

PRINCIPALS



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President's Message



This is our third issue and I am amazed at how different the stories are, yet again. It really makes us realise how differently we can all grow and how varied is our fraternity.

You may have noticed in our earlier issues, as well as in this one, that there is almost always a reference to family, the family we were born into as well as, where appropriate, the family we married. In many ways it is a tribute I am sure you treasure – a recognition of the impact that parents with strong values had on our lives and the support we receive from our spouses.

As you read of the journeys through life that our four colleagues have taken, I know you may well smile and even chuckle at the very authentic voices coming through and say to yourself that this is so reminiscent of that colleague whom you know.

In that sense, these stories are a reflection not just of the journey taken but the voices we have. You hear accents of excitement, the deep baritone of conviction, the alto of flexibility, the soprano of challenges met and overcome, the tenor of love for the vocation and for the children and you know we have a veritable choir in our midst.

If you remember Dr Stephen Covey's representation of this synergy through Pachelbel's Canon, you will see how we as school leaders are playing a wonderful symphony even as we enjoy each other's differences and know we are ourselves valued for our way of managing the unique schools we have.

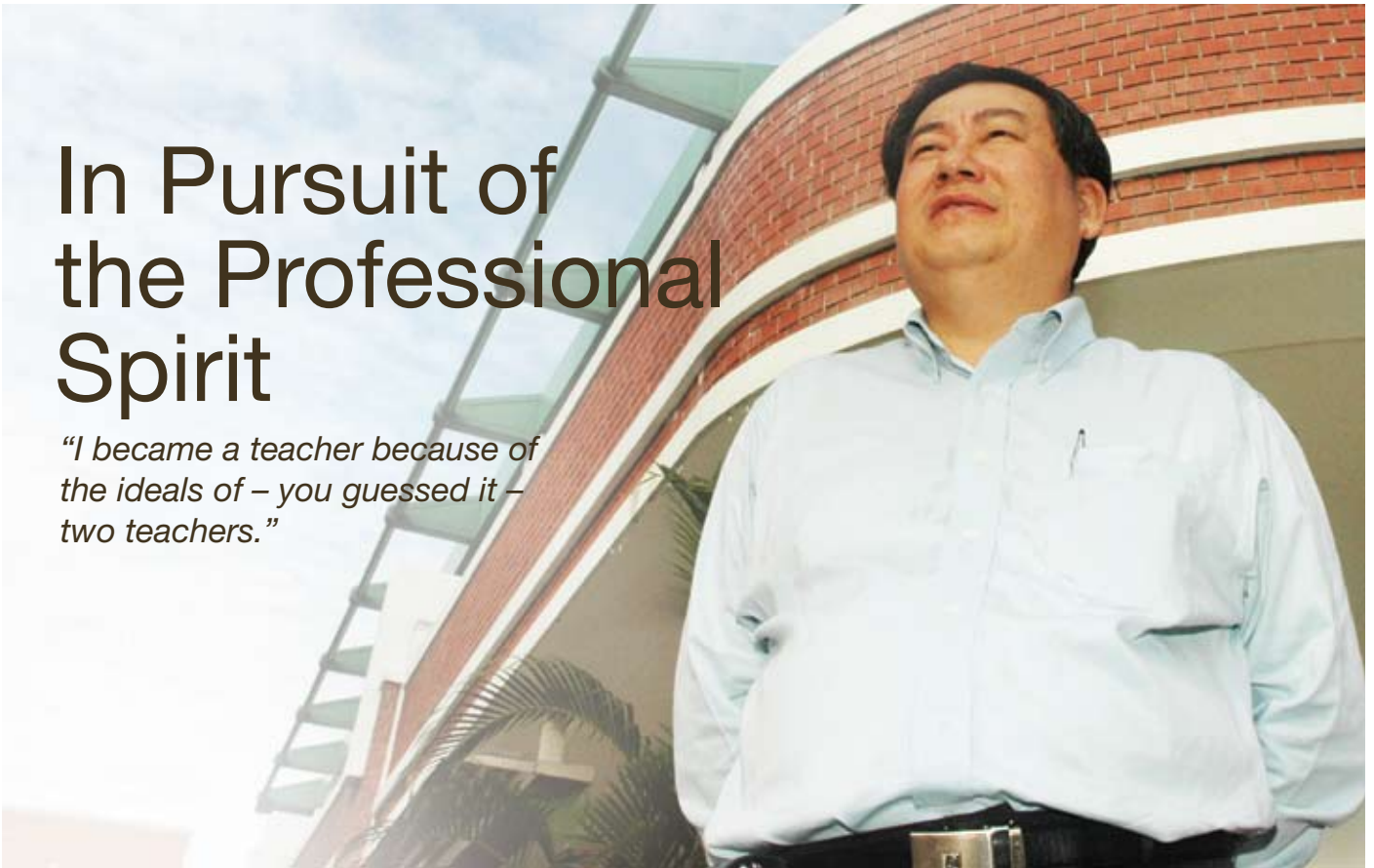
Leadership is developing your own voice while hearing the voice of others.

Belinda Charles

President of Academy of Principals (Singapore)

In Pursuit of the Professional Spirit

"I became a teacher because of the ideals of – you guessed it – two teachers."



"I was having some health problems in Primary 1, frequently needing the toilet. My teacher noticed something was wrong. She could see that I didn't know how to tell my parents, so she spoke to my older sister and then my mother. A visit to the doctor cured the problem. Today, I always tell my teachers, 'The first thing is, you must use your *eagles'* eyes and observe the needs of the children!"

A few years later, on the last day of term, a bully punched Richard and then ran away. "My math teacher came to check on me and he actually promised to question and punish the boy. A full month later when school reopened, sure enough, he brought the bully and me to his office and punished him. It made me feel so good. He'd remembered and followed through. That led me to feel teaching actually touches peoples' lives – the caring, humane side of education. By the way, he was a very good math teacher, but I remember him first for his sense of fairness and justice, and for doing what he had promised; for his integrity. From that day onwards I wanted to be a teacher."

Growing up in rural Malaysia, Richard attended a Chinese primary school, then switched to English at the secondary level. "That was very tough, even with the extra preparatory year. I didn't actually start *speaking* English until about Sec 5. I improved my English through reading popular adventure stories. DIY!"

teach in a primary school for one year just to round out his experience. That stint coincided with the time when the 'communicative approach' to teaching English was coming into favour – what seemed a refreshing alternative to the traditional style of 'English Grammar' instruction. Today, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, he wonders if the shift



“ ‘Wonderful’ was one of the first descriptive words Richard picked up from reading Enid Blyton, and it began appearing all over his writing. “I remember my first English essay; the teacher asked me, ‘Why do you use ‘wonderful’ everywhere?’ and I said, ‘It’s a wonderful word!’ ”

Richard was part of a wave of Malaysians who came to join Singapore's teaching force in the late 1970s. After 8 years in secondary schools, the Ministry steered him onto a leadership path, but not before having him

in emphasis was altogether appropriate. "Changing any curricular approach can be very risky – scary actually. You often won't know the real effect until 10 or 20 years down the road."



