

# Outstanding Youth in Education Award

## RUNNING THE RACE TOGETHER

By Ng Qihui

Former national dragon boater Ms Ng Qihui is a teacher who leads by example. Whether it is running and training together with her students or leading them in community-based projects, Ms Ng is focused on developing a generation of well-rounded individuals.

When I was a student, my most fruitful learning experiences were the times when I was given space to make my own decisions. As a Physical Education (PE) teacher now, I believe that the purpose of education is to provide the children with the values and skills they need for their roles in life. I see my role in teaching as a facilitator and a mentor. Personally, my teaching philosophy is to give my students time and space to chart their own learning paths at their own pace. At the same time, I build their capacity by bringing out the best in them.

Recently, one of my students shared with me the most significant moments of his training after his final race: "Saturday morning training stretched into the afternoon; after completing 20km of paddling, it was off to the MacRitchie Trails for a jog; or sprints on the slopes of Lim Bo Seng Tomb." As I reflected, some of the land training exercises which I developed were meant to not only build students' physical strength but also enhance their mental endurance. I was glad to know that these experiences had indeed strengthened his resilience and enhanced team bonding.

### Setting Challenges to Develop Resilience

Instead of creating training programmes for students to always feel good about themselves, I prepare progressively challenging programmes to bring them out of their comfort zones. Being present with them during an activity allows me to observe not only their performance, but also their body language and emotions. It also allows me to decide when I can push them and when I should back off.

When I paddle alongside my students during canoeing training, I would assess their mental state especially when they feel that they have been pushed to their limits. I would ask them to reflect, "So how do you react in this situation?" The intention is to

sharpen their mental focus and toughness during training. Just like there are situations which are stressful outside of training, I believe that students should learn to organise their thoughts positively so that they are able to be resilient and not be crippled by their fear.

When students begin to feel overwhelmed during periods of high intensity training, I encourage them to take good look at their team mates who are practising hard to help them draw inspiration from their peers. "Drawing strength from each other" eventually became one of the lines in our team mission.



**Ng Qihui**  
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During the pre-competition period, it is inevitable that some students start to falter in their academic performance. As a Co-Curricular Activity teacher, I step in to find out from both the student and the academic teachers how best to help the child. When the child is discouraged, I share my personal experiences as a student athlete. I teach my students how to manage their time and overcome difficulties.

In a recent reflection by my A Division Girls' captain, she shared the quote that I had shared with her during her secondary four days, "Tough times don't last, tough people do". I felt a sense of accomplishment as she was able to understand the meaning behind these words and put them into action.

### Passing on Useful Skills

When I first joined the Values In Action committee to support students' development through community engagement, I knew very little about the work. In my first overseas community involvement programme, my students had planned to teach basic English to the local students. But the students soon found out that the locals were already familiar with the content. It was a humbling experience for my students who had underestimated the locals.

One student told me that she "felt so embarrassed that she wanted to return to Singapore". I was stunned then but it soon dawned on me that this was a good learning experience for my students who needed to learn to pick themselves up. I worked on facilitating their reflection of learning points from this experience. Eventually the team dynamics improved. They improvised on the spot and their lessons for the locals got more engaging. At the end of the trip, they saw themselves grow.

An overseas service trip is a good opportunity for a student's personal development, including the gaining of global perspectives. I always advise my students to serve in a meaningful manner. I tell them that "we are here to teach the locals how to fish and not to give them fish." As a result, one of the projects that the students came up with was to develop teaching aids that could be used by the local teachers subsequently.



**Ms Ng Qihui (middle) always trains with her students, even if it means climbing Mount Ophir with them.**

On the local front, I familiarise myself with the different areas of community service by being on the ground with the students, as well as talking to various partners and understanding the needs of the community. Over time, I find myself having more tools to facilitate students' learning and establishing relationships with organisations of different causes.

Similarly, a teacher's or mentor's presence is also important to a student. I have had students who felt disappointed during a befriending session at the hospital when an elderly patient refused to speak to them. I got them to think from the patient's point of view and explained that no one wishes to be seen as being helpless on a hospital bed. I got the students to try some other ways of engaging the elderly for the subsequent sessions. They soon learnt that to befriend others, they needed to show sincerity and build rapport.

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**- Qihui**

### The Leadership Journey

One of my schools leaders once told me that as I move up the leadership hierarchy, I would have to look at putting in place processes to ensure the sustainability of programmes.

Eventually, I should be able to develop other teachers to take over my role on the ground. I agree with that but I will not miss the opportunity to be on the ground with my students to see them through their learning. It is what drives me to continue moving forward and grow as an educator.

