

NORTHSTAR

EXPERIENCES ISSUE

MR PHANG CHEE KHENG, our new Vice Principal, was in the military for many years before he came to CVSS. He shares his experiences in the SAF and CVSS.

Q: What were you doing in the SAF?

A: I was a SAF combat officer for 26 years and I was in the Artillery. I was the Commander of Sixth Division Artillery, which oversaw five Artillery Battalions. I was also Head - Training Audit, Training and Learning Systems Group at HQ Training and Doctrine Command.

Q: What were your learning points as an Army Officer?

A: The most important thing is health. The army's emphasis on staying healthy is for very good reasons. The next is the importance of good working relations and why leaders must have competencies in managing relationships. I believe that these are important for leaders even in the field of education.

Q: How different is CVSS when compared to your Army Camp?

A: The nature of military and education are very different and there will obviously be great differences. Army camps are 'rough and tough' when compared to the very refined environment I see in CVSS.

Q: Your posting to CVSS coincided with the H1N1 outbreak in June. What was your role in ensuring safety in the school?

A: MOE sent communiqués and directives frequently and I had to read and understand these. I then had to sieve the most important information and communicate this clearly to the staff so that they knew exactly what to do. The health concerns of our students and staff were of the utmost importance and I was very happy to see the staff

and students being very responsible during this time of crisis. Their wonderful co-operation made my job easier.

Q: What would you like to see being introduced in CVSS?

A: I would like to see more specialised software being introduced in school to help teachers with their professional and administrative duties. I would also like to see software which allows for more effective Home-Based Learning to be used in CVSS. I want to do my part to help teachers explore more varied ways of engaging our students and for more effective teaching and learning to take place.



KIMBERLY CHIA JING YI (SEC 2E) was recently seen in Channel 5 prime time drama *'Fighting Spiders'*. She tells us of her experiences in TV land, modelling and beauty pageants.



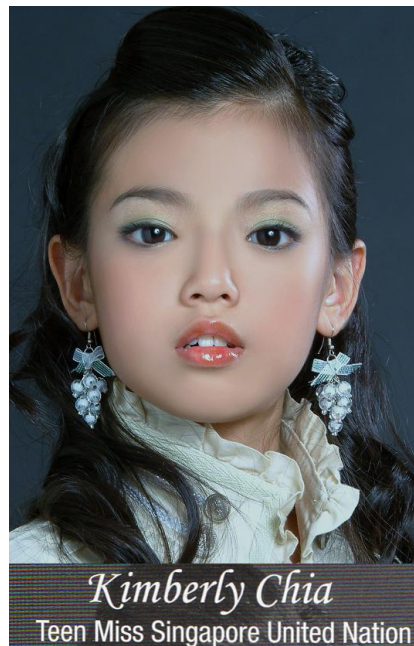
I have been acting in TV dramas and independent movies since I was in primary school. The producers of *'Fighting Spiders'* had watched my performance in *'Mandy and her Mighty Adventures'* (a 2007 local TV series for children) and felt that I was suitable for the role in *'Fighting Spiders'*. I was asked to attend an audition and they selected me over many other girls vying for the role as they felt that my looks suited the character. *'Fighting Spiders'* was a breakout role for me as previously I had played only minor characters. I had a major role in this drama-series and it was also my first series which was shown during prime time on

Channel 5. I do get recognised now when I am out in public.

Production for *'Fighting Spiders'* began in late October 2008 and went on till March 2009. Shooting had to be done in locations such as Pulau Ubin and Tuas TV World as the series was set in the 1960s. It was very exciting shooting in these locations. The most enjoyable scene was when I had to throw eggs at the character who was interested in me. The most difficult scenes were the emotional ones. But we had a good director who was able to bring out the best in all the actors.

I have been modelling for print ads since I was three years old. The early ones were apparels for toddlers and young girls.

