

Rapport

REPUBLIC POLYTECHNIC CORPORATE NEWSLETTER **JANUARY** 2009 | ISSUE 2



Paint your future at **RP**

HELLO, PIDGET

RP UNVEILS INNOVATIVE
NEW SOFTWARE

GOING GLOBAL

SPREADING RP'S
PHILOSOPHY ABROAD

SOLVE THIS!

AN INSIGHT TO PROBLEM-
BASED LEARNING

ACHIEVING **FULL**
POTENTIAL

Welcome to the RP Open House

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Learning with A Difference.

INSPIRING A NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS

At Republic Polytechnic (RP), students embrace problem-based learning, a technique that bridges the gap between knowledge and application.

STUDENTS ACCUSTOMED to the chalk-and-talk method of studying may take a little time to adapt to RP's problem-based learning (PBL) pedagogy. But once they get the hang of it, they enjoy the process of self-discovery, negotiating teamwork dynamics and ultimately, being responsible for what they learn.

In this issue of Rapport, PBL takes centre stage as students and staff members illustrate how it leads to a holistic and enriching experience for both student and course facilitator. Our editorial team spent a day with international student Dharsaka Tennekoon at RP to see how PBL works in the classroom and beyond (page 12).

Glen O'Grady, Director, Centre for Educational Development, shares more on how students' understanding of concepts and principles are facilitated under the PBL system (page 16). "PBL allows students to be genuinely interested in learning something, so they can better recall what they learn and use the knowledge more effectively," outlines Glen.

In the area of innovation, RP staff members from the School of Information and Communications Technology unveiled a software

application known as the Pidget (or Personal Interactive Digital Guide for Tourists). Their efforts are testament to the strong spirit of innovation on campus (page 8).

These days, the air at RP has an even busier buzz; we are gearing up for Open House on 7 and 10 January 2009. This is an excellent opportunity to find out more about the RP culture, our six schools, four learning centres and 30 diploma courses on offer.

The theme of this year's Open House, 'Paint Your Future', is an apt exhortation to post-secondary school and ITE students standing at an academic crossroad to consider their range of options (page 2).

The dynamics of the job market are constantly and rapidly shifting. In this climate, RP's focus on PBL and life-long skills will prove invaluable as graduates enter the workforce ably prepared to be active learners and problem-solvers. For corporations and hiring industries in search of enthusiastic and capable employees, here's your chance to paint your organisation's future with the right minds and the right attitude. **RP**

PAMELA QUEK
EDITOR

LEARNING — THE RP WAY



👉 Find out how RP students adapt to problem-based learning (page 12).

WELCOME TO RP

The Republic Polytechnic (RP) Open House on 7 and 10 Jan 2009 is the perfect opportunity for students and staff to showcase their projects and achievements in a fun and creative environment.



↑ 'Paint Your Future', the theme of this year's Open House, is an invitation to students to consider the range of diploma options offered at RP.

TOURS, challenges, skits, live demos, rock-climbing competitions and more! Visitors to RP's Open House will find no end of engaging activities to pique their interest. Expected to draw several thousand students from secondary schools and the Institute of Technical Education, the two-day Open House celebrates the vibrancy of campus life, giving potential students an insight into the RP community. Here's an overview of what the various Schools have in store....

SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCE (SAS)

Tour the Anatomy Museum and get a free foot scan to learn about the structure of your feet. Find out how recycled cooking

oil can be used to power up vehicles; take part in the recycling challenge, and have a taste of health-boosting ice cream!

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING (SEG)

See how students learn to program dancing robots. Plus, a showcase of RP's winning robots that have clinched numerous gold medals in national robotic competitions.

SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY (SOH)

How does a student transform into a 'hospitality hero' during the course of his or her education? Find out in a fun skit. Learn about the different table set-ups (for fine-dining, banquet, etc) and don't miss the drinks mixing and juggling demonstration.

SCHOOL OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (SIT)

On display are student projects ranging from a travel diary to a canteen booking system to an interactive RP video tour. SIT will also be conducting a parents' seminar and providing course counselling on site.

SCHOOL OF SPORTS, HEALTH AND LEISURE (SHL)

Try your hand at sports marketing; test your reaction time, teamwork and leadership skills; design a sports tournament format. If you enjoy these activities, you could be well suited for a diploma course from the SHL.

SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY FOR THE ARTS (STA)

Take in students' final-year projects which include 2D art works, 3D art works, new media, installations, set and costume designs. Plus, live performances and screening of films by student and alumni.

CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION (CCC)

Henna painting, batik painting and origami demonstrations promote cross-cultural awareness and racial harmony. Visitors can also don one of several cultural costumes, have their photo taken and reflect on their respective nationalities.

OPEN HOUSE

7&10 Jan 2009
<http://rp.sg/openhouse>



CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CED)

Solve the mystery of the poisoned cat by using a condensed version of RP's One-Day, One-Problem™ process. This exercise activates students' cognitive skills, especially in the area of analysing, reasoning and making connection with given clues.

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE (CIE)

Learn how an innovative mindset can instil lifelong skills that will come in useful in the workplace.

CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS (CSM)

Mathematical concepts like grouping and permutation are illustrated in games like 'Guess the 5th Card'. Meanwhile, a magician is able to deduce your birth date with the use of seemingly random numbers.

THE REPUBLIC CULTURAL CENTRE (TRCC)

Check out the visual arts exhibition, a hip hop dance competition, student rock band performances and various stage acts that showcase RP talent from various interest groups.

OFFICE OF STUDENT AND GRADUATE AFFAIRS (OSG)

Find out more about RP's range of student life activities. Make your way to the Sports Complex for water polo, soccer and rugby exhibition matches; attend an aikido and judo workshop or head for the Adventure Learning Centre for the rock climbing competition.

HOT DATE

Visitors to the RP Open House will receive download access to the first-ever, limited-edition RP 2009 e-calendar and wallpaper to help map their year ahead!



For more information on the RP Open House, log on to www.rp.sg/openhouse.

EDUCATION BEYOND BORDERS

Each year, Republic Polytechnic's (RP) Office of Planning and International Operations (OPI) embarks on various initiatives to spread the school's methodology and philosophy. PHOTO BY EALBERT HO



↑ (From left) Brian Chan, Christina Chan and Amelia Chang are part of the OPI team who recruits international students and markets the RP brand abroad.

STEP INTO THE RP CAMPUS on any given day and amid the chatter of voices and the swell of students coursing through the hallways and school grounds, one thing is evident — clad in fairly similar 'uniform' of jeans and tees are teenagers from Singapore and beyond.

The RP student population, which numbers at 4,500 per annual intake, comprises up to 500 international students who have made Singapore their home for the next three or four years as they pursue a unique RP education. Most of them hail from China (58.6 per cent) and Malaysia (13.4 per cent), as well as Sri Lanka,

Russia, India, Indonesia and Korea.

This is in line with Singapore's agenda to welcome international students from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and beyond, and how globalisation continues to become a part of educational institutions in Singapore. RP takes things one step further through its curriculum that's heavily based on project work and discussions, and by the careful allocation of only one or two international students per class of 25. This fosters interaction and encourages good communication skills between students of various

geographical backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures.

Responsible for growing RP's international student population is the Office of Planning and International Operations (OPI), led by Director Dr Terence Chong. Based on the direction set by Principal/CEO Yeo Li Pheow, strategic planning is done by OPI in consultation with Republic Polytechnic International Pte Ltd (RPI), a not-for-profit wholly-owned subsidiary of RP which supports the school's student overseas programmes. A wide range of initiatives is then rolled out.

