

TEACHERS HEAL THE SOUL

Ms Lin Xiaojun, Chestnut Drive Secondary School

When I was young, my ambition was to be a doctor as I wanted to save lives. However, as the years went by, I aspired to be a teacher instead. Upon reflection, I realise that a teacher is like a doctor too - *Doctors heal the body; teachers heal the soul.*

My inspiration to be a teacher came when I was a Volunteer Probation Officer. Through mentoring the juvenile delinquents, I was able to get into the lives of these youths and discovered how the lack of proper guidance in their lives had caused them to get into trouble with the law. It made me realise the importance of having a significant adult to guide youths through their lives. I wanted to reach out to more youths and I believed that being a teacher could make a more impactful difference to the lives of the youths.

The Healing Process – The heart of education is the education of the heart

My journey as an educator has helped me develop a strong belief in character education. I believe that a child may not have excellent academic results but as long as he is rooted in strong moral values and possesses good character, he will be able to go far in life.

Having been involved in several Youth Expedition projects as a student, I believe that Service Learning is a very powerful tool to inculcate strong values and develop character in students. As such, I started the Service Learning Project for at-risk students in school. Every experience has been rewarding thus far. I was particularly touched by the sincerity displayed by the at-risk students when they were reaching out to those in need and was impressed by the resilience they displayed despite the tough conditions in Cambodia.

Richard* was one of the at-risk students involved in my first Service Learning project to Cambodia. He was unmotivated in his studies and was involved in gang activities. During one of the nights in Cambodia, after our debrief session, Richard shared with me, *"I am tired of the way I'm leading my life."* He realised how time was being wasted in getting into unnecessary trouble and wanted to do more meaningful things in life. I gave him encouragements and after Richard finished his N levels, he continued to stay in touch with me and helped out with the subsequent Service Learning projects whenever he could.

Change in character does not happen overnight but I am confident that Service Learning projects definitely have a positive impact on character one way or another. These projects have made students realise that they are capable of so much more in life. They became more appreciative of what they have and are more giving towards others.

The Healing Process – Uncovering the potential in students

I first started teaching Caleb* when he was in Secondary 3. He often got into trouble with the discipline team for breaking school rules, such as showing a defiant attitude and getting into fights. It took time to understand Caleb and after building a rapport with him, I realised that getting into trouble in school was a way for him to enhance his self-esteem. He also shared that he felt that he has not achieved anything in his life.

To me, Caleb was an unpolished gem. I encouraged him to re-direct and re-focus his energy and develop his interest and talent in other areas such as basketball. Eventually, Caleb saw his worth and started to work hard. He eventually represented the school in the B Division West Zone Basketball Championships. He was also promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant in his Uniform Group CCA and even volunteered to perform at the Graduation Ceremony!

At the Graduation Ceremony, his father teared and thanked me profusely. *“Thank you, Ms Lin. Because of you, my boy has changed. I really can’t imagine what would have happened to my son without you.”* Tears welled up in my eyes too. Upon reflection on the journey with Caleb from Secondary 3 to 5, I believe consistent support and encouragement is the key that unlocks success. It was heartening to see how Caleb has grown over the past three years. Most importantly, Caleb shared that he realised that there was much more that he was capable of than what he had thought previously. Through this experience, I learnt that everyone has his own strengths and worth – they just take time to be uncovered.

The Healing Process – Being the support and inspiration

I always tell my students, *“If there is a will, there is a way.”* Having been in NPCC as a student, I was keen to pass on this passion when I took up the role of teacher officer. While preparing for a Campcraft competition, the morale of the team was low as the students believed that they would not be able to do well. However, I continued to support and encourage them and inspired them to achieve what they thought was impossible. The team eventually managed to come in among the top twenty in the competition, a feat that they never thought possible.

Last year, on my birthday, one of the students, Marcus*, called me, *“Hi, Ms Lin, sorry that I cannot be there to celebrate your birthday. I just want to thank you for giving me the listening ear when I needed it. It really meant a lot to me.”* This student went through a difficult period during his final year of study. He was unmotivated and wanted to give up his O levels. I visited him at his house and spent time after school to help him catch up with his studies. Eventually, he managed to complete his O levels and moved on to his post-secondary education.

I believe that it was the pillar of support and inspiration that encouraged both my NPCC and ex-students to persevere on and achieve more in their lives. Looking back, this journey of healing has been very enriching. As I heal the souls of others, I have become more empathetic and compassionate. In the process of healing others, I was healing my own soul too!

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