I have been taking part in beauty pageants since 2005. I was crowned 'Miniature Miss Singapore' in my first experience at a beauty pageant. In 2007, I was crowned as 'Miss Teen Super Model'. This led to my first overseas beauty pageant experience. I went to Salt Lake City, USA for the 'Teen Miss United Nation' where I emerged as the 2nd runner up. This was quite an experience for me for it was very different from taking part in local pageants. I had my own personal pageant-mentor who groomed me for the competition. This experience helped



me in my personal development and gave me a much broader outlook to life.

I am happy to have a very normal life in school. I am treated no differently from others by my teachers and classmates. I do realise the need to balance my studies with my acting commitments. My parents and teachers have also advised me to give my studies the priority now. I do hope to go to La Salle College of the Arts after my O Levels to take up Theatre Studies. This will ensure that I can find some work in the world of theatre if I do not succeed in my aspiration to be an actress, which I am well aware is very competitive and only a select few can make it.

My greatest inspiration is my mother who has been most encouraging and supportive in my exposure to the world of acting and modelling.

AMANDA LEE (SEC 2G) is a *Peranakan*. The *Peranakans* trace their roots to the early Chinese immigrants who married local women and merged local customs and traditions with their own Chinese traditions. Unique to this part of the world, the *Peranakans* in Singapore are trying to revive their traditions which faced/face great challenges in modern independent Singapore. The male *Peranakan* is called 'Baba' while the female is called 'Nyonya'.



can never forget my role as a curious and mischievous girl called *Bulat*. We prepared for the musical as one big happy family and I really had a most wonderful time. The musical taught me much about my own culture and the audience also learnt much about our rich culture.

As it was a musical, I had to act, sing and dance. I feared that I would forget my lines or experience stage fright but fortunately none of these happened. Like all the others,

I enjoyed what I was doing and this could have contributed to my well-received performance. Taking part in '*Siapa Baba?*' has given me great confidence in my abilities and myself.

This year, I had more opportunities to share my *Peranakan* culture with

I joined the '*Main Wayang Company*' last year. This theatre group aims to teach our *Peranakan* culture to the younger generation as well as to share the rich *Peranakan* history, culture and traditions with other Singaporeans.

The company's most ambitious project was an original musical-drama called '*Siapa Baba?*' (Who is a Baba?) which was staged at the Republic Polytechnic Cultural Centre in November 2008. There were three sell-out performances over two days. I

others. I performed before the APEC dignitaries at the Raffles Convention Centre. I also took part at the Chingay Parade and National Day Parade. I also performed at the Singapore Heritage Festival at Suntec City. All these performances have left me with very rich experiences.

'*Main Wayang*' is planning for another musical in 2010 and

I am looking forward to be involved in this stage musical too.

I have been able to balance my studies with my involvement in this theatre group. The adults here are well aware of the importance of education and so they ensure that there are no rehearsals or performances during school examination periods or weekdays. The adults also always advise us never to neglect our studies.

My parents have been very supportive of my involvement with the '*Main Wayang*' group. They are aware of the benefits I am receiving and also that the adults involved in this group are all positive role models for younger *Peranakans* like myself. I am glad that I am doing my part in keeping the *Peranakan* culture alive in Singapore.



Nyonyas in Kebayas

**SPECIAL FEATURE :
WHAT OUR TEACHERS ARE
READING!**

Student Librarians Patsy Leong Mun Hei & Jasmine Len Jie Min (both from Sec 2I) talk to Humanities Head of Department, Mrs. Lee Sear Yeen, on her reading preferences:



Patsy: How often do you read?

Mrs Lee: It depends. During term time, I normally read only during the weekends due to my work commitments. I do read more during the holidays.

Patsy: What types of books do you like to read?