GOING GLOBAL

For a start, overseas trips are organised two to three times a year to visit top schools in the region as part of a recruitment drive. Quality international students with a reasonably good command of English and proficiency in subjects like Mathematics and Science are invited to consider applying for a place at RP, explains Christina Chan, Assistant Director of International Operations.

She elaborates: "The recruitment drives vary from country to country, but generally range between four and six days per trip. On these trips, OPI also coordinates and conducts entrance assessments. To date, we have established ties with markets like Vietnam, Brunei and Medan in Indonesia. We generally select cities where students are open to pursuing overseas studies."

Once selected and relocated, international students pursuing an RP education are provided with ample opportunities to better integrate themselves into a new country and education system.

Explains Amelia Chang, Head of OPI's Analysis department: "Through projects and interaction, local students learn about the lifestyle habits, working attitudes and behaviours of international students, and vice versa."

She explains that RP also has an active international students club which organises activities such as Amazing Culture Day (an annual activity that allows international students to share their native cultural events) and I-star (a singing competition which sees international students belting out tunes in English and their respective Mother Tongue languages).

"Two to three times a year, invitations also come from the

Singapore Tourism Board which conducts assimilation programmes featuring sightseeing and food-tasting trips for them," she adds.


BEYOND RECRUITMENT

But OPI is responsible for much more than just the recruitment of international students. Branding, by creating awareness of RP's teaching pedagogies and tertiary education experiences, is also a top initiative.

Says Christina, "Whatever is communicated locally, we bring it overseas too. We build our brand by working with government agencies overseas, by establishing close relationships with schools and partnering with STB and IE (International Enterprise) offices abroad.

"We also try to arrange exchange programmes where we spearhead projects relating to collaborations and visits. In the process, we find matches and explore potential projects which can result in student exchange opportunities. We bring RP's educational methodology overseas to expose it to teachers and educators in the region and we chaperone our facilitators overseas for training, exposure and learning opportunities in countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Brunei. The latter is done as part of staff development."

Christina adds that Singaporean RP students are also given opportunities to be stationed overseas for work attachments or study trips, while teachers from the region get a chance to be attached at RP.

"For me, the most satisfying aspect of my job is to see good students coming to RP, benefiting from what RP and Singapore have to offer and most of all, contributing to RP in their own ways," she smiles. 



↑ Hospitality students enjoy a work stint in Medan, Indonesia, as part of an overseas student industry attachment.



↑ A workshop conducted for a government agency in Hanoi, Vietnam.



↑ An overseas recruitment seminar for secondary school students in Malaysia.



↑ RP's educational methodology is shared with fellow educators in Brunei.

ENGAGING CURIOUS MINDS

Republic Polytechnic (RP) is fast carving a reputation for itself on the local scene, thanks to the enthusiasm of the schools outreach team led by **DR TAN LAY PHENG**. PHOTO BY EALBERT HO



innovative education that nurtures individual potential, drives pursuit of aspirations and meets global industry needs." Elaborating on the institution's strengths, Dr Tan is confident that RP students, through PBL, will acquire problem-solving, communication and IT skills. In addition, through frequent classroom presentations, students also develop confidence, inter-personal skills and learn how to work as a team. In totality, these skills prepare them to be independent, adaptable, and fit for the working world.

"We are committed to building students' knowledge and developing their skills in an engaging and explorative environment. We will provide students with a vibrant student-life environment and give them opportunities for international exposure, service leadership, arts, sports and industry experience."

Those keen to find out more about RP can soon visit the permanent exhibition located within the campus. Scheduled to be open in early 2009, it features different booths each offering an insight into RP's six schools. Secondary schools can book a time to visit the exhibition where outreach programmes will be tailored to suit their needs.

And with the warm and effusive Dr Tan leading the programme, visitors and potential students will not only enjoy the presentation, they will also gain insights into RP.

That alone should make Dr Tan happy.

"My role," she declares, "is to work with the RP team to publicise this wonderful institution in the north which has so much to offer potential students." RP

↑ Dr Tan Lay Pheng and her outreach team conduct corporate programmes to share RP's strengths with potential students.

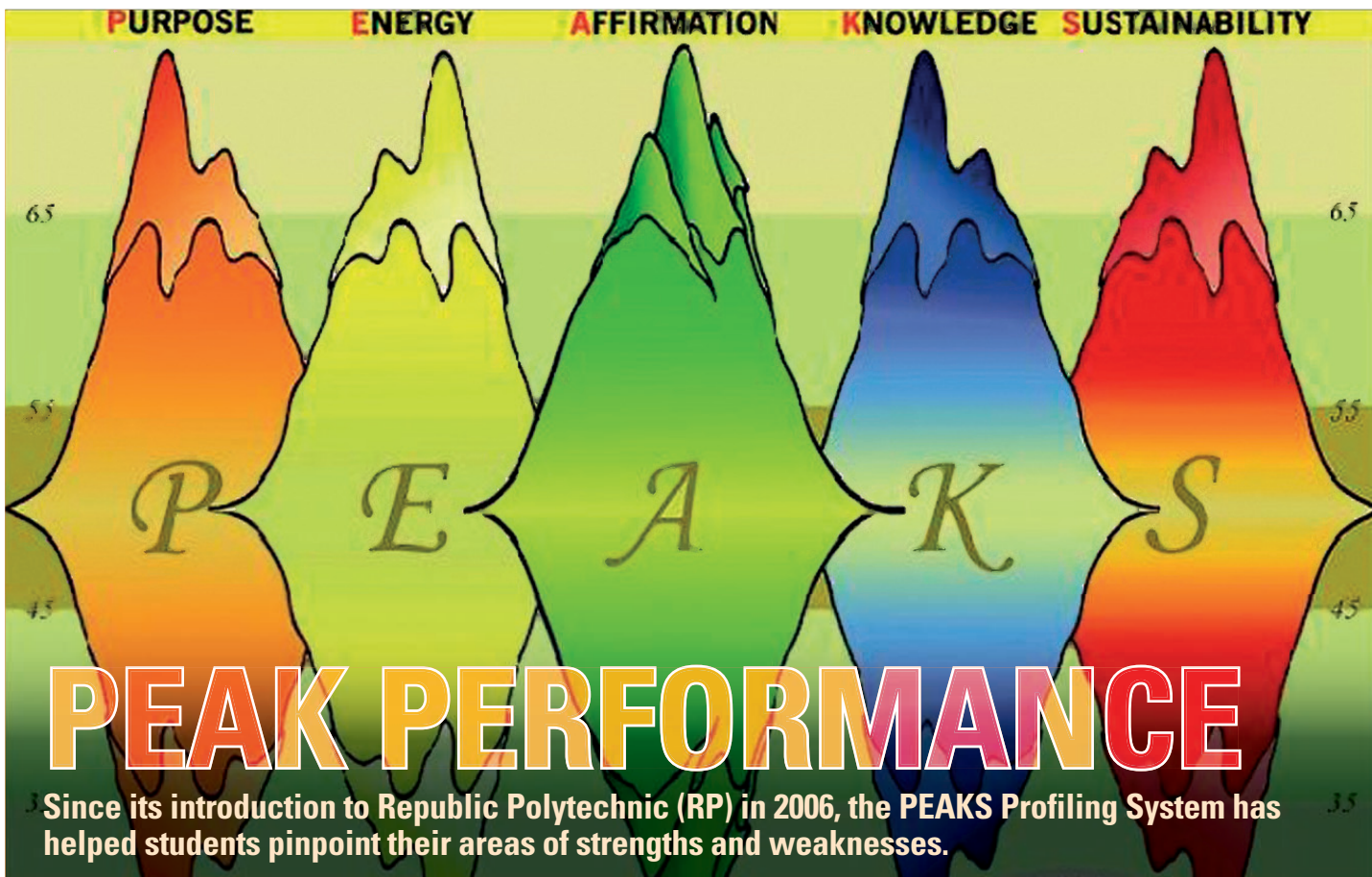
THE AIM IS SIMPLE: To make RP a choice polytechnic for graduating secondary school and ITE students. To accomplish this, a dedicated team from RP's Office of Corporate Communications (OCC), make over 100 visits a year to schools and other institutions to share the polytechnic's strengths and its problem-based learning (PBL) pedagogy (see p16).

