chor Pang decided soon after his GCE O Level examinations that what he really wanted to do was to teach.*



*Chor Pang enjoys relating to young people, and has an intuitive ability to push them to the tipping point to effect a positive change.*



*Pictured here with the top students in MI in 2010, Chor Pang believes in first helping students discover their aspirations in life, and then guiding them to achieve their goals.*



*Chor Pang has established an extensive school-industry network to provide authentic platforms for students to exercise their knowledge and skills.*

sees his students not just receiving an education in MI, but more importantly, growing in capacity and competency to be successful in life.

To enlarge the educational space to achieve these outcomes, Chor Pang develops partnerships with the industry, the community and overseas schools to inject a sense of realism in learning, and to foster 21st century skills.

## CREATING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Because Chor Pang is clear that he is not just preparing his students for examinations, but preparing them for life, he believes that it is important to connect them to the real world, so that what they learn in school is meaningful and relevant to them in real life. "The space for schooling is quite borderless. We tap on the industry, the community and overseas schools because these partnerships create additional space to educate the child." Through these partnerships, Chor Pang hopes to provide authentic platforms for students to exercise their knowledge and skills.

MI's partnership with the industry supports the school's Innovation and Enterprise (I&E) initiatives, and creates avenues for students to think and work in real life settings. The school works with the Housing & Development Board (HDB) to enable 150 science course students to take part in the Cool Ideas for Living Design Competition where they create products to enhance living spaces. Chor Pang's rationale is: "We give them the real world to innovate. Students must know that their creative ideas can become a reality and can actually benefit someone."

Partners such as Junior Achievement (JA) give MI students a chance to be equipped with knowledge of personal finance as well as entrepreneurial skills. Jurong Point Shopping Mall provides valuable retail spaces for the students in the business and arts courses to actualise their business proposals, and put into practice what they have learnt about conducting market surveys, writing business proposals, and maintaining proper accounting records.

Chor Pang has, over the years, established an extensive school-industry network to enable his students to gain exposure to the workplace. He works with several industry partners including the Jumbo Group of restaurants, the Jay Gee Melwani Group, Jurong Healthcare, and the Ministry of Education Gifted Education Branch to provide work attachment opportunities for MI students. To ensure that specific educational objectives are met, he secures these partners' commitment to teach the students specific work skills during their attachment. MI's partnerships with St Luke's Hospital, SLP Real Estate Empire and the Singapore Press Holdings also provide the students with career mentoring support.

## CONNECTING STUDENTS TO THE WORLD

As Chor Pang shares his vision and plans for MI to become an institution with a business focus, it becomes even clearer that he has big plans for his students - plans to enable them to be internationally connected, culturally aware and socially adept



to thrive in the real world. To this end, Chor Pang has, over the past eight years in MI, built up an extensive network of overseas educational partners who host MI students in homestay programmes.

While overseas exchange programmes are gaining traction in many schools today, what is distinctive about MI's partnership with overseas schools is the breadth and depth of its involvement. Counting 21 schools in 16 countries in its network, the MI.World programme typically begins with IT-mediated collaborative projects between MI students and their foreign counterparts before culminating in a bilateral homestay experience. Before the trip, MI students learn basic greetings and conversational words in the language of the country they are visiting. During the visit, they log their reflections daily, and discuss their learning with their teachers often.

To consolidate ties with the overseas partner schools, Chor Pang organises the biennial MI.World International Conference (in 2010, and again this year). Over ten days, 10-12 overseas school partners gather in MI – the students participate in a homestay and school immersion programme while the educators exchange pedagogies and school practices. In addition, the participants attend an adventure day-camp, enjoy cultural and institutional learning journeys, and as part of the commemoration of International Friendship Day, put up exhibitions and share about their respective schools and countries.

Besides working with local community partners such as the South West Community Development Council, the National Environment Agency and various voluntary welfare organisations, Chor Pang has also spearheaded efforts to help regional communities in Chiangmai and Batam in the last three years. This year alone, more than 200 students have carried out infrastructural improvements to homes and community facilities, and contributed to feeding programmes and teaching of the English Language in slums, orphanages and schools in Batam.