Photo: Seow Kian Yong

Although English is by no means his forte, Richard feels deeply concerned as he watches young English language teachers struggling to be effective, especially where their own lack of proficiency is part of the problem. Not one to point the finger of blame at shortcomings, he prefers instead to concentrate on putting in place training and development programmes that address gaps right at the school level – and not *only* in English. “The pre-service training our incoming teachers have received is, of necessity, pretty general. For further professional development the school must act and identify needs: from specific skills training, to changing mindsets. Top grade education can’t happen without top grade educators.”

Richard puts great stock in the development of his staff. Wary of piecemeal approaches to training, he tries to take the long view and over the years has developed his own multi-pronged strategy. He starts with a careful look at the school’s profile. “When I was at Xinghua Primary School the intake was predominantly from Chinese-speaking homes and a survey showed that 50% had entered without speaking a single word of English. Here at Anglo-Chinese Primary School, 92% of the students come from English-speaking homes. In order to be effective here, teachers need a different type of skill compared with teachers in a neighbourhood school where many of the pupils have very little exposure to English at home. So this is where we have to look at the specific needs of the children so we can map out suitable training programmes for the teachers.” It seems to Richard that the

next logical step is to take stock of teachers’ existing competencies, natural strengths and interests. He recalls that first year of primary school teaching. “It was fascinating. I had only taught physics and math in a secondary school. Now I had to teach all the subjects: English, science, arts and crafts, everything!” Results of a school survey of teachers’



subject preferences confirmed his own view: it was more important to let teachers concentrate on their subject specialisation and teach, at most, one additional subject. “That way, they can give their best and the children can get the best.” Helping teachers develop in areas where they are not very good is his third strategic training thrust, one which Richard finds to be the biggest challenge of all.

FOSTERING PROFESSIONALISM

“Sometimes people ask me, ‘Mr Lim, How do you know all these stories? And how do you remember them?’ I say, ‘It’s very simple. Every Sunday when I go to church I hear a story our pastor is using and on Monday I’ll slightly modify and share it with friends.

After a while the story just stays with me.’ I think it works in the same way with professional development: after undergoing training you must modify what you’ve learnt according to what’s comfortable for you. And then when you start sharing, you will actually internalise it even more.”

This is one of the reasons Richard has worked actively at creating a non-threatening work environment that is free of criticism. He’s built protected time into the schedule for professional sharing, both departmentally and by level. Despite this, when teachers gather, discussion often descends into nitty-gritty administrative talk, which is not the purpose of professional sharing. “We have to create success stories in the sense that when people do open up they find encouragement. Then I think people will be more comfortable sharing.”

During an overseas trip to China, Richard was impressed by the attitude of teachers there who seemed only too happy to share, to have guests or colleagues observe their lessons. “I said, ‘Wow! You are very confident...’ and this teacher replied, ‘If people want to come and observe my lessons that means I’m very good, doesn’t it? So of course I will welcome them; and even if there’s some fault with my lessons, and they give me that feedback, I will improve, right?’ So that is the kind of mentality, the kind of professionalism that we hope our teachers will develop.”

The problem Richard finds himself grappling with is teachers who feel too insecure to allow peer observation to be a part of enhancing their classroom effectiveness. It’s a mindset which persists; a cultural hangover, no doubt, from when principals or VPs did observations which were purely evaluative rather than developmental. “This is one of the hardest things to change. They feel afraid of being judged, even when it’s their own peers observing.” He sees this attitude as a major block to raising professional standards.

In an effort to motivate his staff to make their teaching more dynamic and responsive, Richard brings in stories, models he hopes might inspire them. *Freedom Writers*, for instance, spotlights Erin Gruwell, a beginning teacher faced with enormous obstacles who was able to help her students recognise that their own troubled lives were something



worth writing about. With such examples Richard is conveying to his teachers they should feel free to improvise, to respond to the opportunities presented by their students. That's what a good teacher does: make learning meaningful. The problem Richard sees is teachers becoming 'trapped', passive and text-bound.

Using another tactic, he encourages teachers to actively identify and address the school's gaps as well as their own. As a new principal of Henry Park Primary School, Richard wanted greater emphasis placed on character development, but he was wary about introducing a programme. "Teachers will tend to perceive such initiatives as simply 'a new broom sweeps clean,' and fail to 'buy in.'" Instead he set about making teachers see the need themselves by sharing newspaper clippings and current stories about campus shootings, and such, and eliciting their views. "Finally, I asked, 'What do you think we need to do in order to build up our next generation?' The response was:


character. Once they had identified the need, they were convinced that we needed a character building programme."

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

Having grown up on a farm outside Johor Bahru where his father was a rubber plantation foreman, Richard knew about rubber tapping and tree management from an early age. He learned how to inspect trees, to spot where the rubber tappers had cut too deep, injuring the tree and shortening its productive life. He would have to warn them that the short term gain in latex was not sustainable. "Some workers understood and were very good. But some, after a while might say, 'We've had enough scolding; we can't carry on so we resign.' Those experiences taught me a lot about education, staff training and human relationships."

"Sometimes in this competitive world, if we get fixated on 'performance', I think we lose

our focus. If you try to force results from them without that love, care, and concern, it doesn't work." Like that short surge of latex, it's performance that can't be sustained.

Richard reminds his teachers that, "while our eagle's eyes are observing, remember: there are hundreds of pairs of eyes looking back! You simply must be honest. You cannot hide, especially from little children. I heard once about a teacher whose student said, 'I know why you work us so hard. You want us to get very good results so that the Principal will praise you! And the Principal is working you very hard because he wants praise from the Superintendent!' You know, children can see straight away. So I always tell the teachers, 'Let us be genuinely concerned for them, be sincere with them and we will do well, as long as we focus on the children!'" A simple sounding motto; but from one such Richard Lim, it's a concentrated dose of wisdom, one that conveys the essence of an educator's mission. 



What's Driving Miss Daisie?

Effusive? Dynamic?
Now that would be an understatement.

There will never be an energy crisis so long as Daisie Yip is in the room – she has enough energy for everyone! And when multitasking – that inevitable part of any principal's job – she shifts gears like a seasoned Formula 1 pro.

A self-described *kaypoh* (Chinese for busybody), she feels that taking an active interest in everything that's going on is really an essential part of the job. Seeing Daisie in action, one certainly gets that impression as she flies about Gongshang Primary School (GSPS) greeting visitors and students alike, monitoring a theatre training group, checking in with the enrichment classes, answering phone calls and text messages while zipping upstairs to a lunch-hour meeting of her teaching staff. Here, the agenda is set partly by questions and suggestions delivered via the 'Sunshine Post' – a nice touch Daisie added whereby staff and students can have a direct line to their principal. Every note gets answered.

Daisie approaches leadership as she does nearly everything, with her signature blend



of boundless zeal, humanity and a deep sense of spirituality. She loves asking questions and testing even the most fundamental assumptions about pedagogy and the importance of subject matter. Classroom experience has reinforced her recognition that teaching is first and foremost about relationship. The content will come. Her love of reading and appetite for stimulating

thought range from Lao Tzu to Gandhi to Peter Drucker, influences that manifest as her personal mark on school culture. "I teach who I am" is a byword and it's difficult to imagine her doing anything else.