Dr Tan Lay Pheng, OCC's Senior Manager (School Outreach/Community Relations), explains that apart from actively seeking avenues to present RP's range of

diploma courses and its brand-new campus, very often, schools will invite RP to give talks on post-secondary education to their graduating students.

"Some principals may even be interested in specific RP schools, such as our School of Hospitality or School of Engineering. If that is the case, representatives from the respective schools will accompany me for the presentations. While I give a general overview of RP, my colleagues can go into detail about the courses we offer," says Dr Tan.

"RP offers a unique and



THINK OF IT AS A MIRROR that reflects your innate potential and helps you optimise your strengths. This, in essence, is what PEAKS (Purpose. Energy. Affirmation. Knowledge. Sustainability) is all about.

A psychometric technology developed by Research Communication International (RCI), a global leadership and innovation research agency, PEAKS is a profiling system that assesses innate human potential at all levels of organisations and societies. By answering a questionnaire, RP students will get feedback on their PEAK profiles. The latter captures and tracks individual development in areas such as personal development, learning styles, career development, entrepreneurial development, team & partnership orientations.

Elaborates Ang Keng Loo, Senior Director (Student Affairs), "PEAKS is introduced to all Year 1 students to help them better understand their strengths and weaknesses, their learning preferences and inclination."

To complement a holistic student development, PEAKS has also been used to support Student Life Activities (SLA). Explains Michael Lim, Manager, Adventure Learning Centre — Outdoor Pursuits,

"Currently, all RP students have a personalised PEAKS profile and an associated Individual Development Plan (IDP). This plan works with the existing SLA framework much like a map-and-compass pairing. Through discovering and pursuing their passions via the various SLAs, RP students can discover more about themselves, develop and commit themselves to change with the help of the IDP."

A strength-focused tool, PEAKS not only helps individuals identify areas in which they have natural strength, it also allows them to choose identified pathways to personal excellence. Says Abdul Kahlid, Assistant Director (Administration), School of Sports, Health and Leisure, "Most critical to the understanding of PEAKS is that it places a strong emphasis on individuals to set the goals they want to achieve." The best thing about PEAKS, he adds, is its ability to serve several purposes. "It can be used for personal excellence, leadership, team development, career coaching, counselling, and feedback."

Spurred by a fundamental belief that everyone can be nurtured and developed to their fullest potential, RP introduced PEAKS to enhance student development. While it is not compulsory for students to undergo PEAKS profiling, its benefits as a character-building, leadership development and career-coaching tool are incentive enough. "We expect to see many taking advantage of what PEAKS can offer," says Mr Ang.

Currently, 496 RP staff members have gone for PEAKS profiling certification and workshops. This allows them to interpret PEAKS personality scores and feedback reports for the purpose of coaching and mentoring.

Shares Mr Ang, "After taking the PEAKS questionnaire, I had a better understanding of myself and my working style. I was also able to discover some of my blind spots. I am sure students will go through a similar experience. It may not be an immediate process, but they will soon discover how to build on their self-worth to become better leaders or exhibit leadership traits." **RP**

Page 1 of 27 Estimated Time Left: 55 minutes

STATEMENT	SD	A	N	A	SA
I don't usually act impulsively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sometimes feel discouraged and totally hopeless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people find me warm and friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I always keep my promises and pay my debts promptly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't usually pay attention to my feelings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often try new ways of doing things in everyday life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often find myself late for meetings: even when I can be early	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am seldom anxious about what the future holds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am suspicious when someone does something nice for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am known to have a very high opinion of myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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👉 Fill up a questionnaire to get your PEAKS profile.



← Senior Academic Staff
 Friso Kluit and his team have created user-friendly tourist tool, the Pidget.

IT IS DUE FOR AN AUGUST 2009 LAUNCH, but already, there's a buzz about the Pidget.

The Personal Interactive Digital Guide for Tourists (or Pidget for short), was created in the Open Source Technology Development Centre, School of Information and Communications Technology, under the leadership of Principal Investigator Friso Kluit and his four-member team, Julian Wong, Lynn Teo, Melani Jay and Dr Zhou Kainan.

“The Pidget is an application that runs on a new handphone platform known as Android. Developed by Google, Android is supported by major corporations such as Motorola, HTC, Sony Ericsson and Garmin,” says Friso.

A software application that makes use of all the functionalities of the Android phone, the Pidget's main features include using GPS to determine the user's current position, a large touch screen to provide easy-to-use interface and different ways (3G, Wifi) of connecting to the Internet.

Designed mainly as a tool for tourists, the Pidget integrates the above technologies to make the exploration of Singapore an enjoyable and hands-on experience.

PIDGET

It's a phone, it's a map, it's a hand-held holiday companion! The Pidget, an innovative work-in-progress, is a Republic Polytechnic (RP) staff project. **FRISO KLUIT**, Senior Academic Staff from the School of Information and Communications Technology, tells us more about this cool new software application. PHOTO BY EALBERT HO



↑ An early beta version of the Pidget is due for release in April 2009.

“We can provide maps showing the nearest points of interests like restaurants, tourist attractions, hotels and MRT stations. But we also plan to implement more innovative tools like customised walking tours, planners, event highlights and suggested itineraries,” shares Friso. “With the integration of technologies, the Pidget enables the user to exploit location-based and time-sensitive information and services.”

“We can provide maps showing the nearest points of interests like restaurants, tourist attractions, hotels and MRT stations.”

Although the Android phone is not yet available in Singapore, it should be in stores by the first half of 2009. By then, Friso and his team hope to make the Pidget available for use in Singapore either for tourists or for locals who want to explore their own country a bit more. “We aim to enhance their experience and enjoyment of Singapore by offering them useful, innovative and interactive applications to run on their Android phones.”

A WINNING IDEA

Although the Pidget is still being fine-tuned, it was debuted at the 15th Infocomm & Media Horizons (ICM’08) last November to much interest. Organised by the Institute for Infocomm Research (I²R), the event is a platform for universities, polytechnics, research institutes and commercial companies to showcase their recent inventions and demonstrate up-and-coming technologies.

Back at RP, the Pidget also won top prize for ‘The Most Innovative TDC Project’ at the annual Quality and Innovation Day (see box). “My team and I feel honoured to have won the Award. It is nice to see our efforts recognised,” acknowledges Friso. “At the moment, there are a lot of developments in the field of mobile computing and we will see more innovation soon.”

What is also noteworthy is how the Pidget team had no previous experience with Android or mobile computing platforms.

“By getting involved with this project, we gained new expertise which will be passed on to students in the form of final-year projects spinning off from the main Pidget project,” enlightens Friso. He adds that this is a good example of how RP’s culture of nurturing innovative technology can benefit both students and academic staff.