## TAKING PRIDE IN CHANGING DESTINY

Even as Chor Pang is educating our young in the schools, he has also served in his church as a Sunday School teacher to children and youths, sat on the board of a childcare centre and volunteered in community work in the course of the last 20 years. The father of two girls, aged 17 and 19 years, admits to having “a great inclination towards relating to young people”. His personal philosophy is to “contribute to somebody's growth” in whatever place or position he serves in. To Chor Pang, it is a privilege, not a right, to be in a position to influence a person and shape his mindset and perspectives.

So what results have his efforts yielded so far? Chor Pang is keenly aware of how hard it is to measure the results of positive changes in students. He acknowledges, for instance, that the success of the approach of helping students discover their career aspirations before choosing their courses is dependent on how seriously they take the entire exercise. And while he knows that his teachers



*Chor Pang establishes partnerships with overseas schools to expose his students to diverse cultures through homestay programmes and cultural exchanges.*



*Counting 21 schools in 16 countries in its network, the MI.World Programme prepares MI students to be culturally aware and socially adept to thrive in the real world.*



*Chor Pang hosts his overseas educational partners biennially in MI – the students participate in a homestay and school immersion programme while the educators exchange pedagogies and school practices.*



*Chor Pang paves the way for MI students to help regional communities in Chiangmai and Batam through infrastructural, educational and social programmes.*



*Chor Pang inspires his teachers to take pride in helping students change their destinies and take comfort in every story of positive change.*

believe that this approach is sensible, he is also aware that they struggle with not being able to clearly measure the benefits it brings. So besides the usual KPIs for school programmes, Chor Pang gives his teachers a very clear mandate: "Take pride in helping our students change their destinies. And take comfort in every story of positive change. This may be hard to quantify, but no less worthy."

But what of preparing the students for the A Level examinations? Wouldn't they benefit from more time spent on academic coaching and revision? Chor Pang is very clear that the rigour of the academic curriculum must never be compromised - the partnerships with the industry and overseas schools complement MI's core curriculum, and give it meaningful context. And more importantly, they open up possibilities and options for MI students.

Judging by the stories that have emerged, Chor Pang must be doing the right thing for students. He shares many stories, one of which involves two brothers who rose above their circumstances to achieve good A Level results. The younger brother, in particular, quit his involvement in gangs, took the O Level examinations as a private candidate with the aim of joining his elder brother in MI, did well and was offered a statutory board scholarship and a place to study overseas. He declined both to read Law in the Singapore Management

University, where his elder brother is currently studying Business Management.

These stories affirm the work of Chor Pang and his teachers, and to them, are more fulfilling and precious than accolades. Certainly, Chor Pang has had his share of disappointments and heartaches, and has had to ask students to leave the school. But for every student who remains untouched, many more have shared that they value their experience in MI. One student who repeated Pre-U 2 and had to leave after failing a second time admitted that coming to MI was the best thing that had happened to him - he only blamed himself for not working hard enough.

### **TILLING THE SOIL, SOWING THE SEED**

As seeds must first be sown before the harvest can be reaped, Chor Pang ploughs the ground himself to ready the soil. "I don't believe I'm in a place for just a moment. In every school I go to, I invest time and energy to make sure that the processes we put in place will endure. Especially in areas that are new and where the teachers have greater discomfort, I will personally get involved." His students used to be surprised when Chor Pang got his hands dirty (literally!) mixing paint for their house-painting project in Batam. Now they are used to it, and the teachers feel assured and empowered

knowing that their Principal is with them in body and spirit.

Sowing seeds can sometimes bring surprising harvest. Chor Pang's voice swells with tenderness and pride as he talks about a particular student with an issue of violence in Pioneer Secondary when he was Principal there. Despite all the care, counselling and even canings that Chor Pang gave to him, he remained unchanged. On Chor Pang's last day in school before he took up the posting to MI, this student came to him crying, apologising and promising he would change. When Chor Pang checked with his ex-colleagues the following year, this boy was a class monitor and doing well. What a turn around when the time was ripe!