DRIFTING INTO THE LEAD

Of the four children in her family, Daisie is the youngest by 12 years. She adored her siblings, especially her brother who was a very active and inspiring influence. Some 17 years her senior, he was almost like a father. Intensely involved with the International Brotherhood of Magicians, he actually wrote a book of his own original card tricks. Some of that skill and passion for magic must have rubbed off on his little sister because as a teenager she daringly took up the challenge of performing at the Hyatt Hotel as a close-up magician.



"My father would often sing at home, a wonderful tenor. When my brother bought a piano for his first son, my old man just sat right down and taught himself how to play in no time. It was awesome!"



'The Sunshine Post'

“ Children drop in notes to me about everything from bullies to how stressed they are feeling. The teachers and I – the 'Angels' – will open the box, and sort out the issues. We somehow find a way to resolve each question, whether through assembly, in the halls, or in their class. The children give me a lot of suggestions, so in a way they are helping me to make decisions in the school. ”

By the time she started Primary 2, Daisy's father had already reached retirement. She fondly remembers countless hours sitting with him on their deckchair stargazing and discussing late into the night. A staunch Anglican, he often discussed the Bible with her and engendered a philosophical leaning, a trait which has stayed with her to this day. Daisy never felt jealous of his attention, probably because he always had time for her, to talk and tell stories. "He opened that door for me, the world of imagination. I think my older siblings were quite grateful because I could be quite a nuisance to them."



Daisy taking time out

For more down to earth matters Daisy naturally turned to her mother, a very supportive and visionary woman. Because it was so paramount, Mdm Goh Kim Lang willingly pawned every piece of jewellery she owned to ensure her daughter's education, a sacrifice for which Daisy remains grateful. "Poor as we were, she found ways to stretch so I could be very active in school. I was a Girl Guide Patrol Leader, always off camping with the girls, and helping out with work around the school. Before I knew it I was asked to go for 'an interview'. At first I stalled, but on the third call I went and just seemed to drift naturally into becoming a teacher. In those early days my mother would actually often sit up with me, late into the night, and while I wrote and marked, she would colour and

help cut out "insects" and paste them for me – those were the audio-visual aids we had back then. Now, looking back, I see how very important her support was."

With a steady income of her own, Daisy was able to complete her 'A' Levels privately. She would eventually take her BA in English and MA in Education and Human Development, but that was much further down the road. First came marriage and an extended stint away from teaching to become a full-time homemaker and mother. "I faced the outside world for a while, but the calling to

come back to teach was very, very strong." While ultimately grounded in English and English Literature, she has over the years enjoyed teaching geography tremendously, "because it's so down to earth and you can talk about connectedness and relationships: the aftermath of things, the impact; just like science."

She taught briefly in Surin, a little town on the Thailand/Cambodia border, and provided training in India as well, experiences that underscored how education is really about life. "In school and CCAs, I was always given the chance to enjoy certain leadership roles, and that helped me a lot. Now at GSPS, I make it a policy that every child be given a leadership role for at least one term in each

academic year. As a leader you learn how difficult it can be to move people. So when the time comes for you to be a follower you will be a better follower."

“ While I still yearn to teach I don't have time for that now. But, whenever a teacher is absent I ask them to give me the opportunity to go in. I don't get that much of a chance because... my teachers are very protective, very territorial about their class! ”

Daisy sets aside a small parcel of time for every graduating class, a short life skills session that she provides based on Timothy Gallwey's GROW ME model. It's her chance to connect, to share her voice and she finds it very meaningful.

THE GONGSHANG VILLAGE



Reviewing their Learning Journey Book

Accountability and the sharing of responsibility – the 'whole village' notion of raising a child – these concepts anchor Daisy's philosophy. Every child at GSPS is given a colourful *Learning Journey* handbook which stays, grows and evolves with them, facilitating a 6-year partnership between parent, school and community. "Children and parents are appreciative of that *Learning Journey* not just because it encourages and

rewards responsible behaviour, but it also serves as a tool for 'quality time'. There are games for them to play and lots of other things inside that they can talk about: dreams, goals, building friendships, even networking! Some parents have said, 'But, they're learning executive language!' And I say, 'Why not?' It's a diary, an organiser, but above all, it's one more way to keep affirming the child, not just in school, but more broadly."

The handbook reinforces the school's values of

Perseverance, Thrift, Integrity and Respect, giving parents another vehicle to encourage those traits and behaviours in the child. Where parents are unable (or unwilling) to play that role, other parent volunteers step in to provide positive reinforcement. Daisie also promotes the practice of self-monitoring, teaching youngsters to observe patterns in their own behaviour over time and showing them techniques for setting realistic goals accordingly.

Gongshang (meaning literally "industrial/commercial") Primary School boasts a heritage with roots reaching back across long decades when its funding, indeed its very survival, depended entirely upon the generosity and selflessness of the Chinese immigrants. With this posting Daisie had two potential strikes against her: a weakness in Mandarin, and her gender — she is the school's first and only female principal in its nearly 90-year history. Of course, turning challenges into advantages is the currency principals must often deal in. Keen listening and diplomatic

skills — not to mention charm — won the hearts and confidence of the Gongshang alumni who immediately recognised kindred qualities in Daisie: her generosity of spirit and selflessness when it comes to the interests of her students.

Today the GSPS community is definitely thriving, abuzz with teacher-driven initiatives in pedagogy.

DIGITAL DAISIE

The first time Daisie used a computer was during a staff meeting. She

confidently picked up the mouse thing, pointed it at the screen and began clicking it like a TV remote control. "The HOD next to me tried to save me from embarrassment by gently pushing my hand down. And I said, 'Wait!' And he pushed my hand down again and whispered, 'Put it down. Draw with it!' We laugh about that now and I tell my teachers, "You think you are challenged? I was an IT *sotong*!!" (*Sotong* is the Malay word for squid roughly translated here as 'dumb like squid!')

Not one to be easily deterred, Daisie has embraced digital technology, investing in interactive white boards (IWB) for every classroom in GSPS — and not just because it's trendy. "We have to make changes to our pedagogy because we are relating with digital kids." She sees the IWB as a natural complement to a GSPS pedagogic initiative called STAR whereby pupils are trained to Suggest ideas, Think out of the box, Ask questions and Reflect whenever they face a challenge. "When a student asks a good question, teachers are in the best position to

say, 'Let's find out...' and engage students in researching the question, finding websites and highlighting information, getting volunteers to do more looking at home, finding answers and reporting back. So there's a lot of learning that takes place."

Of course, people (teachers included) can get quite stressed dealing with computers. Daisie has engaged a couple of 'IT Executives' who are just a phone call away. They help staff not only with technical issues, but in providing savvy approaches to curriculum-compatible use



P1 teacher Mdm Eunice Moon at the IWB



of these classroom tools. "I've found myself conducting a meeting and, oops! There's no overhead projector — just the interactive white board; so suddenly I've got to learn! I can fully appreciate how people feel."

However, Daisie is quick to cite research showing that all this interactive, very exciting digital technology is ultimately delivered by live, 'interactive' teachers; they make the biggest difference and are fundamental to learning. "We teach who we are. At the end of the day, it's those very human qualities like personal rapport between teacher and student, tacit knowledge, and human touch that matter. In talking with someone, your language, your expression, your eyes... these convey quite a lot of things which aren't actually said in so many words."



"Chess, anyone?"

