

**TEACHING BEYOND THE ACADEMICS**  
*Mdm Tan Mei San, Chongzheng Primary School*

*"Ibu is coming!"*

*"Yes, Mummy..."*

*"Okay, Mama!"*

These are responses not from my own children but from my current students. The same phrases were also uttered by the students before them.

I believe that my students address me as such as I have been actively engaging their 'heads, hearts and hands'. Just like their caring mothers, I constantly encourage and remind them to do the right things.

**'Engaging every leader's heart and mind to create a better future for Singapore'**

'Engaging every leader's heart and mind to create a better future for Singapore' is my current personal teaching philosophy. I believe that every child can learn and do his or her part to contribute to the community. However, before a child can learn and serve the community, it is important to ensure that the student's well-being is taken care of.

A student, \*Andy, reported to class on the first day of school looking sleepy and disengaged. His torn schoolbag contained only a pencil case and a notebook. Having being informed by the school counsellor of his high rate of absenteeism since he was in Primary Four, I decided to find out more about his family background and spoke with him on the second day of school. After discovering that he needed financial assistance, immediate arrangements were made for him to be placed under the school financial assistance scheme. I also gave him a new school bag and told him that I looked forward to seeing him in school every day. Since then, he has been attending school daily and also participates actively in class discussions.

Another boy, \*Kelvin, was an independent learner. However, he lacked confidence communicating in English. In my interactions with him, I discovered that he was creative in nature and was able to come up with innovative solutions to problems. To tap on his strengths, I gave him opportunities to present his innovative ideas at competitions and exhibitions. In one of the assignments entrusted to him, he managed to rally the support of parents, entrepreneurs and external organisations to contribute to the community. He was also eventually appointed as a student mentor to his peers. At the end of the year, it was a touching moment for me to witness him delivering his thank you and farewell speech confidently to his teachers and fellow schoolmates on stage.

**"The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows" by Sydney J. Harries**

To help students develop 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and to be leaders in this 'VUCA' (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment, there is a constant need to collaborate with fellow educators and work in partnership with stakeholders and external organisations. Personally, I am very inspired by Sydney J. Harries, a journalist who wrote: *"The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows."*

Though my students are primary school students, I strongly believe that they are able to be confident and adaptable leaders capable of embracing the spirit of continuous progress and

excellence. At the same time, we must instil in them the passion for learning and civic responsibility of caring for the disadvantaged in the community. All these can be achieved if primary school teachers lay a strong leadership foundation in their students.

### **Donating food from the heart**

To create opportunities for students to reach out to the community and to integrate sustainable school projects into the school curriculum, I initiated the 'Food from the Heart' food donation drive in 2007. In 2008, this project was led by the Scouts and Infocomm Club members, who produced a video clip to rally the support of the school community. Eight years after its launch, this meaningful project is still carried out annually by the uniformed groups and student leaders. Every year, teachers also participate in this project by going to the food distribution centre to distribute the donated food to the residents!



**'Food from the Heart' donation drive held in school**

### **Packing and distribution of the donated food to the needy by staff and their children**



## Creating the Green Wave

Since 2010, the school has been celebrating the International Day for Biodiversity on 22 May. On this commemorative green day which I initiated four years ago, the school celebrates the arrival of a new 'family member' – an endangered native species tree. In the morning of that day every year, staff, parent volunteers and students gather at the school eco-garden to water the newly-planted tree, thereby joining other schools and organisations in the world to create the 'Green Wave'. Thereafter, the school community is engaged in various green activities such as planting purple sugar canes, harvesting colourful corns, visiting exhibition booths at the school foyer to view the 'Young Scientist' cards and other environment-related projects. We also shared our tree-planting photographs on the NParks' Facebook page.

A warm  
welcome to our  
new  
Chongzheng  
family member,  
the Tampines  
tree 😊



Teachers and pupils witnessing the planting and watering tree ceremony

Colourful Corn Harvesting with our school  
principal during Green Wave Day! 😊



Our Green Wave Campaign Activities



## Inspiring everyone to be innovative thinkers, gracious leaders and engaged citizens – fulfilling the school's vision

'An innovative thinker, a gracious leader, an engaged citizen' is my school vision that is closely aligned to my personal teaching vision. Learning should go beyond the academics as I firmly believe in developing students who are self-directed, independent and socially-adept individuals.

Setting up the InnoClub together with like-minded colleagues was the first step to realising this vision. Designing structured training customised to students' learning needs and partnering with various external organisations to provide platforms for students to display their innovative works, teachers develop students into risk-takers who are always challenge-ready and able to deploy strategies they have learnt in real-life situations.

Successfully setting up the 'i-CARE' social enterprise in school and earning a profit to contribute to both the less fortunate in the school's community and the 'Values-In-Action' partnering school is an example of how students in the InnoClub have overcome real-life challenges while at the same time contributing to the community. Though it was a challenge to facilitate the process without any prior business management knowledge, this venture was an enriching one for me.

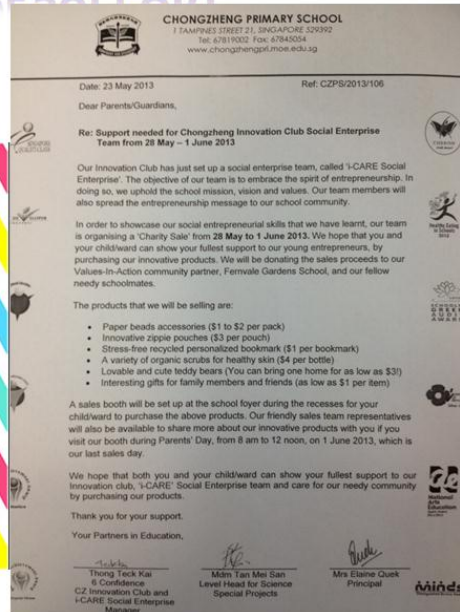
## SETTING UP THE 'I-CARE' SOCIAL ENTERPRISE BOOTH AT TOA PAYOH HUB



# 'I-CARE' SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SCHOOL PUBLICITY TO GAIN SCHOOL SUPPORT



Advertisement posters put up around the school for staff and schoolmates



Letter for parents to engage their support

Another heart-warming community problem-solving project that a group of my students embarked on was the 'Stop Animal Abuse' project. Apart from inviting a volunteer from the Cats Welfare Society to deliver an assembly talk to the school on care and respect for animals, the students also managed to get the support from the AVA to sponsor resources to raise awareness on animal abuse. The students rallied the support of their peers to plan and deliver lessons about love and care for pets. This group of students delivered the planned lessons when they did their work attachment at kindergartens after their PSLE. I was touched when one of my students shared her work attachment reflection with me, "Now, I know what it means to be a teacher. It is not just about putting in the heart to plan a good lesson for the class. It is about caring for the children and teaching them to care for others too."

## Outreach by our P6 seniors during their post PSLE work attachment at kindergartens after they learnt about our Project J.A.V.A. (Justice for Animals, Voices for Animals)



Without an education, a person's opportunities in life can be limited. However, if educators collaborate to open more doors of opportunities for students, these students will learn and be empowered to turn mirrors into infinite windows of opportunities and possibilities for themselves and others in the future. This, I feel, is what teaching is all about.

*\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the student.*