CELEBRATING INNOVATION

At RP, technology is so much a part of campus life, all Schools have set up their own Technology Development Centres (TDC), each focusing on a different area of technology. Designed to inspire and encourage staff to kickstart technology-based projects, 13 TDCs are currently working on over 50 initiatives, many of which involve industry collaborations. To maximise their ability to bring new innovations to the public, TDCs are encouraged to collaborate and pool their resources not only with industry, but also with each other.

RP’s annual Quality and Innovation Day, open to all staff, recognises the research and development efforts of the TDCs by running competitions to find ‘The Best TDC’ and ‘The Most Innovative TDC Project’. The Pidget clinched top honours for the latter category at the Quality and Innovation Day in Oct 2008. By putting Quality and Innovation Day on the calendar, TDCs are inspired to actively initiate projects, work on team-building, share their ideas and interact with industry. After all, successful lab-to-layman innovations bring recognition to their respective schools and to RP as a whole.

← And ‘The Most Innovative TDC Project’ award goes to... the Pidget!

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Come March, **Jane Lee** will be leading an all-female expedition to scale Mount Everest. Here, the gungho Republic Polytechnic (RP) training facilitator shares her mountaineering experiences and expectations with Rapport.

IT ALL HAPPENED during a post 'A'-level trip to Nepal. Hiking up to the Annapurna Base Camp with friends, Jane Lee felt the urge to go higher and higher. She may not have realised it then, but she had been bitten by the mountaineering bug. To pursue her passion, she joined the 'Make-It-Real' Student Mountaineering Programme as an undergrad at the National University of Singapore.

"I went on my first technical mountaineering course in New Zealand in 2003, climbed my first Himalayan peak in 2004 and when I got back, I was completely in love with mountaineering." That's when she formed the Singapore Women's Everest Team (SWET) with a few of her team-mates.

Today, SWET comprises six young women whose goal is to attempt to summit the world's highest mountain (at 8,848m) come March this year. A staff member of the Adventure Learning Centre at RP's Office of Student & Graduate Affairs, Jane is part of a team that conducts adventure learning programmes ranging from three hours to multi-day camps.

Says Jane, "In my debrief to students, I always offer this quote, 'Courage is not the absence of fear, but acting in spite of your fear.' I think fear (of rejection, failure or the unknown) holds most people back from becoming incredible individuals. To me, courage means acting with a plan and behaving with composure in a difficult situation, it's not about showy machismo and bravado. I hope students find that useful."



EXCELLENT WORK

RP staff **Tan Chee Liang** and **Adelena Loh** did RP proud when they clinched the Silver Award (Exec) at the Excellent Service Award (EXSA) Ceremony and Best Practices Sharing on 3 December 2008.

INTO ITS 14th YEAR, EXSA recognises the best service individuals from 10 service industries: airport, attractions, banking, healthcare, land transport, hospitality, retail, restaurant, travel and public sector.

A manager (Technology Development) from the Office of Procurement and Technology, Tan Chee Liang's role is to evaluate, implement and promote new technologies at RP. He believes his "people-oriented personality" and ability to be a good listener has helped him in the workplace. He also credits RP for giving him the freedom to exercise creativity when implementing new technologies.

Adelena Loh, a manager (Human Resources, Finance and Administration) from the School of Sports, Health and Leisure, shares her secret for delivering good service: try and get things right from the word go, and when faced with a crisis, direct your energies to finding the root of the problem instead of laying the blame on someone else.

EXSA attracted over 15,000 participants from more than 300 companies. Both Chee Liang and Adelena were nominated by RP for their outstanding commitment to good service.



PHOTO: POH YU SEUNG

Poh Yu Seung (front left) and wife Rosalind (extreme right) took on a fund-raising motorcycle ride.

RIDE FOR LIFE

FOR 10 DAYS LAST OCTOBER, POH YU SEUNG, a Senior Executive at RP's Office of Student and Graduate Affairs, and wife Rosalind, embarked on Enduro Africa, a fund-raising motorcycle charity ride covering 2,000km of South Africa's most rugged off-road terrain. Organised by UK-based social enterprise Global Enduro, the ride was conducted to acknowledge the efforts of Enduro Africa fundraisers worldwide. Yu Seung and Rosalind had each raised \$13,000 from a combination of personal donation and donations from supporters and RP staff. The charities benefiting from the \$26,000 raised by the couple are: UNICEF, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and Sentebale, a charity founded by England's Prince Harry and Lesotho's Prince Seeiso to support orphans and vulnerable children.



PHOTO: EALBERT HO

LIVE ON AIR

RP academic staff **Pandiyan** marries his media experience with his love for teaching.

HEART DISEASE AND POETRY may not make the most compatible of partners, but that didn't deter RP academic staff Pandiyan from weaving poetic verses into a cardiac discussion — live on national television.

A facilitator with the Centre for Culture and Communication, Pandiyan hosts *Udalum Ullamum* (Body and Mind), a weekly Tamil talkshow on MediaCorp's Vasantham channel where medical experts dispense health tips.

An experienced broadcaster with extensive TV and radio experience, Pandiyan, who holds a Computer Science degree from the National University of Singapore, joined RP in 2006 to fulfill his interest in teaching. When Vasantham relaunched in October 2008, he was approached to host the station's new health programme. "My favourite episode has been the one on heart disease where I included some poetry, giving an artistic slant to an otherwise technical discussion. Poetry and heart go hand in hand, don't they?" he chuckles.

His return to the media industry has enabled Pandiyan to experience new technologies and trends in broadcasting and transfer this knowledge to his students. "In particular, I would be able to contribute to one of the modules of the DCID (Diploma in Communication and Information Design) — Fundamentals of Broadcast Journalism. I also plan to conduct media-related Creative Engagement activities and workshops for DCID students in 2009. My current media stint plays a big role in realising this."

FROM INDUSTRY TO CLASSROOM

Under RP's Industry Associate Scheme (IAS), academic staff are encouraged to be associated with an industry in a systematic, coordinated and sustainable way. By allowing academic staff to develop strong links with the industry, collaborations can be facilitated and staff can keep abreast of industry trends and cutting-edge technologies. Putting their industry experience to good use, staff members can incorporate industry practices into the academic curriculum and create relevant educational problems centred on RP's problem-based learning approach.



LIFE LESSONS

Rapport shadows Sri Lankan international student **Dharsaka Tennekoon** for a day and finds out how Republic Polytechnic's (RP) problem-based learning (PBL) works in the classroom and beyond. PHOTOS BY EALBERT HO

A second-year student pursuing a Sports and Leisure Management diploma from RP's School of Sports, Health and Leisure (SHL), Dharsaka Tennekoon has been living in Singapore for the past two years. Having completed his GCE 'O' and 'A' Levels back home in his native Sri Lanka, the 22-year-old — affectionately known as Dharshy to his course mates — says he has been used to the traditional chalk-and-talk method of studying all his life. But he has since embraced the PBL way of life as an RP student.

He explains: "I was not familiar with the PBL system when I arrived here. But I really like it now, because, frankly, lectures are boring!"

In the PBL system, RP students don't attend lectures. Instead, class size is kept at not more than 25 students and

teachers take on the role of facilitators to guide the students' learning process by assigning them a 'problem' for the day.

Even as these problems trigger and stimulate learning, students have to tackle worksheets, make presentations as a team, and end the day by writing in their reflection journal as a form of self-evaluation.

"I like how PBL makes interaction necessary among course mates or discussion team members. I like that we do our own research and make presentations, which allow us to learn more." Dharsaka adds that this method of learning and studying is very challenging as ultimately, it makes him responsible for how much he discovers and absorbs.