“ Every child in GSPS learns to play International Chess — during Primary 1 curriculum time. It's a skill, a mind exercise, learning to plan and pre-empt; and after just one move to rethink all your plans. These are the kinds of traits I would like to see our children having. ”

FROM GIRL GUIDE TO 'TEACHER GUIDE'

"We've been given a lot of funding autonomy which principals didn't have before, and I'm enjoying that. There are broad guidelines; but it's the wisdom of crafting your curriculum, your timetable. I hope I will not regret my decisions years down the




road, especially with these initiatives that are coming so fast and furious! I see the MOE really trying very hard to respond to the ever-changing landscape."

Unlike many of her predecessors who had to learn the hard way, Daisy was able to study leadership theory through the Diploma in Educational Administration course. "Nowadays, current and new teachers coming in have quite a diversity of choice regarding their own development and career path: a pure teaching focus leading perhaps to Senior Teacher; or a Specialist or Leadership track; plus all the mentoring they can get from Senior Teachers and HODs. With more and more resources being pumped into staff development it just keeps getting better. We can also see that MOE is really putting the "staff well-being" notion into action. And that's really about 'satisfying the customer' because, after all, teachers are also our customers. Hopefully they will feel good about

their job and will stay!" Daisy is particularly excited and happy about the welcoming in of mid-career people from other professions such as accountants, lawyers, dentists; people who can be a real asset because they have experienced the outside world. "I can feel in their presence that they teach who they are."

At the time of our interview Daisy had just come off a 5-day Teacher Renewal 'journey' that she had been invited to join. Clearly an expansive and intensely personal experience, she is simply brimming over with inspiration. "The beauty of silence and hearing my inner voice! This is a journey I have to take because I am quite a noisy person – very fast moving – I talk so fast! I thought, 'Hmmm, peace; calm; stillness; it's another dimension of myself that I would like to develop.'" Unashamedly spiritual in its emphasis, the course aims to transform participants into full-fledged 'Guides' to other teachers and is inspired by Robert Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership* and

patterned on Parker Palmer's *Courage to Teach*. "It's a gift, actually, that you can either accept or decline. It's just the beginning for us, and frankly I don't yet know how I can guide; because it really has to come from within your heart, your identity, and your integrity of teaching."

The central thrust of the Teacher Renewal journey is about relationships, an idea which, of course, resonates with Daisy. "I want to build that relationship with students first... because I don't really teach the subject. I teach you, I teach life. This training has rejuvenated some of that philosophy for me. It's worth being a teacher; and I want to be a teacher all over again. The teacher is a very, very powerful figure in impacting a young person's life – sometimes even more powerful than parents. It's potentially dangerous too, that ability to influence. But in all, it's a very noble profession. I'm glad I am a teacher. I want to be a teacher." 



Daisy is also quite involved with the Induction Programmes provided through Teachers Network.

“ I always ask them, 'Do you see yourself as a teacher, teaching the subject? Or do you see yourself as actually a nation-builder, a surrogate parent?' With that perspective, that mental model, your whole approach to teaching a subject becomes transformed. As you teach, you also talk about life skills and any related situational learning that comes along the way. ”

"Local residents wrote to complain that my students were making so much noise after school. So I read that letter to my students – and my reply. I wrote,

'Thanks for the feedback!'

'Thank you very much for wanting to see improvement in my school, for bothering to write in to me. Please continue to do so. I have investigated and here are the disciplinary steps I have taken...' They emailed to thank me for responding promptly.'

Ask Ng Hwee Heng what makes a leader and she'll tell you it could be personality, but leaders can also be trained – if they are open enough. "As leaders we really need to be flexible. If we are willing to accept people's constructive criticism and are actually able to face the truth, then we should be able to change and develop in those areas we are weaker in. So much depends on what stage the school or organisation is at; and there are so many types of leaders: transformational, transactional, laissez-faire; there are no absolute right or wrong answers."



"I love mathematics; even when I was a young student my dream was always to become a teacher. After my 'A' Levels, I took a private course and discovered that I really liked accountancy very much." She was accepted at both NUS and Nanyang University, chose the Chinese track and, upon graduating as a certified auditor, stepped straight into the world of accounting. Almost as quickly, she discovered that the day-to-day reality of the profession was not at all to her liking. "In auditing you are actually making people very unhappy: always checking peoples' work, having no friends, eating lunch all by yourself – I just didn't enjoy it. Deep inside, I still wanted to be a teacher."

Then she read in the newspaper that a 'Commerce stream' had just been started at the pre-university level. She was thrilled and applied right away, sailed through the interviews and resigned from her auditing job the instant a teaching position was offered. "I've had no regrets; in fact I'm very glad to be doing something more meaningful; touching lives. Right from the start, teaching gave me that kind of satisfaction and sense of achievement. When I see students, and especially children, doing well, it's like, 'Wow!' I feel very happy. That is the reward."

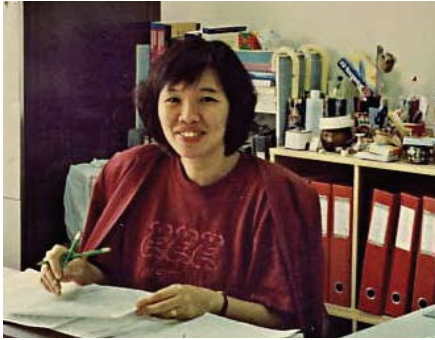
After NIE and 3 years of teaching at Swiss Cottage Secondary School (SCSS), she joined St Andrew's Junior College (SAJC) and soon became HOD/Commerce. Her principal, Mrs Belinda Charles, kept steering interesting new challenges her way, like starting the SAJC Cooperative Bookshop. "I asked Belinda, 'Are you sure? I will go all out to do it, but it won't be simple. Are you able to give me the people that I need? Like the one in charge of the library? These are already very committed people.' Belinda said, 'Take whoever you need!' empowering me just like that."

Naturally, the accountant in Hwee Heng set up the Cooperative to be very business-like, with Commerce students acting as committee members, handling purchasing, publicity, sales, stock taking, accounting, and even personnel by recruiting other students to do the day-to-day running of the bookshop as a CCA. All staff and students were invited to be the shareholders. The



Cooperative proved to be such a real-life learning experience that, even after Hwee Heng's departure, it continued growing. "SAJC was so much fun! Belinda kept giving me new duties, like being the Student Council teacher-advisor, so even after 15 years I never felt like I'd been in that school for a long time. I'd never say no to whatever they gave me. That way I learned a lot."

With all the experience she had garnered in SAJC and the success she had with the various projects entrusted to her, Hwee Heng was seen by her superiors as someone who could contribute in a school leadership position. Hwee Heng, however, was quite comfortable and settled in her position at SAJC. When the Commerce stream was about to be phased out in late 1990, she faced a dilemma. "Since there was no obvious subject for me to teach, I accepted a Vice Principal position back at Swiss Cottage; but truthfully, I really didn't want to become a principal. For one thing, my son was just 3 years old; and frankly, I didn't think I could do the job. Especially my English; I didn't feel it was adequate." While she had wanted a longer stint at Swiss Cottage, her prior experience and her leadership capacity had been noticed and impressed her superiors and at the end of the first year as Vice Principal, the call came for her to head up a small neighbourhood school on Still Rd. "I couldn't believe it. Telok Kurau Secondary School. I didn't even know where TKSS was! I did not know the school at all. I kept saying, 'No! I really don't want to go!'" But true to form, Hwee Heng took up the challenge.



