



Outstanding Youth in Education Award

Keeping It Relevant – from Pizza to the Pandemic

By Ms Low Yihui

Ms Low Yihui's sharp focus on her students' personal development is what inspires her teaching, whether in grooming prefects or making Social Studies lessons more relatable to her students' daily lives.



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Tell us a story that captures the kind of teacher you are.

Students learn to believe in themselves if we believe in them. Casey* was one of my first students in Naval Base Primary School. In Primary 2, she caught my attention as someone who breezed through her schoolwork and was helpful to her classmates but would hold back during class discussions. I was happy when she was given the opportunity to be a prefect as I could sense that there was a quiet but capable leader in her. Fast forward three years, when I was made a teacher in charge of the prefects, I pushed her to play a more active role during

project discussions. She was so exemplary, I approached her a year later to run for Head Prefect. To my astonishment, Casey rejected me without hesitation!

I decided to speak with her to understand why she was so against the idea. I discovered that Casey doubted her own ability to lead. That was when I knew I had to instil confidence and belief in her.

I reminded her of the times she had contributed to the prefects' initiatives by proposing respectful and reasonable suggestions which were eventually taken up by her group, as well as how she mentored junior prefects and students to lead the school in morning pledge-taking. By highlighting how she was already demonstrating the qualities of a good leader, the responsibilities of the Head Prefect position did not seem that daunting anymore.

Casey eventually agreed to run for the position, and I could see her confidence grow as I mentored her through her election campaign. As she crafted her speech, she saw through her many anecdotes that she was a deserving candidate. By the end of the campaign, she surprised me with her enthusiasm and dedication when she filmed not one but two campaign videos.

“Students learn to believe in themselves when we believe in them.”

From a student who avoided the limelight, Casey has grown into a capable Vice Head Prefect whom the students look up to. When I spot her in the mornings, guiding other prefects in carrying out their duties, and being a dependable and approachable role

model in her own way, I know I had done the right thing in validating and journeying with Casey and others like her.

Describe a teaching method or tool you have found effective.

“Teacher, why can’t these people solve their own problems?” As a Mathematics teacher, I go through dozens of word problems with my students every week, and hear them groan on about solving problems that seem irrelevant to them.

Ah-ha! It dawned on me that learning should be given a clearer purpose and meaning. So I decided to create word problems that put my students at the centre of the plot! I tested my idea out in a lesson on area of circles by showing them a pizza menu and asking if they find two 6-inch pizzas or one 12-inch pizza more affordable. And which was more worth it?

The class suddenly sprang to life! The students started to shout out answers from all corners. Beyond the fact that pizza was one of their favourite dishes, the context of the problem was a familiar one. I knew I had hit upon a good idea. Who says Math is boring and irrelevant now? Presented in the right way, students will be excited to pick it up and apply it in their daily lives.

Another example of finding purpose in learning was back in 2020, when I conducted the P2 Social Studies lesson “Don’t Forget Your Thermometer” on SARS. I pointed out the similarities to what Singapore was facing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and noticed that one of the students, Jenny*, was paying particularly close attention.

It turned out that Jenny’s mother was a nurse on the frontlines. Jenny recounted how exhausted her mum was every day due to the intense workload and their family’s fear that she would contract the then widely feared virus. Her classmates listened earnestly with the impact of COVID-19 made real through her heartfelt sharing.

One student suggested, “Can we make thank-you cards for the doctors and nurses to encourage them?” Jenny’s eyes sparkled and she eagerly raised her hand to ask, “Can I take some cards home for my mummy?” With a sense of purpose, the class got busy with their colour pencils and we spent the next period creating cards for the frontline workers of the pandemic. It was turned into an even more meaningful project when I later roped in other teachers and their classes to design

and deliver cards to staff of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital and Sengkang Green Hospital.



Creating cards for frontline workers of the pandemic

Which school project or initiative are you especially proud of?

One of my key aims as a teacher is to nurture the desire to serve. For example, I wanted the students to understand the difficulties that our school’s elderly Operations Support Staff (OSO) face while discharging their duties, and not just listen about it while seated comfortably in their classrooms. So I planned for the members of the Girls’ Brigade to clean the shutters of the hall under the guidance of our OSOs.

To help them understand what farmers go through for us to have food on our tables, I arranged for the students to spend some CCA sessions weeding and planting vegetables in the school’s edible garden.



Creating opportunities for students to understand the work of others

I create these opportunities for students to understand why they should step up to serve, to be the person who reaches out a helping hand to others, and to be grateful for the immense work put in by others. In our society, we tend to focus on ourselves as we strive to achieve our personal goals. By teaching our students to look out for the needy, and uplift others alongside themselves, they will be able to make the world a better place for all.

**Names have been changed*