Not only does Dharsaka experience PBL in his course which covers areas

like sports psychology, leisure planning and sports-related law, he's also applied the methodology to his favourite sport, water polo. Says the school team player: "I started playing water polo when I came to RP — there is a good team here with three national players. However when I first joined the team, we didn't have a coach. But that didn't deter us from training. We got on YouTube, found relevant videos related to water-polo and picked up training tips from there!" This, he says, is a good example of PBL at work: a real-life problem leads to self-directed discovery where strategies are consciously applied to handle team dynamics and find meaningful solutions.

To get a fuller insight into how PBL is ingrained into student life, Rapport followed Dharsaka as he went about a busy day in school....



▲
09:15

During a Sports Psychology module, Dharsaka discusses the problem scenario with team mates. Their challenge is to devise a programme to help *sepak takraw* players perform better as they prepare for a zonal competition. Each team member is to come up with one or two slides and present their case after lunch.



▲
10:30

Facilitator Lilian Chua engages Dharsaka's team to share their various ideas on how to come up with a schedule to help players improve levels of self-efficacy and confidence, and to overcome their fear of failure. The team has a lively discussion about understanding a sport player's strengths and weaknesses before creating a time schedule of motivational sessions to address the latter.



◀
15:20

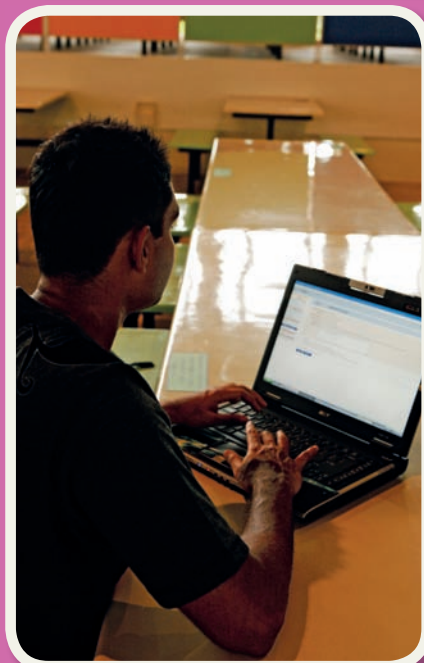
Dharsaka leads his team presentation, giving an overview of what the *sepak takraw* players' weaknesses are and how these are barriers to their self-confidence. The rest of his team mates then make their respective presentations before giving the team's collective recommendation. Facilitator Lilian is impressed with their suggestions and how they substantiated their analyses with personal examples.





17:00

The sky is overcast, but that doesn't stop Dharsaka and his water polo team-mates from warming up and jumping into the pool to practice scoring goals. Whatever difficulties he may encounter during the training session, Dharsaka can be confident that his PBL mindset will help him approach the situation in a social context, with critical reflection further enriching the overall experience. **AD**



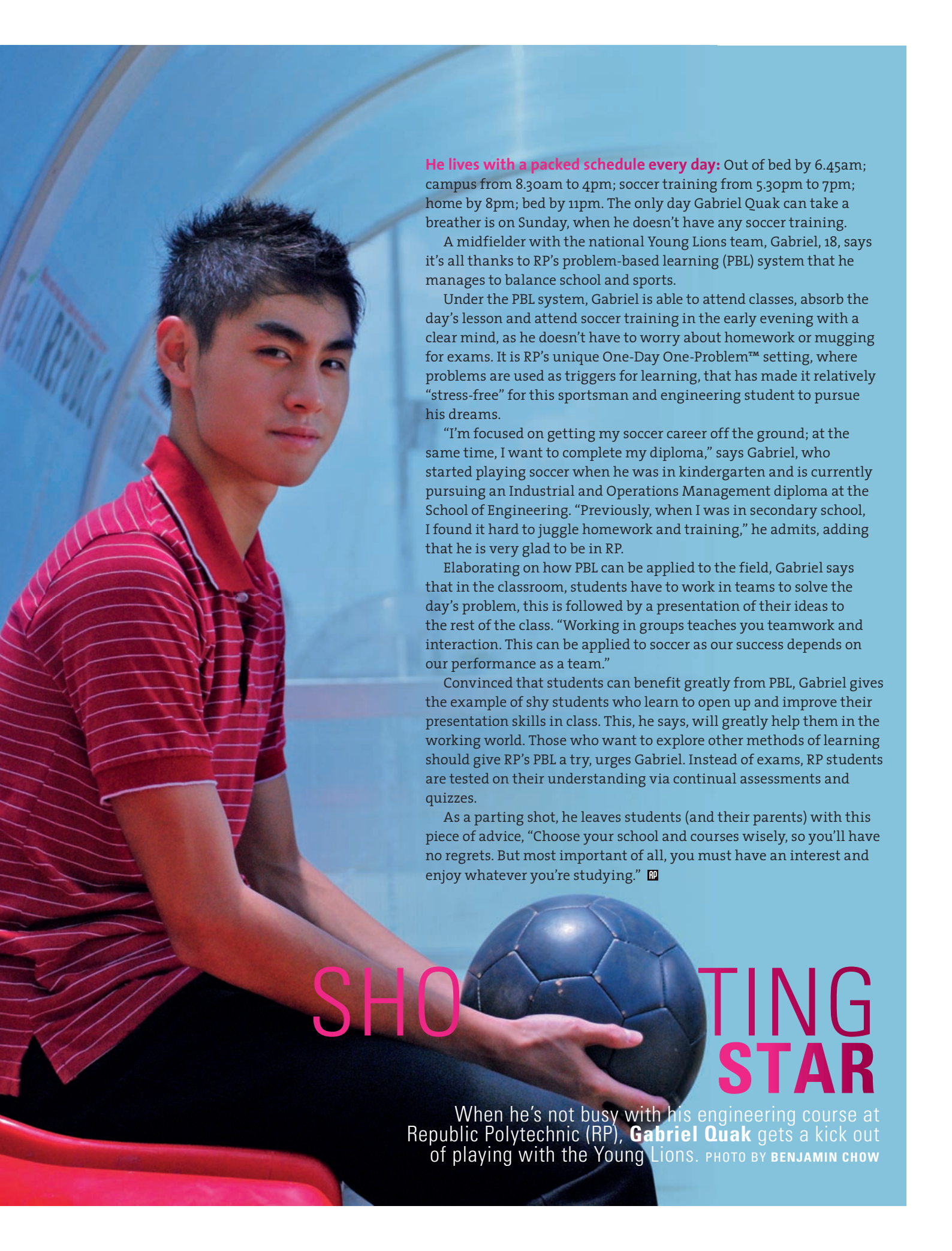
16:15

Lessons are over for the day. Dharsaka unwinds in the canteen with his water polo team-mates.

16:30

Before water polo training starts, Dharsaka works on his reflection journal for the day. This is a form of self-evaluation and is submitted online. The facilitator will assess holistically the quality of the presentation, learning processes exhibited throughout the day, self and peer evaluation and reflection before awarding each student with a daily grade.





He lives with a packed schedule every day: Out of bed by 6.45am; campus from 8.30am to 4pm; soccer training from 5.30pm to 7pm; home by 8pm; bed by 11pm. The only day Gabriel Quak can take a breather is on Sunday, when he doesn't have any soccer training.

A midfielder with the national Young Lions team, Gabriel, 18, says it's all thanks to RP's problem-based learning (PBL) system that he manages to balance school and sports.