The TKSS she faced was in the midst of change. Situated in an old school building, the enrolment over the years had been dropping with many students opting for newer schools in the vicinity. The irrepressible 'problem solver' in Hwee Heng took over. Determined to build on the school's history to take it to new heights she went about finding those areas she could make an impact. What could she do to turn this around? Her first meeting with parents was not promising. "That first day was Sec 1 registration and I could sense the situation: somehow parents were inclined toward moving their children out of the school. I introduced myself, and calmly announced to all the parents that they needn't bother applying for a transfer. The Ministry would only consider medical reasons or change of address, so they couldn't get out. After my little talk, many of them still stood up, turned around and grabbed their transfer forms. They still wanted to go. I was so shocked!" Hwee Heng quickly realised that the dropping enrolment had also taken its toll on the staff. This was her key leverage point and she knew she had to work with her staff.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Education appointed an experienced principal as a Mentor to guide Hwee Heng in her first year as Principal. Mr Moo Soon Chong (the first Principal of the Singapore Sports School) was a man who dared to dream and had a big heart for staff well-being. He became her '*Shifu*' from that day onwards. She learned a lot from him. "I learned that building the capacity of your staff is key. We must take care of their well-being and provide support to enable them to perform."

At that point, her superintendent Mrs Yu Sing Tong, who was a strong believer in the principles of Learning Organisation (LO), brought in a 2-year training course for principals, vice-principals and some HODs

in East 1 Cluster. In that way she helped build the community of practice among her cluster schools.

After the course, Hwee Heng started to share the LO tools with her school staff by creating an environment that was conducive to generative conversation during staff meetings. She provided structure for teachers in the same department to work as a team, encouraging them to share their experiences or strategies at the departmental and school level.

By 2001, four years after her arrival at TKSS, Hwee Heng and her team were on track but only able to bring the school's academic results to just below her target of 'value-addedness'. At this time, she received her next posting to Woodlands Secondary School (WSS). She left with a feeling of unfinished business! Later she was delighted that her successor managed to achieve academic value-addedness for TKSS.



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE?

Double in size, WSS brought its own set of challenges. "I recall that very first staff meeting: both the VP and I were 'the new management'; everyone looked so eager! I asked, 'What do you want to change?' 'Discipline!' they said. 'OK, let's work together.'"

At that time, gangsterism was perceived to be a common problem in some schools in the Woodlands area. Hwee Heng found not one, but three neighbourhood gangs that had penetrated the school. Her tone had to be 'discipline first'; and she introduced caning, when necessary, making examples of all the chief gangsters: Chinese, Malay, and Indian; everybody witnessed her determination. She recalls telling the teachers: "You must believe in them first and then you'll be able to set high expectations and come up with

your whole action plan to help them. If you don't believe in them, there's no way you could 'save' these students."



"I remember in SAJC, I took one tutorial class of repeat students; the last class. As a teacher the first thing I would always tell my students was, 'Nobody has ever failed under me. It will be the same for you. No exceptions!' And, you know, 100% made it! I believed in them, and communicated my expectations to them very clearly; then I monitored them very closely! Much later, one former SAJCian told me I was very fierce, that they were all scared of me. So, I didn't wait until I was a principal to be like that! I just exercise my right of influence. What

But I'm only a teacher!

“Some teachers say, 'The students are only scared of the Principal or Discipline Master or HOD!' But you don't need a title to influence people. That is a very important concept that everyone needs to grasp. I always say to my new teachers, 'You can break a person's life, but you can also touch a person's life, influence them deeply. You are that very important person, their teacher!'”



I feel is right I will do. That's me." Hwee Heng is quite fearless in that way, strong and consistent. She assumes the authority. If questioned, she has already thought it through.

Hwee Heng sees feedback as the key to improvement so listening is a big part of her job. "Anyone can walk into my room. Anyone. Parents, students or staff. My door is open. No matter how angry a parent might be, my aim is for them to walk out of my office feeling that we are working together for the best interest of the child." It gives her the chance to deal with issues first hand. Instead of complaining to the Ministry, more parents come straight to her because they know she will listen. "With sincerity we can touch them."

“ In fact if you need to use your position, your title — 'I am the leader! You do what I say!' — believe me, it doesn't work. It's far more challenging these days. As leaders, we need to set direction; but we also need to empower people to work, and give them space, freedom; and trust that these people are mature enough to say, 'I take the full responsibility and accountability.' ”

"I prefer to give honest and objective feedback to people: about expectations, performance and weaknesses — where things have gone wrong. If I feel something's not right, I will take action."

The Learning Organisation approach which fits so naturally with Hwee Heng's own values and strategies quickly found purchase with her young team at WSS. Creating a learning climate through substantive dialogues did not come easy. Getting and giving feedback through generative communication took much time and energy.

WHO SAYS NT STUDENTS CAN'T PERFORM!

Hwee Heng has great empathy for her Normal Technical stream, that 'pitiable' end of the student profile whose already challenged self-esteem gets battered even further when taught the standard syllabus. Under a new tool introduced by MOE called Innovation Protocol, she convened an interdisciplinary team to try and find ways of engaging the interest of these students. Using ethnographic techniques, their research revealed the sample group's likes and dislikes: in food, friends... and teachers; and more surprisingly, the dreams and aspirations they actually harboured. Armed with these insights the teachers crafted together a 10-week integrated curriculum based in experiential learning and themed around the Bike Trail at Pulau Ubin. "Wow! That was very interesting. They all could cycle well; but many had never in their life been to Pulau Ubin. Ah, but before they could go there were 10 weeks of preparatory lessons.



I went with them, you know. OK, I walked; but with this group I didn't dare cycle!" Hwee Heng appears very proud and appreciative of her team's efforts — they had hesitated, struggled and eventually found alternative ways of delivering the syllabus.

Hwee Heng and her team in WSS have introduced a wide range of experiential learning — including a butterfly garden! For the aesthetics part of the curriculum, she encouraged all students to take up the guitar. After just one year there were quite a number of very good players, enough to form a guitar ensemble and enter the Singapore Youth Festival (SYF). "Some of the heavy-weight schools were there; my group looked very miserable. My VP, HOD/CCA and I were there to provide support, so we reminded them, 'Just have confidence, believe in yourselves! You can make it!'" In 2006, the 23-member guitar ensemble snatched the Silver Award for the first entry, and in 2007, the now over 30-member strong ensemble outdid themselves, receiving a Gold Award.



IDEAS

In 2002, Hwee Heng went to Australia with the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) participants to visit some schools that implemented IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools). When NIE and MOE collaborated with University of Queensland, Australia, to pilot the IDEAS programme in Singapore, Hwee Heng was offered that opportunity to bring her whole teaching staff together to develop a school-wide pedagogy (SWP), a common language for teaching.

