

## **Serving with Skill**

### **Kwan See Ling, Seng Kang Primary School**

How Miss Kwan See Ling convinced her fellow teachers that their students' dance, drawing and computer expertise can be put to good use in the community.

One of the best things about being a teacher is to be able to share with my pupils my belief that it is the responsibility of every able individual on this planet to build a gracious society for all and to see them practising it and influencing others in the process.

Having done volunteer work for five years, I personally felt the impact it has had on my life and those I serve. As the Subject Head for Values in Action (VIA) and Partnership, I can help align the school's values, beliefs and programmes to benefit the school and the community. Working together with my team members, we developed projects for every level and the school as a whole. In 2014, I introduced the VIA infused Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) initiative — an initiative where students could use the skills they learned in their CCAs to serve the community. This new initiative replaced the overseas service learning trip which catered to only a small percentage of selected pupils and would instead provide rich experiences for all P5 and P6 pupils to serve the local community. It would also enable pupils to internalise values such as confidence, integrity, respect and resilience. Believing that values education should not be left to chance, I worked with the Head of Department for Character and Citizenship Education and the respective CCA teachers-in-charge to develop a more systematic way to include values learning in CCAs.

One of the challenges I had to face was to find and persuade suitable partners to work with the school. I had to match the needs of the various CCA groups to the right organisations whilst ensuring that the needs of the partner organisations were met. Out of every four potential partners I approached, I was rejected by three. Most organisations were keener on working with secondary school students as they felt that the maturity level of the students would allow them to serve the community better while others already had existing partnerships with other schools.

Despite the task being daunting, I pressed on, believing opportunities were everywhere and one should be ready to seize them. I eventually contacted Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), the organisation I had volunteered with in 2013. Highlighting that our collaboration would help create awareness in our pupils that they can volunteer as side walkers at RDA when they are 16 years old, I finally convinced RDA to be our partner for the Art Club's VIA project.

In this VIA project, our Art Club pupils came up with Christmas Cards designs for RDA's fundraising project. Although their designs were not selected in the end, it was nonetheless a great opportunity to raise the awareness and confidence in our

pupils that they could use their artistic abilities to benefit the community. During the visit at RDA, the students learnt that animals should be treated with the same respect as human beings. Through observing the horse-riding therapy sessions, they also witnessed the courage and resilience of the riders in overcoming their physical disability to ride the horses. Most of the pupils were really inspired and shared during our reflection session that they would definitely consider volunteering at RDA when they were older.

The other challenge I faced was to convince the various CCA teachers-in-charge to involve their pupils in the VIA projects. Students are only able to engage in such meaningful programmes with support from my colleagues. Through deliberate communication, clarifications on the intent and benefits of the project, I managed to get buy-in from my colleagues. It seemed like a lot of extra work, but I also showed them how investing a little time now to build a strong relationship with our partners would save them effort later.

As the teacher-in-charge of Modern Dance CCA, I arranged for my dancers to promote their toys donation drive for Toys Buffet during our staff meeting. Toys Buffet is an annual event organised by Food From the Heart (FFTH) organisation. It aims to deliver a message of hope by presenting toy gifts to pupils under the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) in Singapore, ensuring that the needy children of Singapore are given the opportunity to have the joyful experiences that every child deserves. After collecting the toys donated by my colleagues, the dancers wrapped the toys and wrote well-wishes for the recipients on bookmarks provided by FFTH. The students realised that it was actually not easy to wrap a present but they persevered in getting the wrapping right despite the initial failed attempts. In the process, they learnt the importance of resilience. We also noticed that a few of our pupils were very patient when guiding their friends in the wrapping of the presents. On the day of the event, the pupils cooperated with one another in the setting up and decoration of the toys booth allocated to them. They presented the toy gifts respectfully to the children receiving the presents and brought joy to the audience at Toys Buffet with their slick dance moves. The commitment level of our Modern Dancers in the VIA project definitely helped convince my colleagues that investing time in the VIA-infused CCA projects was worth their effort. They saw that these partnerships would make a real difference to their pupils.

Sharing pupils' and beneficiaries' reflections during our staff meetings further convinced colleagues that such CCA-VIA partnerships benefitted both pupils and their respective beneficiaries. Members from the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Club were involved in the Intergenerational Learning Programme organised by Feiyue Community Services. The pupils taught the senior citizens the basic parts of a computer and guided them in creating e-mail accounts and composing e-mails. They also showed the senior citizens how to navigate YouTube, play YouTube videos and share videos on YouTube. One of the pupils shared that the programme helped him gain confidence and he learnt to "put himself in other

people's shoes." Pupils also remarked that the senior citizens were not as stubborn as they had expected them to be but were instead happy and energetic. The senior citizens, equally encouraged by the pupils, were supportive of the pupils' efforts. The programme was so successful that both pupils and senior citizens said that they would recommend the programme to their friends. It was clear that such collaboration allowed greater respect and understanding to be forged between generations. Having witnessed first-hand the bond and understanding created by such partnerships, my colleagues became equally enthused to do even more to guide, communicate and carry out the intent of VIA-infused CCA projects.

My own classroom experiences working with a student who struggled with reading and writing gave me the idea to partner the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) with our English Comes Alive Club in another VIA-infused CCA project. Members from the club came together to help raise funds for DAS over a course of one week. To help their fellow schoolmates understand the cause they were contributing to, club members put their public speaking skills to good use and gave a short presentation during assembly, sharing confidently with their schoolmates what dyslexia was and how all of us could help create a more inclusive environment for people with dyslexia. The pupils and their CCA teachers-in-charge were also involved in the counting of the donations collected. This made them realise the importance of having integrity and transparency in fundraising.

On reflection, I think I have contributed towards building a caring culture of giving and paying forward among pupils and staff by starting VIA-infused CCA projects in the school. Education is more than just passing exams and scoring high marks; it is also about having a heart, the ability to understand others' needs, and showing care and concern to those around us. I also believe that VIA experiences in schools should offer our pupils a new perspective on life's priorities. It is a chance to discover new talents in our students and give them opportunities to lead.

It is my greatest wish that our pupils continue to be concerned citizens and active contributors to Singapore and the world after they graduate so that they can build the gracious society that we dream of.