Under the PBL system, Gabriel is able to attend classes, absorb the day's lesson and attend soccer training in the early evening with a clear mind, as he doesn't have to worry about homework or mugging for exams. It is RP's unique One-Day One-Problem™ setting, where problems are used as triggers for learning, that has made it relatively "stress-free" for this sportsman and engineering student to pursue his dreams.

"I'm focused on getting my soccer career off the ground; at the same time, I want to complete my diploma," says Gabriel, who started playing soccer when he was in kindergarten and is currently pursuing an Industrial and Operations Management diploma at the School of Engineering. "Previously, when I was in secondary school, I found it hard to juggle homework and training," he admits, adding that he is very glad to be in RP.

Elaborating on how PBL can be applied to the field, Gabriel says that in the classroom, students have to work in teams to solve the day's problem, this is followed by a presentation of their ideas to the rest of the class. "Working in groups teaches you teamwork and interaction. This can be applied to soccer as our success depends on our performance as a team."

Convinced that students can benefit greatly from PBL, Gabriel gives the example of shy students who learn to open up and improve their presentation skills in class. This, he says, will greatly help them in the working world. Those who want to explore other methods of learning should give RP's PBL a try, urges Gabriel. Instead of exams, RP students are tested on their understanding via continual assessments and quizzes.

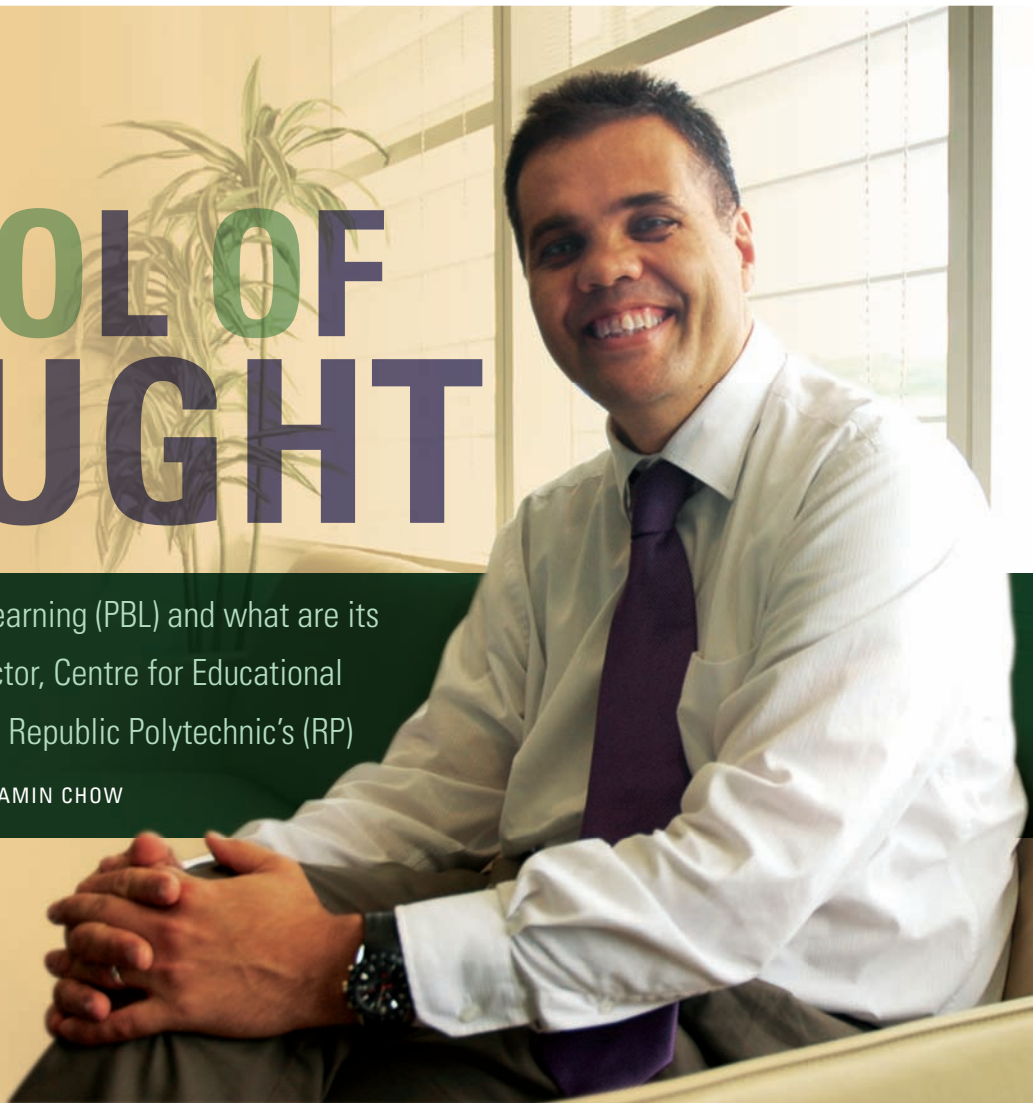
As a parting shot, he leaves students (and their parents) with this piece of advice, "Choose your school and courses wisely, so you'll have no regrets. But most important of all, you must have an interest and enjoy whatever you're studying." **RP**

SHOOTING STAR

When he's not busy with his engineering course at Republic Polytechnic (RP), **Gabriel Quak** gets a kick out of playing with the Young Lions. PHOTO BY BENJAMIN CHOW

SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

What exactly is problem-based learning (PBL) and what are its benefits? **GLEN O'GRADY**, Director, Centre for Educational Development, shares more about Republic Polytechnic's (RP) adopted pedagogy. PHOTO BY BENJAMIN CHOW



AT RP, students develop their capacity to think as they engage in their respective fields of study. In class, they are assisted by a lesson facilitator with industry experience to guide — not instruct — their learning process. That, in a nutshell, is what students at RP encounter as part of their PBL education process.

A methodology first introduced in medical schools by having its students deal with real cases, diagnose problems, conduct research and propose solutions, PBL uses problems and work-life scenarios as triggers for learning in schools all over the world. Says Glen O'Grady, Director, Centre for Educational Development, "It's all about providing support and questioning and comparing ideas. It's a different structure to a learning process that leads to much richer learning outcomes." Here, he tells

us more about this innovative learning process.

What are the advantages of the PBL system, in terms of stimulating learning?

PBL tries to tap on how we naturally learn. For instance, if you placed an object in front of young children, they tend to figure out what the object is by picking it up and playing around with it or asking questions about it. With PBL, what we're trying to do is take how we naturally learn and systematise it in a school context. When you learn naturally, you tend to remember it. PBL allows students to be genuinely interested in learning something, so they can better recall what they learn and use the knowledge more effectively. In contrast, the traditional school formula of lectures and tutorials is

a more artificial approach; we get a question, read a book, find the answer there, write it down and get it graded.

How effective is the PBL system in terms of assessment?

Assessment is a critical part of learning. For PBL, you want to ensure you have an assessment system that is conducive to its learning structure. So, in getting people to learn by experimenting or engaging in discussion, we don't ask them to do a multiple choice test or write what they remember in an essay, because it doesn't then make sense. Our assessment is based on giving students problems and asking them how they go about solving them. What we're testing is not just the answers they come up with to solve the problem, but how they arrive at it.

RP students don't sit for any exams at all — is this true?

We have tests, but not traditional ones like the big three-hour examination at the end of the year. Big exams cannot be the total sum of how we carry out assessments in education. At RP, students do small tests periodically, which allow them to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and principles. They are also assessed on a daily basis where they do self-assessment based on a checklist of what we feel to be characteristics of good learners, and we get them to give peer assessment. Students also have to make presentations and defend their ideas. As a whole, these provide evidence of students' learning and allow their facilitators to make better judgement about how well students really understand.

