



Outstanding Youth in Education Award

THE POWER OF TEAM SPIRIT

By Low Wei Chuan

Chemistry teacher Mr Low Wei Chuan lets his students bond over fried rice to build a stronger school spirit. He also pushes them to perform small acts of kindness to create a caring culture.

What kind of culture do we want to cultivate in school?

A simple greeting to show concern can open the hearts of people to share their challenges in life and gain the courage and confidence to pick up the broken pieces and keep moving on. Emma* took it upon herself to be a constant companion to Rachel*, a classmate who suffered from severe depression. Although Emma often suffered the brunt of Rachel's mood swings and negativity, she never failed to affirm Rachel positively. Rachel once casually remarked that she missed Emma, renewing the latter's confidence that she was making a difference in someone's life.

This is one of the many heart-warming stories shared by students and colleagues in my school that keeps me going. It motivated me to champion a caring culture which is an important cornerstone in the building of a strong school culture that promotes learning and creates supportive and inclusive classroom environments.

Care Agents in the Making

Has it been easy to create such a culture in the school? Of course not.

When I first joined the school, I was glad to find that each class had specially appointed Care Representatives in their class committee. However, I soon realised that their main role in the class was purely administrative. This motivated me to help them find greater meaning in their roles. While it was not easy convincing the students to step out of their comfort zones to care for others, I took the task in my stride as I believe that it is important for the students to be agents of care and share my vision of creating a more caring school.

I planned team-bonding camps and workshops to equip my Care Representatives with essential skills to reach out to their classmates and help them

overcome a myriad of problems. I was touched when a student told me that he had benefited from the training and was now more confident to help others.

I actively mentored our Care Representatives who, in turn, explored creative ways and plan meaningful activities to reach out to and engage the school community. Once, some of them prepared goodie bags for the unsung heroes in the school to thank them for their hard work. Months later, a middle-aged lady came to our school to speak to the principal. She was the daughter of one of the cleaners, who had recently passed away. Her father had received the goodie bag and that was one of the happiest moments in the last days of his life. He was so grateful for the small gesture from the students. This initiative would not have been possible without the power of team spirit.



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Another programme called the Class Eat Together Day was initiated by a student who observed that some of her classmates were always eating alone at the canteen.

I took the opportunity to challenge her and her peers to think of possible ways to promote social integration. This started the programme, which aims to create bonding between classmates and their form teachers. Over food and games, students build more meaningful relationships with one another and become more willing to open up and take responsibility for the well-being of their peers. Paul*, chairperson of a secondary two class, truly embraced the spirit of care and took the extra effort to remind everyone about the dietary restrictions and allergies of specific classmates to ensure that nobody was left out. The form teachers participated actively and some even prepared food for their students.

One colleague, Bernard*, woke up early to whip up a huge dish of his signature fried rice and other delicacies for his students. He was heartened to see his students coming together and building friendships while enjoying some home-cooked food.

United We Stand

In 2014, I became the form teacher of an academically strong but fragmented class. For these students, academic excellence was their priority and building positive relationships with one another was secondary.

It was an uphill task to bring them together and I spent a lot of time advising them on the importance of forging a strong class spirit. I assigned everyone a specific role so that they each had a stake in the class and provided opportunities for them to express how they felt about the different issues the class faced. Some students initially resisted working with people whom they were unfamiliar with but I constantly encouraged and assured them that with teamwork, the group dynamics would change. The hard work paid off when I saw the students gradually coming together to form teams to participate in the inter-class sports competition. Mary*, a girl with self-esteem issues, confided in me that she was glad she was able to find classmates who were willing to lend a listening ear and help with her work during the school's night study programme.

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- Wei Chuan

This experience with my form class planted a seed in my heart. I realised that students will be motivated to act in the interest of the class only if they had a sense of ownership and belonging. Hence I started Project DREAM (which stands for Dream, Resolution, Execution, Assess progress and growth Mindset), an initiative to build strong class identity through empowering students to jointly decide on the best possible classroom environment for study and play.

At regular class meetings, students could talk about issues that mattered to them and possible solutions. As a result, many student-centred ideas were actualised. For instance, one class came up with the idea of subject-based study groups, where stronger students would provide help for their weaker classmates. Another class had a simple yet heart-warming idea of making birthday cards for their classmates.

Bonds that Last

A strong school spirit is the intangible glue that gels students from different backgrounds together as they work to realise the vision of the school. Students learn to accept differences while embracing what they have in common, leveraging one another's strengths to bring about improvement and sustainable change to the school environment. With a supportive school spirit, students can be innovative without being afraid to fail. By harnessing the power of team spirit, every teacher can help build a collaborative school culture where dreams are realised and success is celebrated.

**Actual name has been changed.*



Mr Low Wei Chuan (back row, in black shirt) and his secondary four students, who displayed their team spirit at the annual sports carnival.