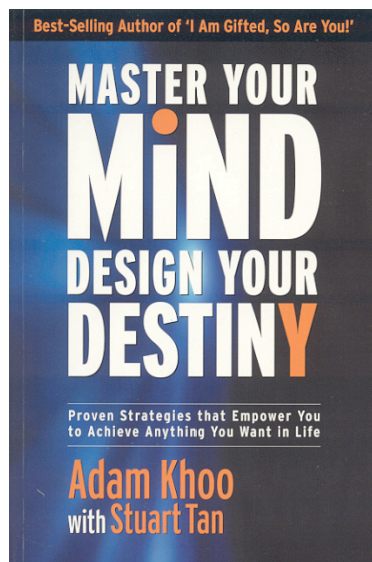
Mrs Lee: I enjoy reading different genres. Whenever I need to relieve stress, I would turn to crime novels. I also like to read magazines, newspapers and motivational books.

Jasmine: Do you enjoy reading?

Mrs Lee: Definitely. It is certainly a luxury, as I do not have much time for leisure reads during term time. So whenever I have the time, I will grab something to read.

Jasmine: How does reading help you in your teaching?

Mrs Lee: Besides gaining knowledge for personal enrichment, I can also use the information for discussions on current affairs with students during Social Studies lessons.



Patsy: What are you reading now?

Mrs Lee: I am reading *Master Your Mind, Design Your Destiny* by Adam Khoo. There are very useful strategies to help people to take control of their lives and developing their own personal roadmap to success.

Student Librarians Kirthana Ganeson and Lau Ping Ying (both from Sec 2E) talk to Science Level Head, Ms. Widayah on her reading preferences:



Kirthana: Are you an avid reader?

Miss Widayah: As I am very busy with my teaching workload nowadays, I hardly have any free time to read. However, I did read a lot during my school days. Now I read whenever I have the time.

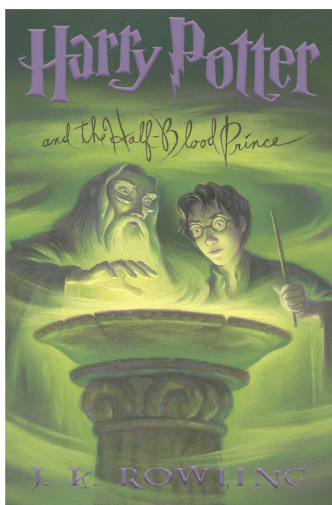
Ping Ying: What made you interested in reading? Did somebody encourage you to read or were there some other reasons?

Miss Widayah: I remember that I became an avid reader when I was in Primary Three. I saw my friend reading *Nancy Drew* and that made me want to read that book too. Once I started reading it, I was hooked onto it. I then went to my School Library and the National Library to get the other books in the series.

This reading habit led me to read many other storybooks too. My father always reads the newspaper and this in turn led me to read newspapers too. I wanted to see what was so interesting in the newspaper that drew my father to read it daily and that curiosity resulted in me reading newspapers daily too.

Kirthana: Are you reading any book now?

Miss Widayah: I am reading *Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince* now. After watching the movie, I was interested in reading the book as I learnt



that there were many interesting things in the book which did not find their way to the movie.

Ping Ying: Do you normally read fiction or non-fiction? What kind of genre do you like?

Miss Widayah: I read fiction for leisure and non-fiction for my professional development. My favourite genre is mystery,

especially the books written by Agatha Christie. One of Agatha Christie's book I read was set in Egypt and it was this book which sparked my desire to visit Egypt.

Kirthana: How often do you read?

Miss Widayah: When I have the time, I read almost anything that I can find, including magazines. I find my holidays complete only if I read at least three books. If the book is interesting, I will even ignore my meals and carry on reading.

Kirthana: Why do you think it is important to read?

Miss Widayah: Firstly, it improves language proficiency. Reading also expands knowledge which is very crucial to all of us.

Ping Ying: What advice would you give to students who do not read? What books would you recommend to evoke their interest in reading?

Miss Widayah: I would advise them to start small and start now. The books they could read to evoke their interest can be the Harry Potter series, Dan Brown's books and Jeffrey Archer's books. As they are in secondary school now, they should outgrow *Nancy Drew*, *Mr. Midnight* and *True Singapore Ghost Stories*.