RP students also have to do self-evaluation through their reflection journals — how powerful an assessment tool is that?

These journals are a critical part of the PBL process. Each day, students write down their reflections about how they have gone about learning. These reflections could be prompted questions like, 'What were the strengths or weaknesses you demonstrated today?' Or 'How did you go about learning?' Over time, this helps them become more self-aware about what they do and could build a rich amount of information about themselves and their learning experiences.

How workforce-ready are graduating RP students?

One other advantage of PBL is that it presents students with problems they are likely to face in the workforce. But it's impossible to give enough problems to students in the space of their course duration to effectively cover all workplace issues. What's really important is for them to be equipped with the ability to step back and understand the concepts and the principles that are important to the specific problem they may face. This capability to learn along with

their knowledge about the discipline will enable them to cope well in a work environment that is likely to continually change.

From your experience, is the PBL system for everyone?

I honestly think PBL is for everybody, but some will struggle with moving away from what I call the book-approach of learning, which they become good at over time. When they come to RP, they want to apply the same but can't, and feel they are not valued as much. But having said that, these types of students do adapt their inherent study skills to PBL and tend to become fantastic students because they can add their own opinions to the mix, along with what others think. Likewise, those who prefer to work alone but have to work in teams also realise eventually they can be motivated to become leaders and help those who may be less able.


How would you describe the student-teacher relationship at RP?

Students soon learn that the facilitator is not there to unload information, but to engage and excite them in problem-solving. Facilitators make it clear that the responsibility to learn and come up with answers reside with the students, the facilitator uses questioning skills to get them to share what they think or to prompt further clarification or investigation. This generates a relationship where the student is not dependent on the facilitator for answers, but as someone who genuinely wants to know what and how students understand. Through this dynamic, the facilitators become fellow learners with the students.

How do you explain PBL to parents, and how receptive are they?

When you do something a little different, it's natural for people to be nervous. Parents have lots of questions about RP and PBL, so we organise Meet-the-Parents nights in school where we help them understand how things are done. We are heartened when parents give us feedback about their child's newfound confidence or ability to become more articulate. We also invite parents to contact the school and view their children's progress, to judge for themselves whether the system works.

Do all RP facilitators have to go through a course to familiarise themselves with the PBL system?

Before anyone steps into a class as a facilitator, they have to go through a week-long training programme where we discuss the system, what we want the process to achieve throughout the course of the day, and how to assess students. Afterwards, facilitators are supported in class by a mentor. They also have follow-up workshops to discuss any concerns and learning they have from working with students, and after a year, we ask them to go through a certification process. They have to compile a portfolio, including student feedback, a statement that describes their own philosophy of teaching and learning, descriptions of actual classes (problems) they have facilitated. We also film them facilitating a class. All this is reviewed by a panel who asks them questions to gauge their understanding of what it means to be an effective facilitator. If we think they have what it takes, we certify them. Otherwise, we highlight certain areas for them to work on and review their progress in six months' time. 

“When you learn naturally, you tend to remember it. PBL allows students to be genuinely interested in learning something, so they can better recall what they learn and use the knowledge more effectively.”

SCHOOLED FOR TOMORROW

From adventure-learning programmes, community projects, arts festivals and a dialogue session with the Education Minister, Republic Polytechnic (RP) students and staff get every opportunity to lead a vibrant campus life.



EMPOWERED INDIVIDUALS

RP students outlined their key concerns to Minister for Education Dr Ng Eng Hen during a dialogue session.

⬆ Minister for Education Dr Ng Eng Hen offers his advice to the youth of today.

12 November 2008

The economic downturn, job security, the government's stand on creative industries... these were some of the topics discussed at the Ministerial Dialogue Session with Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence.

Attended by some 400 RP students who packed The Republic Cultural Centre studio, the dialogue session was an opportunity for Dr Ng to reassure his audience that the government is constantly changing

and adapting itself to "recognise and appreciate the youngsters of today as contributing citizens of Singapore".

Commenting on RP's problem-based learning (PBL), Dr Ng feels this methodology prepares students to be flexible and adaptable — key fundamentals that will help them survive the ever-changing financial and economical landscape in store for the near future

He says, "RP students are empowered individuals who are able to push Singapore to achieve

greater and better things given their independent, robust and self-taught methodology of learning." He expressed confidence that RP students would be able to withstand the "tough and unforgiving" nature of the workforce and the various obstacles that come with it. During the hour-long session, the eloquent Dr Ng also shared his views on nationhood, his vision for Singapore and, at the request of the audience, offered his advice for the youth of today.



← Volunteers from OSG painted gates in Marsiling.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

17 October 2008

Armed with brushes and cans of paint, 20 staff members from the Office of Student and Graduate Affairs (OSG) descended on Block 3 Marsiling Road and painted 10 gates of one-room flats in less than three hours. This was an exercise to spread awareness of the Sunlove-Marsiling Neighbourhood Link, a Voluntary Welfare Organisation which RP staff and students have partnered since 2006 for their Service-Learning projects. Gate-painting as a group gave OSG staff a chance to build on camaraderie and forge friendships with Marsiling residents. So successful was this exercise, there are now plans to paint 100 gates of one-room flats in Blocks 3 and 4, Marsiling Road!

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

26 – 31 October 2008

It's been dubbed the "toughest climb in Malaysia", but that didn't deter RP students in the Alpine Leadership Programme (ALPS) from reaching the summit of Gunung Tahan (2,187m). Situated within the Taman Negara Nature Reserve, Pahang, Gunung Tahan offered the 12 participants and accompanying three staff from RP's Adventure Learning Centre a chance to navigate dense jungle, river crossings and steep terrain while balancing heavy backpacks. Daily tasks like setting up camp, collecting water and cooking outdoors were all part of the character-building experience.

ALPS is aimed at training RP staff and students to be effective leaders. With its strong focus on leadership in a mountaineering environment, participants are given opportunities to utilise and improve their leadership skills through rigorous exposure to outdoor environments. Next up, the ALPS will take participants to the 4,095m-high Mount Kinabalu in Sabah.

← ALPS participants scaled Gunung Tahan, Malaysia.

HEALTH MATTERS

9 December 2008

RP strengthened its relationship with Australia's Monash University with the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The agreement opens new possibilities to RP students keen to pursue professional careers in the healthcare industry, either as radiographers or dietitians.

