



REEL TO REAL

By Ng Wan Jun

When her students struggled with Chinese, Mdm Ng Wan Jun took a TV show they were watching and turned it into the lessons they needed.

Loving the job and the language

Teachers have always been held in high regard by my family. “Never question or disrespect the learned, they are here to teach you” (尊师重道) was my parents’ mantra. They influenced me to see teaching as a highly respectable profession.

In Primary 3, I had a Chinese language teacher who had a huge impact on me. I was touched by her caring nature and learnt a lot about values from the stories that she shared during lessons. She inspired my passion for Chinese, and the desire to pass on my love for the language.

After I started teaching, I realised that many of my students could not write well in Chinese. They lacked the vocabulary to express themselves, and this affected the quality of their work. What could I do to help them?

Television lessons

During one lesson, I overheard my students talking about a drama serial that they were watching on television. It was about a man who operated a coffee shop. As his coffee shop and house unit numbers were both “118”, the people around him gave him the nickname “118” (要要发). Whenever someone was in need, they would always seek his help. I went online to find out more about this show, and found numerous snippets of about 10-15 minutes each. I clicked on one and found it suitable as a teaching resource. With the many personalities living in the man’s home and hanging around his coffee shop, there were abundant opportunities for the class to discuss the plot and characters.

Before incorporating the drama serial in my lessons, my students were only able to use words like “good” or “bad” to describe a person. I carefully selected snippets, and used them to introduce vocabulary and

values such as filial piety (孝顺), generosity (慷慨), and helpfulness (乐于助人), when describing the show’s characters. My students were thrilled to see, hear, and put themselves in the shoes of their favourite stars during Chinese lessons. They could talk about why they supported a certain character, and described how they felt when role-playing them.



Mdm Ng helping her students learn new vocabulary and values through role play



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I did not stop there. In another lesson, I got my students to work in small groups and script the endings they would like to see for each video snippet I showed them. One of the video snippets was of an old man begging for money. There were many passers-by. I asked my students to predict if people would be willing to donate money to the beggar, and why. I used open-ended questions such as “If you were...”, “Why do you say so?”, and “How do you know?” to prompt for a variety of responses.

My students came up with various endings, one of which was that the beggar would receive a lot of help because a kind soul posted his plight on social media. My heart leapt with joy when I heard them say, “More, more. Can we do more?”

Besides coming up with story endings, we also discussed moral issues such as kindness and empathy. Providing a context for my students’ learning had resulted in a fun, meaningful, and relevant experience for them. I was glad to see them so engaged.

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From knowledge to action

Besides imparting knowledge, I feel strongly about the need to create opportunities for my students to demonstrate the values discussed during our lessons.

As the Head of Character and Citizenship Education in my school, I initiated the “Nobody but You” programme so that students could turn knowledge into action. I allocated areas in the canteen to each class so that students would tidy up their eating area using the cloths provided after every recess. This is a way for students to learn social responsibility, and I hope that they practise this routine at home and in the community.

I was elated when I was invited to share my experiences in implementing this initiative on national television in 2016. I hope that others will be inspired to ensure a holistic education for all students. After all, nothing makes me happier than seeing students learn and develop their character, while knowing that I have made a difference in their lives.



Mdm Ng using stories to discuss moral issues