Student Librarians Ang Jia Yi, Sabrina Chan and Jasmine Chew (all from Sec 3B) talk to Craft & Tech Head of Depart-

ment, Mr. Lee Boon Siang on his reading preferences:

Jia Yi: What do you normally read?

Mr Lee: I read the Straits Times everyday and books when time permits.



Sabrina: What benefits do you get by reading the newspaper?

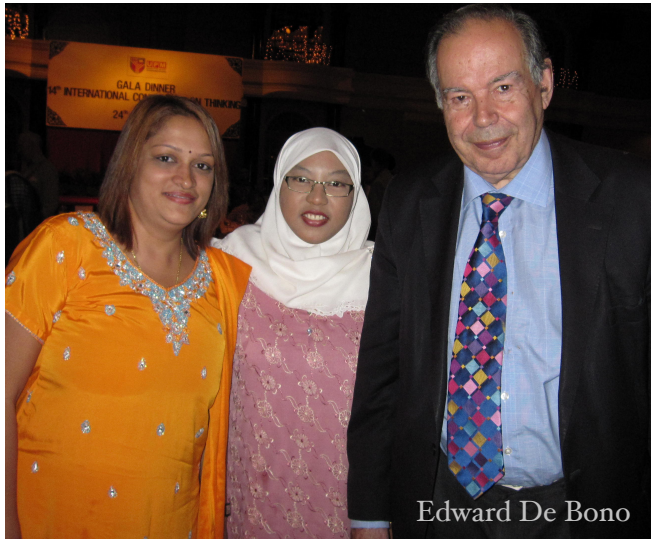
Mr Lee: We get to know about what is happening in our country and the rest of the world through newspapers. Besides politics, newspapers also cover other aspects such as social, economic and entertainment news. I like to read articles related to tourism and successful people.

Jia Yi: How does reading help you in your teaching?

Mr Lee: I get many inspirations for design from what I see in the newspapers, magazines and books.



MDM JAMALIAH AND MRS VIDDIYAWATI attended the *International Conference on Thinking in Kuala Lumpur from 22-26 June 2009.*



ference stretched one's ideas, challenged perspectives and invited ideas. There was plenty of interaction with the speakers, presenters and fellow participants from many

c o u n t r i e s
a r o u n d
t h e
w o r l d .

We met several principals, headmasters and educators who related to us their experiences in planning and conducting Thinking Skills programmes in

their schools. Their experiences were varied as they managed a diverse range of schools, from those with extremely talented students to those that are in challenging neighbourhoods. In fact, we surmised that education anywhere in the world was equally challenging, and that students anywhere in the world are influenced by their classroom experiences!

During the conference, we were also teased to re-examine some age-old ideas about Thinking Skills and how they can be nurtured or developed in learners. One of these ideas was on Bloom's Taxonomy. One of the most inspiring presenters at the Conference,

Professor Lane Clark, put forth that Thinking Skills cannot be hierarchical because they evolve seamlessly one into the other. Instead of trying to build one Thinking Skill at a time, she proposed that educators allow their learners to infuse different thinking skills simultaneously, and increase the mastery of each skill concurrently through the use of appropriate action terms and instructions.

One of the more memorable lunch conversations we had was with the headmaster of an all-boys school in New Zealand. He shared that in his school, students were given tasks or problems that were proposed by their parents! The school, being within a close-knit community, engages their young members to help solve real problems within the community. This sustains the student's interest and enables them to learn independently by exploring things around them.

In all, the Conference was a delightful, albeit tiring, way to end the June holidays. However, the enormous amount of learning that was gleaned left us with many more thoughts in the months to come as we seek to use the knowledge to develop ourselves as educators in CVSS.