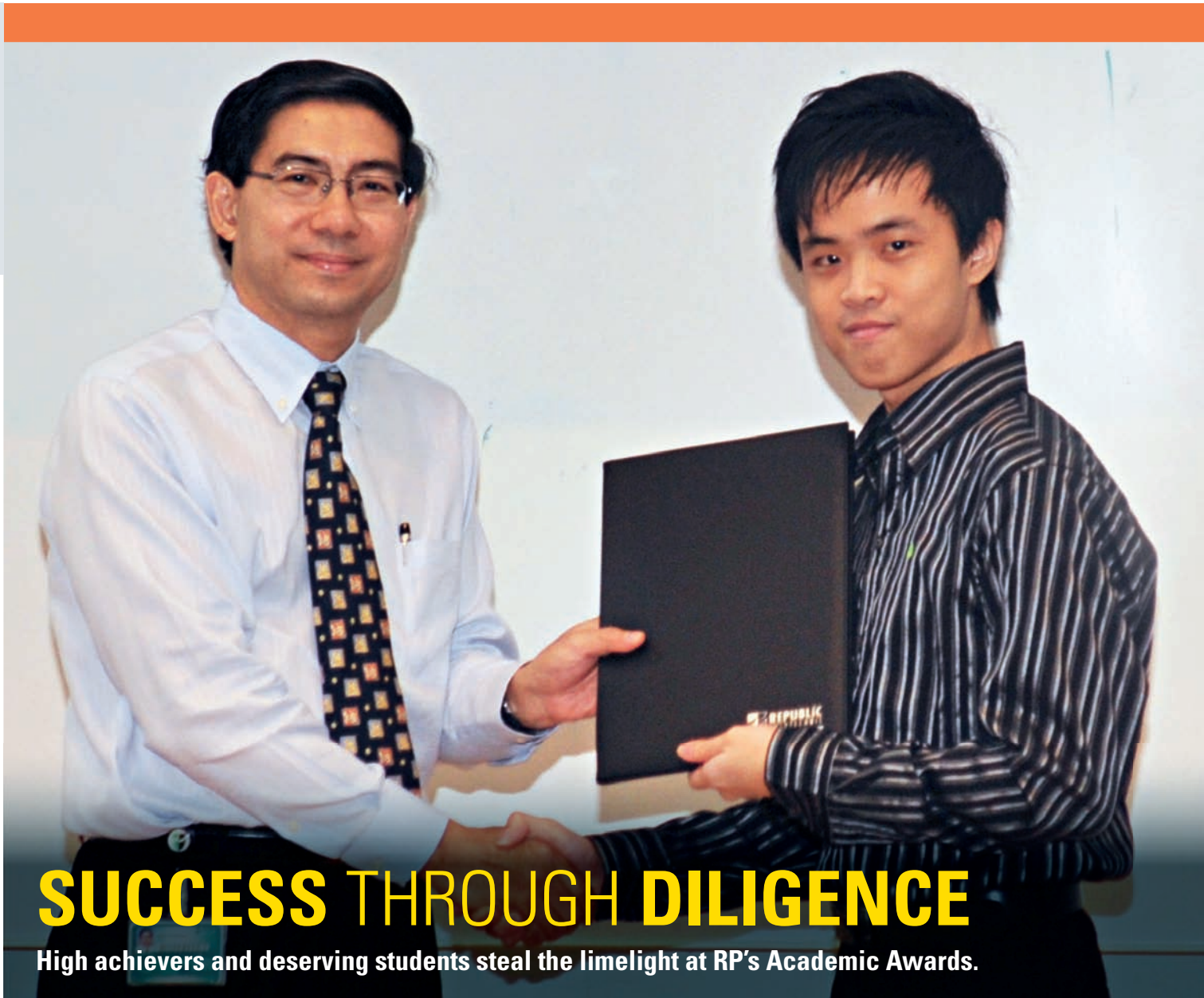
Under a new programme (the first of its kind in Singapore), students with a biomedical science or biotechnology diploma can obtain advanced articulations into professionally accredited healthcare bachelor degree programmes. Qualifying students who enrol in the International Programme in Medical Imaging or the International Programme in Nutrition and Dietetics will be able to obtain their degrees in a reduced amount of time. This advanced standing reduces the cost of obtaining an overseas degree.

Current partnerships with RP's School of Applied Science (SAS) and Monash involve the International Programme in Biomedical Sciences (IPBMS) linking to the Bachelor in Biomedical Science. The new MOU expands on this to include the new allied healthcare programmes outlined above. Says Dr Terence Chong, Director, SAS, "We are delighted with the growing relationship between the two institutions and look forward to building upon our success."



① Professor Leon Piterman, Senior Deputy Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University, signs an agreement with RP Principal/CEO Mr Yeo Li Pheow.





SUCCESS THROUGH DILIGENCE

High achievers and deserving students steal the limelight at RP's Academic Awards.

↑ RP Principal/ CEO Mr Yeo Li Pheow congratulates Year 2 student Jeksen on his academic excellence.

13 December 2008
 Two hundred awards, bursaries and scholarships given out at RP's annual Academic Awards ceremony recently honoured top-achieving students. "You are a testimony of what can be achieved through diligence, creativity and self-motivation; a validation of RP's problem-based learning [PBL] techniques," praised Dr W A M Alwis, Deputy Principal (Academic Services), in his opening speech.
 "I dare say the way our students have embraced PBL is one of the ingredients of their success. The methodology has brought out the best in them – their creativity and enthusiasm, their perseverance and will to succeed, their sense of

responsibility and integrity," added Dr Alwis.
 While book prizes were given to students who excelled academically, scholarships went to those with scholastic achievements and achievements in activities not directly related to programmes leading to formal academic qualifications. What all the award winners had in common was the potential to contribute positively to society and industry. Among the outstanding achievers was Year 2 student Jeksen (Diploma in Industrial and Operations Management) who received the Madge Goldman Award for Mathematics and Sciences.
 Describing his RP experience as

"enriching", Jeksen, an international student from Indonesia, revealed he was swayed by the school's problem-based learning (PBL), paperless culture and the choice of diplomas offered.
 He says, "The job market seeks people who are not just book smart, but those who are able to continue the learning process, apply their knowledge on the spot, communicate effectively, as well as possess the right attitude towards teamwork. PBL prepares students for all these. I believe the RP learning environment reflects what happens in the working world and helps students perform well upon graduation."



The month-long Reflections 2008, RP's community arts festival, attracted some 21,000 people. Here are some of the highlights.

CELEBRATING THE ARTS

3–28 November 2008

For an entire month, the RP campus was abuzz with music, dance, theatre, film, literary arts and visual arts. This was all part of Reflections 2008, RP's Community Arts Festival. Headed by Ganesh Kalyanam, Chairman of the Cultural Hub Coordinating Committee, and Director of The Republic Cultural Centre (TRCC), the festival team put together a collection of 21 shows, five exhibitions and six workshops spanning 26 days.

Into its second year, over 1,200 students and staff were involved in the festival, taking on roles of performers, production crew, marketers and organising committee members. This year, under the artistic direction of Zaini Tahir (Assistant Director, Artistic Development, TRCC), the various student performing groups pushed boundaries and explored new territories. Moreover, by collaborating with external professional groups and schools in the neighbourhood, RP student groups experienced how meaningful working relationships can translate beautifully on stage.

Students were also hand-picked to fill important 'behind-the-scene' roles in various productions, giving them the opportunity to work with artistic partners like The Main Wayang Company, T'ang Quartet and Gamelan Asmaradana.

Arts fans can look forward to more exciting arts events in the coming year. Already in the line-up: Arts Platter (a weekly term-time series), Momentum 2009 — RP's Dance Festival (May), IGNITE! Music Festival (July) and Reflections 2009 (November). Look out for them!



⤴ A collection of 21 shows, five exhibitions and six workshops took centrestage during the month-long Reflections community arts festival.

TEAM PLAYER

RP was awarded the Distinguished Home Team Partner Award on 13 November 2008 for its commitment to community safety and security.



⤴ Mr Eden Liew, Deputy Principal (Corporate Affairs), receives the Distinguished Home Team Partner Award from Ministry of Home Affairs Senior Parliamentary Secretary Mr Masagos Zulkifli.



7&10
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2009
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to
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 - See award-winning 'Under-water' & 'Pet-nanny' robots
 - Uncover secrets to grooming super athletes/world-class champions
 - Take The Big Set-Up Challenge and win prizes for the best table setting
 - Learn math concepts to perform magic



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