It takes not just courage, but a deep faith in the value of human life to want to make a difference in the lives of people. Chor Pang feels drawn towards young people and intuitively, he is able to push them to the tipping point to effect a positive change.

Borrowing the words of American historian, Henry Adams, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops", Chor Pang has, over the past nearly three decades of service to education, touched countless young lives.

And clearly, his influence continues today.







# BUILDING AN Inclusive Community

*Kuerk Heng believes in nurturing children to use their intelligence, ability and personality to benefit the community.*

*Yeo Kuerk Heng*

***An avid player of International Chess, Yeo Kuerk Heng knows the importance of making strategic and decisive moves in order to win a game. He credits this hobby for enhancing his capacity in predicting outcomes, assessing situations and designing effective strategies to give himself the best possible chances of success.***

The beauty of chess playing, as Kuerk Heng shares, is in having a good chess partner. “Every time my partner adopts a new strategy, it prompts me to change my strategy in order to stay ahead.” To Kuerk Heng, a chess partner is not just an opponent, but a partner in growth – both parties spur each other on to be better, quicker, more effective.

Hence, when Kuerk Heng took over as Principal of Chong Boon Secondary School in 2011 and inherited the partnership with Pathlight School, he embraced it whole-heartedly. He saw Pathlight not only as a strategic partner, but also a friend. He shares Pathlight’s mission of wanting to maximise the potential of each child,

and he empathises with its cause of giving its students a chance to lead independent and meaningful lives. Kuerk Heng also recognises that, while supporting Pathlight to educate its students, Chong Boon would ultimately receive more than it gives.

## **TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE INCLUSIVE**

Kuerk Heng began his teaching career as a Chinese Language teacher in Tanjong Katong Secondary School. Over the past 30 years in education, he has served as Head of Department for Mother Tongue Languages in Tanjong Katong Secondary; Vice Principal in Chung Cheng High (Main) and Siglap Secondary School;

and Principal in Nan Chiau High and Serangoon Secondary before coming to Chong Boon Secondary.

Kuerk Heng’s views on education have been immensely influenced by Confucian teachings. His belief that all students, regardless of background and circumstances, must be taught to accept differences and given an equal chance to succeed, is shaped by how Confucius advocated “educating all despite their social status” (有教无类). And just as Confucius espoused the ideal of educating a child to be a “true gentleman” (君子), Kuerk Heng believes in nurturing children to “use their intelligence, ability and personality to benefit the community”.



The father of two sons, aged 22 and 24 years, teaches his own children this: “Don’t do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you” (己所不欲, 勿施于人). He instills in them the importance of accepting and respecting people who may be different from them.

In a fast-paced society, Kuerk Heng sees an increasing need to teach students to guard against becoming so self-centred that they are blind to the needs of others. On a visit to a school in the United States of America in 2001, Kuerk Heng saw a special needs student in a mainstream classroom playing happily with his classmates. The child’s disability did not stop him from connecting with his peers, and his classmates did not treat him any differently – they truly enjoyed his company. This incident left a deep impression on Kuerk Heng, and reinforced his desire and commitment to support children with special educational needs, so that they get an equal chance in life. It also fueled his conviction to create opportunities for his students to make friends with people from different backgrounds, with different needs, so that they grow up to be caring citizens.

### A PRICELESS PARTNERSHIP

Chong Boon’s collaboration with Pathlight School was established in 2005 by Kuerk Heng’s predecessor, Mrs Saraspathy Menon, who wanted to foster a school culture that embraces diversity. The Chong Boon-Pathlight partnership is guided by a holistic framework which integrates four domains of school life: physical, social, academic and professional.

As the first satellite campus for Pathlight students, Chong Boon houses Secondary 3, 4 and 5 Pathlighters attending daily lessons in mainstream subjects with curriculum taught by Pathlight teachers. Selected Pathlight students join their Chong Boon counterparts in mainstream classrooms for



*Kuerk Heng credits chess playing for helping him to develop the ability to adapt to situations and make strategic decisions.*



*Kuerk Heng believes that in supporting Pathlight’s educational goals, Chong Boon’s teachers and students would ultimately receive more than they give.*



*Kuerk Heng’s views on education have been immensely influenced by Confucian teachings. He teaches his two sons to accept and respect diversity in people’s circumstances and abilities.*



*Kuerk Heng believes that teachers must teach students to accept differences and give every child an equal chance to succeed.*



Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics lessons, accompanied by Allied Educators (AEDs) who are on hand to lend additional support when needed.