An initial survey of students, parents and staff showed that one of the key areas needing improvement was engaging students' learning. HOD/EL, Mr Poh Soon Koh, was tasked to lead in this initiative. He led the staff through 5 phases namely discovering, initiating, envisioning, actioning and sustaining. When invited, 13 teachers volunteered to join in the actioning stage to build the SWP. Hwee Heng's conditions to the 13 teachers were explicit: to be daring enough to allow their class lessons to be videotaped and then critiqued honestly and meaningfully by students, parents, as well as peers. What emerged was a set of Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP) principles:

1. Create a Conducive Learning Environment
2. Think, Challenge and Question
3. Teacher as Facilitator: use of modelling and scaffolding
4. Collaborative and Experiential Learning: emphasise social and authentic learning
5. Impart Values by Seizing Teachable Moments
6. Tap on Prior Knowledge

Equipped with this home-grown recipe, every teacher in WSS prepared a lesson that peers then observed, videotaped and evaluated. During a subsequent in-house teachers' conference, WSS invited schools from the cluster to give feedback and share these lesson plans. From this 2-year exercise, a community of practice was beginning to emerge in Woodlands SS, revitalising educational practice within and beyond their walls.

The sense of being part of an energised, effective team has literally transformed teacher confidence at WSS. The issue of high staff turnover was thus addressed. From designing integrated curriculum to experiential learning and CCA renewal, staff have been tackling their jobs with an enthusiasm that has translated into student achievement both academically and in CCAs. In fact, enrolment has grown to capacity and Hwee Heng has admitted having to turn students away.

"Staff development is really the core; this means having a genuine community of practice, open sharing among peers and not taking things personally. It's very professional, actually; we're really talking about pedagogy. Like my science department, constantly revamping their syllabus — one science teacher has written a whole book!" WSS is now focusing their community of practice in Action Research on pedagogical innovations.

Now in her seventh year at Woodlands SS, and with rumblings of her next posting in the air, Hwee Heng is happy and enjoying her job. "To be very frank with you, I never imagined I could become a principal. I always looked

at Belinda, how well she spoke, especially off the cuff. I could never be up to her standard. That was my thinking, you know. Then, as a new principal I would write and write and practise and practise before speaking. But now, after many years of experience, I'm OK, more relaxed for an impromptu speech." When it comes to English, Hwee Heng may be at a disadvantage; one may find fault with her language — but not with her logic or her conviction; in Belinda Charles' words, "an amazing lady who takes on every challenge."

It's a shame Hwee Heng's dad isn't around to share in her sense of accomplishment. "My father came from China at a very young age. He was the type who'd go back to contribute money or get people to raise funds to build a school or add new facilities. His loyalty to his old school there must have influenced me; his respect for the profession. When I joined this profession he was very proud; always telling people about his daughter, the teacher. He passed away while I was a vice principal. His lungs gave way.

"When I first took on the job, what surprised me most was how I totally forgot that I didn't want to be principal... suddenly this problem was on my plate, so I had to solve it! I had to get people to come together on the issues. Maybe I don't work the way a principal is really supposed to. It's in my nature; given any job, any position, I just feel I must do it well." At the end of our interview, Hwee Heng laughed heartily, offered me the few remaining cookies baked for us by her Sec 3 students, pushed up her sleeves and got back to work. 🍪



From non-grad teacher to MOE's Director of Training & Development, the path marking this man's career reveals a persistent theme:

Putting People First

"Pleased to meet you, Mr Hodge!" (Vigorous handshaking.)

"Two metres." (More vigorous handshaking.)

"I beg your pardon?"

"Two metres. That's the answer to the question going through your mind now."

An imposing figure, certainly. But people quickly discover that behind the height and the stern countenance, Winston James Hodge possesses a deep well of warmth, intelligence and humour. His predilection for gentle teasing is complemented by a sincere and caring side that leaves an equally deep impression. During 360° interviews, colleagues uniformly described him as a 'people person' first and foremost; and as someone who's had a major, transformational impact on them, both professionally and personally. Although the 'boss' to all of them, none speak about having worked for him; 'with' is their preposition of choice.

Take Alexius Chia, a former colleague at St. Gabriel's and now a Lecturer at NIE. During his maiden year of teaching, when a sudden vacancy left him holding the English department reins, Alex felt totally unqualified. Winston, himself having just been called to fill in on VP duties, threw Alex a lifeline — guiding the nervous newbie through the nuts and bolts of HODship. "He was a very hands-on leader, really, playing a very strong mentoring role for me influencing a lot what I would eventually do as a HOD. What's more, he loves food — that's one of the reasons we got along so well. If he knew a HOD meeting might stretch over the whole day, he'd come with his walnut cake, his home-baked sugee cake or homemade sandwiches, so that we'd feel comfortable. He was always concerned that we were well fed; if we were hungry, we wouldn't be able to work well. That may seem trivial to some, but it really meant a lot to us: your principal actually bothering to do this! We felt really good, looked after."

Alex also recalls how, at the end of one pressure-packed day of determining which St. Gabriel's students would receive scholarships or bursaries, a serious error surfaced that he'd made in his rankings —

two hours after the awards had already been handed out. "I went straight to his office not knowing what would happen, because believe me, I've dealt with bosses that shout at you when you've made a mistake. But his reaction really surprised me; he was very calm. He was the one who actually had to calm me down." After a few strategic phone calls and some driving around town switching bursaries and smoothing feathers, Winston had the situation contained. "I went to his office later and apologised and he said, 'Everybody makes mistakes; it doesn't help the situation to start shouting. That'll just make the person feel worse.' I was in just my second year of service, and really, that made a huge impact; something I remember to this day. It's affected my own approach. Every organisation has its hierarchy; but frankly I've never seen any leader that treats people, regardless of their position or level in the organisation, with so much respect. I didn't think of him as a role model when I was working with him; but now, looking back, I realise he was a very good role model."

Being perceived as a genuinely caring boss certainly helps when one is trying to foster a workplace culture that actually empowers. Yet it's really only one part of the equation that Winston employs. Another crucial component is what he refers to as 'collective leadership'. "I think that can happen in any kind of grouping. But there are a few things people need to know: they need to feel safe; they need to feel they're not always



Winston with RJC staff

“ People, Environment, Opportunities; those are the 'big rocks' of his leadership framework, expressing the way he wants the school run – from getting the right staff, the right school leaders, the right management team, to staying focused on students. 'Student focused-teacher supported' – that's the People component. Environment: 'iron sharpens iron' – his idea is to create an environment where highly motivated staff and students interact freely in a dynamic and vibrant environment that propels innovation and progress. At the same time, he is focused on creating something like family: caring, safe, conducive. And Opportunities – meaning to create a 'buffet' of opportunities for the students. In CCAs, academically, experientially, in every way. ”

Mrs Chia Geok Boon, VP, Curriculum and Faculty



being appraised and judged every time they open their mouths; and there needs to be an understanding that not everything that we discuss or say is going to become part of the plan. It's a discussion. So at the end of the day it depends how well the leader creates that climate.”

So it's not a matter of creating 'good vibes' and then letting things take care of themselves – far from it. Fundamental to Winston's approach is putting in place well thought out systems to truly support staff as they participate in change. And it's a leader's job to make sure those 'implementation frameworks' actually do mesh with the intent of any change in

“ I still remember my first impression of him: a very intimidating man! When he talked to me I had to look up to him all the time. After getting to know him, I began realising that his is actually a serving kind of leadership; he embodies that. He sees himself not just as Head, but actually as a servant alongside us. His leadership is inspirational: I see a great difference from when I first started as an RJC teacher; we have achieved change in leaps and bounds. ”

Ms Lee Lih Sin, HOD Science

policy or procedure that is being introduced into an organisation. Inclusiveness – in the problem-solving and decision-making process – is perhaps the defining charac-

teristic of his leadership. It's hardly a revolutionary idea; but it's an idea that for many leaders often stops at lip service.

