

AN OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE BACK

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My parents have always emphasised the importance of education—my father completed his schooling in Secondary Two and my mother decided to start working after Secondary Four. When I made it to university, my starting salary was about twice the combined salaries of my parents at any point in their lives.

As a trainee teacher, I have met students of a similar background to mine. Meeting them made me to reflect on my own life and I realised that I had benefitted from an educational system that offers the opportunity for each generation to do better than the previous generation. Our educational system does not discriminate against students according to where they stay and the type of families they were born into. Education can effect positive changes in students' lives and hence lead to societal and national progress. Having been a beneficiary of the system, I resolved then as a practicum teacher that I should make it my personal mission to give back to the system.

Teaching is not just a career for me, but a personal way to express my gratitude to a system that has benefitted my family and me.

More than Words

My empathy for breast cancer patients has definitely grown. I think that often people see cancer patients as sad and weak people but they overlook the fact that they are human too. They have the ability to be cheerful and they are just like every one of us. Upon meeting one of the volunteers, I had no idea that she was a survivor of breast cancer as she seemed just like every other person.

Carol Yeo
Gap Week Organisation:
Breast Cancer Foundation

The need to give back to society and the nation is also an impetus which I seek to inculcate in my students. I initiated the Gap Week programme in my school, which allowed students to be out of school for one week and volunteer at social organisations of their choice (e.g. Breast Cancer Foundation, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society). Initially, I was concerned that the students would find the programme a chore. Responses would be at best, lukewarm. After all, they are the "Strawberry Generation".

I was pleasantly surprised by the strong personal voice in many of the students' proposals. It gave me faith and reason to believe that they are not necessarily "soft" and "individualistic", which is how their generation is portrayed. By and large, they are interested in societal issues. What they needed was a platform to engage them deeper in these issues.

I was also happily proven wrong when I read some of their proposals on what they would like to do for the programme. One of my students, Jennifer, wanted to volunteer at SPCA as she is passionate about animal welfare. To her, all living creatures in the world deserve to be treated fairly. Although animals are not human beings, "they do not deserve to be abused for no good reason." Jennifer's choice to volunteer at SPCA was to "show that I do support the SPCA and that my support is not merely backed up by a few empty words."

As a student-driven programme, Gap Week allows students to learn about social issues from multiple perspectives while feeling a sense of ownership towards the programmes that they have initiated. It raises students' awareness and experience of the world beyond school and home. It enables them to have greater empathy and understanding of social issues.

Personally, I am proud to be able to provide, in my own small way, a platform for my students to give back to society.

Every student has the opportunity to succeed in life and improve their lives and of those around them. As an educator, I constantly point out such opportunities to my students and encourage them to make a difference when they can. It is a fundamental belief in my approach to education. It does not matter where we come from. It is about what we do moving forward to make a positive impact on the lives of those around us. Regardless of age, one can always give back to society.



The last day of Gap week was emotional for some of us. We had learnt to be more grateful of what we have and persevere in whatever we do.

Wendy Ooi
Gap Week Organisation:
Food from the Heart