Pathlight students also use the Science Labs and sports facilities in Chong Boon's campus, participate in joint recess periods with Chong Boon students, and take part in the school's activities such as Racial Harmony Day, Speech Day and Cross-Country Runs.

Through exposure to their peers in a mainstream school environment, the Pathlight students learn to integrate into society and function independently. And while the Pathlighters benefit from the greater exposure, they too enhance the quality of learning in the classroom for Chong Boon students. The Chong Boon teachers observed that the nine Pathlight students in the mainstream classes are "very focussed, hardworking, and they ask intelligent questions". They add value to the Chong Boon students' learning, and inspire them to also work hard.

To ensure that students from both schools benefit meaningfully by design, Kuerk Heng works very closely with Pathlight's school leaders at the strategic and systemic levels. He and his key personnel meet with their counterparts from Pathlight three times a year to plan and review the avenues for collaboration in their school programmes. This helps both schools to better deploy and coordinate resources for their respective programmes. More importantly, these meeting platforms promote joint ownership of plans and foster greater appreciation of the considerations and constraints faced by each party. This year, both schools appointed an AED each to serve as liaison officer, to "better monitor their collaboration, provide immediate support and address requests and concerns quickly".

Kuerk Heng is also taking steps to deepen the physical, social and academic integration of Pathlight students into his school. For instance, while Pathlighters used to be spectators at Chong Boon's annual Speech Day, they now put up a joint band performance with Chong Boon students at the event. He is heartened that the students are benefitting from these efforts - one Pathlight student wrote a letter to Kuerk Heng, sharing what he had learnt from the process of helping one another to improve in order to put up a good performance, and thanking Kuerk Heng for the opportunity to perform alongside the Chong Boon students. What Kuerk Heng thought was a simple gesture turned out to make a difference for a student!

### **COMMON GOALS, MUTUAL BENEFITS**

To Kuerk Heng, the most heartening outcome from this unique partnership is the changed mindsets of his students and teachers. "Our students feel that the Pathlighters have enriched their lives. They recognise that children with autism have unique strengths. Some of our students even have very good friends who are from Pathlight!"

Kuerk Heng is encouraged by the results of a survey administered by the Ministry of Education in 2009 which revealed that students in Chong Boon Secondary see their peers in Pathlight School as equal. To him, this not only shows that his students accept the Pathlight students as part of their school life, but also that they embrace diversity. "This is what we hope our students will become - gracious citizens who accept people who are different from them, who can relate to these people, and live and work together with them. This is what an inclusive society is."

Besides the students, the partnership with Pathlight has also made a difference to the teachers. "Our

teachers have grown professionally, and I think they have also grown in humanity and humility." Through joint workshops and sharing sessions with teachers from Pathlight, Chong Boon teachers learn advanced skills in teaching students with special educational needs while at the same time, sharpening their techniques in differentiated learning. As they share pedagogies and lesson ideas with their counterparts from Pathlight during the weekly one-hour Professional Protected Time and on Chong Boon Ideas Day (an annual platform to exchange best practices in teaching and learning), they also learn to be resourceful, adaptable and sensitive towards different learning needs.

The Pathlights teachers in turn gain valuable exposure to the mainstream curriculum and take away useful teaching strategies. By joining the Chong Boon teachers in various teacher training activities, they are kept abreast of changes in curriculum and assessments, and are able to improve their subject content knowledge and pedagogy.

The high level of collegiality between the staff from both schools have brought about greater professionalism and job satisfaction. Both groups of staff are enriched by each other's strengths and expertise, and this has broadened their perspectives on education and enhanced their capacity in engaging a wider group of students with different needs.