“ He was a very good principal to have because he really geared everybody towards a more caring culture, a more values-based environment intent on character development. As principal he walked the talk, so the staff really understood that to be central. You always look to the head of the organisation to get an indication of what the organisation stands for. ”

Mrs Melissa Lim Ai Lin, Dean, Student Development

“ He brought in a new culture – a paradigm shift, really – giving us the latitude, the freedom, so we could go out and explore, with real support and encouragement. He believes in challenging the process: a healthy questioning of the status quo. Why are we doing what we are doing? Is there a better way to do it; a more effective way? Or can we do something new? So I think that way of encouraging us by giving us the space is fantastic! For me it was a first. ”

Mr Michael Jeyaseelan, HOD Physical Education



Miss Lee Lih Sin



Mrs Melissa Lim Ai Lin



Mdm Ku Geok Boon



Mr S. M. Michael Jeyaseelan

Winston enlists involvement exceedingly well; and while that skill appears second nature to him, he is quick to point out that it has come through a lot of exposure, experience, and training. He thrives on seeing staff become agents of change. That must gratify the perpetual teacher living at his core.

Such deeply held convictions about the essentials of leadership have left their trace. Listening to members of his Raffles Junior College leadership team describing his 7 years with them, it's hard not to be impressed by his legacy; to say nothing of the pride and sense of ownership they exhibit about what's occurring in their school and the culture shift they have helped bring about.

LET'S DO SOMETHING UNUSUAL!

Asked about the source of his evident knack for leadership, Winston ponders, then points out key influences: "Having been an only child, and being an assertive one, I was given a lot of space to be myself, to do my own thing. I think a lot of it came from exposure to projects when I was younger; and training courses later on. Intuitively, I am an orderly person. When I went to teach class, for example, I knew what I was going to do for the whole week. Of course it took discipline to actually write your lesson plan down. But in my mind, I knew what I wanted to do, why I wanted to do it and the outcomes I was looking for. It's something that comes quite naturally to me." And something which echoes back to his childhood.

Winston remembers gathering a whole group of Sec 1 friends to scheme up adventures — like tracing the Serangoon Road Canal, from the Rex Theatre right back to its source! One less sanguine chum suggested they explore as far as possible... by bus; then finish on foot. So off they went... Winston had the next brainwave: spend one Saturday



“Really from the start I knew that learning wasn't just about the classroom. It's about the whole world, you know. And when you cannot bring the world into your classroom, you've got to go out.”

mountain climbing! After cleverly locating the base of Mount Faber and debating as only 13-year-olds can whether or not it was actually a mountain, they began their assault. Visions of finding big caskets of gold, or skeletons, spurred them upwards. "I knew why we wanted to do it: to have fun, to do something different, to chart something quite new and just enjoy ourselves. I knew what to do, the climbing up. And the whole outcome was to have bragging rights! There was no gold, no skeletons, and some parts were really, really steep. But we did it! We'd gone up, you know, on our own."

In addition to drama productions in school, Winston was involved with some amateur drama groups when they were just getting started in Singapore like the Experimental Theatre Club and the National Library Group. "Drama, both on stage and behind the scenes, is a very useful platform to develop people because you've got to take control of so many factors to achieve a tightly prescribed goal. Everything from costumes, stagecraft, planning, rehearsals, to selling of tickets... it's an inherently messy, chaotic process that either works or doesn't — all geared to getting your act together for those X minutes on the stage. And I've learned that, in a way, that's been my management style."

BACKING UP THE LADDER

Practically from the outset of his Christian Brothers education (St. Michael's / St. Joseph's) Winston knew he'd become a teacher or writer. At Sec 2, he qualified for the science stream even though with hindsight he felt his strength was in the Humanities. "I enjoyed biology; chemistry was tolerable; and physics was beyond me." He did manage to clear his 'A' Levels at Gan Eng Seng but not sufficiently to make the university cut. He happily joined the Institute of Education where his heretofore

overlooked affinity for the Humanities was ignited into a serious passion, courtesy of his 'wonderful' English teacher, Miss Penny Liew. "When I think of master teachers, teachers that have this profound effect on their students, she would be that person."

But that open door to English language and literature would have to wait, as Winston became completely swept up by the adrenaline of being a classroom teacher. "Well, I was having a ball teaching science at Outram Secondary School, and much to the credit of the school leaders there, they gave me a lot of leeway to go beyond the classroom and subject discipline. Adventure camps, excursions, taking students to Malacca: in those days, being given such chances was pretty special."

“I still remember getting my 'A' Level results the second time, seeing the results, and it was good enough for me to get to the University, real satisfaction. I was in the school canteen. The first person I shared it with was this lady, who became my wife actually, and she cried... because she knew I was going to leave the school because of that.”

Before he knew it, 8 years had elapsed and then one day a close friend came up to him to say she was going off to university in Australia. It was the wake-up call he needed. Through an MOE scheme, Winston became a student again, retaking his 'A' Levels in the morning, teaching in the afternoons, then marking and studying at night. "Grueling!



“As with any school, you've got to quickly establish yourself as a professional. People will respect you not because of your title or credentials, but because of what you stand for; your ideas, vision and capability. I think expectations are always very high in the Raffles schools.”

But the best decision of my life. As studying in the university was what I'd always wanted, I worked hard for it.”

At NUS the quest for knowledge was all he'd imagined – invigorating, deep, conceptual and tremendously enjoyable. He actually felt a tinge of regret going back to teaching; English this time, at St Gabriel's school. But all that quickly evaporated. He had filled an important personal gap and the added confidence was quickly recognised. As St. Gabriel's evolved – changing location, expanding, with lots of new staff – Winston found himself on a fast track which perfectly matched his appetite for new challenges, learning and leadership.

“At the heart of it, teaching is about people; it's about equipping people and seeing them grow. And that doesn't stop as a VP or as a principal; your classroom becomes basically not your students but your staff. You don't just work with a static group of people and say, 'Work! Work! Work!' A large part of the leadership job is to actually grow your people. As a school leader, and even now as a Director, I take a very hands-on approach to developing people, to mentoring people. The scope may not be the same as that of a classroom teacher, but it gives me great satisfaction nevertheless.”

THE RAFFLES FAMILY

From St. Gabriel's, the Ministry called him for a 2-year stint as a School Superintendent. He found this quite valuable because he was exposed to primary and secondary schools, JCs, the full range of different schools. When he was posted to Raffles Junior College (RJC), Winston saw a big contrast from St. Gabriel's in terms of student profile – in age, obviously, along with development and maturity. And in a JC, there's a much shorter window of opportunity to influence them. “But you work with what you have; and it was a different kind of satisfaction. The capacity of the students was tremendous. In addition to providing the students with a rigorous academic programme to engage and stretch them intellectually, we placed much focus on the development of character and leadership, an area I feel quite strongly about. Essentially, it's still about people and figuring out how you can best serve them; that doesn't change.”

Having no first-hand experience or knowledge of the Raffles culture, Winston faced quite a steep learning curve. Since he was depending on others to 'level up those gaps', a large measure of his natural humility was needed. “I was fortunate because I had good colleagues; and the 'old boys' were very supportive. I worked with the School Advisory

Committee, who to their credit, accepted me quickly, despite my not being an old boy. Their bottom line was, 'Can this person serve the interests of Raffles? Does he have a heart for the staff and the students and the culture of the school?' And I think that once that was established, I had no problem getting support. It came hand in hand with my understanding the culture of the school.”

“That's why RJC was a wonderful stint. We started with our strategic plans, and we did the move to the new campus; the move to independent status; the move to the Raffles Integrated Programme. All this required lots of serious thinking, planning. First, the conceptual: the policies, the intent. After that, the nuts and bolts: what's the implementation framework? How will it impact the people? How will we smooth it out? How will we communicate? How do we make sure that things move from here to this point to the next point; in a way that is seen as an 'added value', rather than just change for its own sake? I've always enjoyed doing those kinds of things.”

Winston finds that, in any school, once the rhythm of the year kicks in, the key challenge for principals is to actually keep looking at and thinking about strategic directions. It's precisely when things are humming along nicely, that inputs are needed: to improve systems and better equip people. And not everyone needs to be a 'first level strategic thinker'. What's critical is having enough people on one's leadership team who are thinking together and planning ahead.

“Then you need to be able to communicate involvement of the rest of your teachers. And while I believe teachers need a strategic mindset and to understand the rationale for decisions affecting them and





As ever, his staff find themselves thoroughly engaged. A current target (one of the many) is to have a School Staff Developer (SSD) in every Singapore school by 2010. The policy intent has been carefully crafted; the implementation frameworks and communication strategies are all falling into place. The SSD oversees training for that whole school and ensures that the training is both customised to the individual's needs and aligned to the strategic vision of that particular school. "Our goal is to provide a systematic plan for professional development in schools. The network of SSDs will help us to be more responsive and relevant."

the school, it would be unfair to expect them to be thinking about things that are far removed from their critical role in the classroom. So at RJC, with all the changes happening, teachers were feeling quite a bit of turbulence in terms of the future. I kept reminding them, whatever changes that take place, now or down the road, the role of the teacher remains the same: to be the best teacher you can in the classroom: to engage your students in the learning process; to have a level of subject mastery and to make sure that learning takes place, building rapport so that your students are well cared for. So no matter what we do, that doesn't change."

Different schools can have widely differing issues – all of them burning. Winston believes the educational system can customise to that reality by trusting principals. "They must be given autonomy to do the necessary; of course principals also need to understand: with autonomy comes accountability. We should all be very clear about what requires compliance, and what is in fact a guideline within which you can work. These are exciting times. You couldn't have asked for a better time to be



a Principal in Singapore. But you need to understand the ground rules."


The Burning Platform

Winston has found that, when he has to manage change, he first needs to articulate the 'burning platform.' "Once people understand, the necessary changes in mindset often take place on their own!"

FROM 30 TO 30,000

From that first science class back at Outram Secondary the scope of Winston's influence has certainly expanded. Today, as Director of Training and Development, MOE, his portfolio reaches out to every school in Singapore's education system, with the aim of making sure teachers and non-teaching staff are equipped for the challenges of educating our young. In his off-beat office with walls covered with artwork from his various school experiences, discussions unfold – without chairs – Winston prefers low-to-the-floor sofas that somehow bring everyone to the same level. This quirkiness adds to that sense of possibility that characterises working with Winston: it's not so much a 'meeting' as setting out on some sort of shared adventure. And one suspects that's exactly how Winston perceives his work – as a non-stop adventure.

His 29 years of experience in the service, almost all of it in schools, give Winston a tremendous source of confidence in taking on this new portfolio. "I know the ground well. Having been there I know how teachers would respond; and I know the challenges teachers face." He feels strongly that the best people to actually effect decisions about the students will be the principal and his or her teachers. He gives a lot of credit to the Ministry for having recognised that early on; and fostering school principals' autonomy. "The 'bottom-up initiative top-down support' model has been apt and opened the way to a harvest of wonderful ideas from the ground: TLLM Ignite and the 100 schools, all sorts of great initiatives; and they're just the beginning. Without that autonomy there is always a danger that we can become very homogeneous in our ideas and in our approach."

When former colleague Alex Chia heard that Winston was the new Director, Training and Development, he thought that he was the best person for that job "because of that first impression you get, that people are important, that people need to be developed to the best of their abilities. You know, he was one of the very few people who encouraged me to pursue a Master's degree, not to benefit my career or salary advancement but because I'd feel better about myself. And he said, "You know, in running a department, knowledge is important: but it is equally important to manage people and to manage systems; to recognise the strengths of the people who work with you." 



“ There's a story about two workmen who were painting Winston's new office at Teachers' Network, commenting to each other in Hokkien, "This man is crazy! Why does he want black and crimson walls? The colours clash!" After listening for a while Winston said, "Don't worry guys. It'll look fine!" — speaking to them in Hokkien, of course! So the two were stunned... a bit worried; but they ended up really admiring the artwork and left quite happy with the result! ”

“ This was done by one of my Normal Stream students in the Art Club at St. Gabriel's when, at that time, Normal stream students weren't eligible to take art at 'O' Level. I'd actually taken the club members to Bali on an education tour, and this fellow had a wonderful artistic flair, a metaphorical eye, even though his style was very primitive: naïve art, very two-dimensional. It looks fairly straightforward, but when you study it a bit more, it's actually very revealing. The chest looks like a collar and a shirt, but it's actually a person there with a heart. The arm ends as a snake; the house looks insidious; with the odd limb coming out; and yet, there's that star there, about hope. He produced several really interesting pieces. ”



“ I had this painting hanging very low on my office wall in St. Gabriel's; and when boys got caught for something and they were very angry, I would get them to sit on the floor and I would say, 'Stare at this painting until it talks to you!' That's partly to calm them down. And so they stared. And I'd say, 'So, what does it tell you?' And they would think that I'm joking, you know, and they'd say, 'Yeah; nothing, nothing!' 'No! Get back to it! Stare at the painting until it talks to you!' And then they start telling you about the painting, and it's amazing, even from very young students; they would tell you interesting things about it, something that hadn't struck me until one boy pointed it out, 'He's got problems, sir. He's got a lot of hate there, sir. And you see him out there, crying out for help!' and I said, 'Huh? I thought it was just his clothes. But now looking at it, yeah hey, that's true!' So I've kept the painting wherever I've gone. ”

“ Because we'd done all these paintings from Bali, we held an exhibition in CHIJMES; and obviously it was not that big, though big enough for the school; but for the students who had a painting there, it was like the highlight of a lifetime. I'm sure if I spoke to them now they'd still remember it. That's what principals should create: wonderful memories for students, experiences; so that long after you've forgotten all the rules for science or math, it's those things you remember like climbing up that Mount Faber as a child with your friends. ”

PRINCIPIA

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Richard Lim
Principal, Anglo-Chinese School (Primary)
In Pursuit of the Professional Spirit

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Principal, Gongshang Primary School
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Mrs Yap-Ng Hwee Heng
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'Thanks for the feedback!'

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Winston Hodge
Director,
Training and Development Division, MOE
Putting People First