### **BRINGING THE HEART INTO THE PARTNERSHIP**

It is apparent that the success of the Chong Boon-Pathlight partnership lies in the mutual respect, empathy and consideration exhibited by both partners.

Kuerk Heng has a high regard for Pathlight and is very considerate towards their needs. As he talks about the partnership with Pathlight

School, phrases such as “we need to think about the Pathlighters”, and “we must inform Pathlight in advance” keep coming up. This role-modelling has influenced the Chong Boon teachers to always keep the Pathlighters in mind. “We are very conscious of our friends in Pathlight. We are always thinking about how to include and facilitate Pathlight’s involvement in our activities.”

But doesn’t sharing physical, academic and professional resources put additional stress on the Chong Boon teachers? Surely they need to put in more time and effort to coordinate programmes and balance competing demands?

Kuerk Heng’s reply reveals what is perhaps the key ingredient to preserving and uplifting this partnership. “Sometimes when we make decisions, we don’t just use our head; we must use our heart. Since we know this can really make a difference to the Pathlight students, we must then try to work things out.” It is this spirit of “always keeping an eye on what will benefit the students” and “always looking for ways to resolve issues” that characterises Kuerk Heng’s approach to sustaining the partnership with Pathlight. It becomes clear that this generosity of heart is energising the longstanding friendship between the two schools.

An instance that shows the extent to which Kuerk Heng would go to support Pathlight involves the sharing of the Science Labs. Kuerk Heng admits that the decision to open up the Science Labs for use by Pathlight students during school term did not come easy. “Pathlight students are already using our Science Labs for their exams at the end of the year, and it will help them a lot if they can also use them during school term. So we didn’t say no immediately. Instead, we studied it carefully and found that we could actually work things out.”



*Kuerk Heng works closely with the leaders in Pathlight to ensure that students from both schools benefit meaningfully from the collaboration.*



*To Kuerk Heng, Pathlight School is not just a partner but also a friend in maximising the potential of each child and building an inclusive society.*



*Kuerk Heng is heartened that his students recognise the unique strengths of Pathlight students and see them as equals.*



*Kuerk Heng is proud of his teachers’ empathy with Pathlight and their desire to support Pathlight students to the best of their ability.*



Since Chong Boon students mostly used the Science Labs for lessons in the morning, Pathlight students could use the labs in the afternoons. This, and other instances of how Kuerk Heng is always open to finding a win-win solution go a long way towards fostering strong bonds and trust between the two schools.

## EMBRACING AND CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

A truly collegial partnership goes beyond reciprocating what each party has to offer; it humbly embraces and joyfully celebrates what each party brings to the table. Both Chong Boon Secondary and Pathlight School do not just recognise the mutual benefits each receives from their collaboration - they genuinely and sincerely value their friendship and think that they are better because of it. There is great humility on the part of Chong Boon as it share its resources with Pathlight, because the school leaders, teachers and students are keenly aware that they have so much to learn from the Pathlight community.

In a bid to teach students about embracing diversity and accepting differences, Kuerk Heng and his teachers have created an environment that embodies and celebrates respect and consideration towards fellow Singaporeans with special needs. Through the modelling by school leaders and teachers, Chong Boon students are immersed in a culture of diversity and acceptance daily.

Because of the enlightened leadership of Kuerk Heng and his predecessor, Saraspathy Menon, the educational space and social experience of the students from both Chong Boon Secondary and Pathlight School have been enriched. And these young men and women are one step closer to holding their own in society.



*Kuerk Heng has witnessed the positive outcomes of a nurturing approach to motivating students.*



*Chong Boon teachers are enriched professionally and personally by the collaboration with Pathlight.*



*Kuerk Heng believes in helping students build confidence to forge ahead in the face of challenges.*



*Kuerk Heng motivates his teachers to deepen the school's collaboration with Pathlight.*





1

## Living the Spirit of Giving

*Adrian Lim*



5

## Building Upon the Legacy of Love

*Tan-Soh Wai Lan*



9

## Sowing Seeds of Change

*Tan Chor Pang*



13

## Building an Inclusive Community

*Yeo Kuerk Heng*

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