The 14th International Conference on Thinking (ICOT) was an awesome gathering of minds! Hosted by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) at the majestic Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, the five-day conference provided much intellectual stimulation, networking and learning. We spent the last week of our June holidays in the company of great thinkers such as Edward De Bono (Six Thinking Hats), Tony Buzan (Mind Mapping), Howard Gardner (Multiple Intelligences) and Art Costa (Habits of Mind).

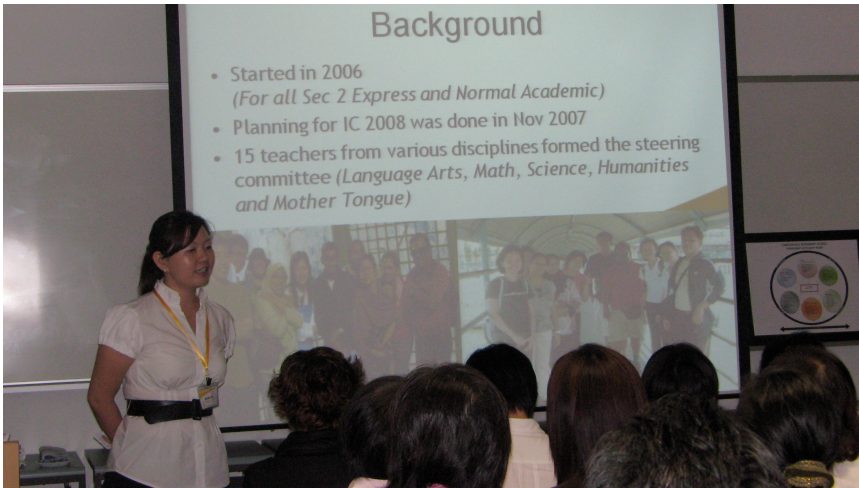
The participants at the 14th ICOT were privileged to witness the launch of the "Age of Intelligence, Century of the Brain, Millennium of the Mind" at the Opening Ceremony. Indeed, the entire con-



MRS BERNICE KUAN had a busy first semester as she had to present at two major conferences.

asking questions related to how they could introduce IC in their own schools. When I listened to the views of teachers who had IC programmes

global in nature. The audience comprised educationists and educational researchers from around the globe. The focus of my sharing here was more research based and it was based on my study on “Developing Understanding through an Integrated Curriculum”. The international audience was largely appreciative of our IC programme and they also gave useful pointers on how we could carry out more in-depth research.



Presenting at these two conferences were great experiences and I learnt so much. I am looking forward to more of these kinds of conferences which allow for intellectually stimulating conversations with educators from other schools or countries.

This year, I had the privilege of presenting at two major conferences. The first was TLLM (Teach Less Learn More) Conference organised by MOE on 3 April where I presented alone. The second, which I co-presented with Mr Arasumani was the Redesigning Pedagogy International Conference organised by NIE and which was held from 1-3 June. I shared on our school’s Integrated Curriculum programme at both conferences. The two conferences were of a different nature and catered to very different audiences.

in their own schools, I realised how fortunate we were that our IC programme has been implemented smoothly thanks to the full co-operation extended by our teachers and school leaders.

It is also a testimony to our school when MOE officers in-charge of IGNITE programme approached me and asked whether we could share our school programme with schools which would be embarking on IGNITE in 2010. (We did host this in late April 2009.)

The TLLM Conference was more localised in nature and it was to showcase how teachers have implemented TLLM in their schools. Their audience were mainly fellow teachers and MOE officials. At the end of my presentation, I was very heartened to see teachers from other schools

The Redesigning Pedagogy International Conference was totally different as this was



MADAM ZUBAIDAH ABDUL GHANI was a former teacher and an officer at MOE Research and Testing Division (now known as SEAB – Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board). She is a homemaker now and her daughter is a Sec 2 pupil in our school. Mdm Zubaidah volunteers her time helping our students during EL Afternoon Study Programme.



Q: Can you share your work-ing experience?

A: I was a teacher teaching EL and EL Literature for seven years before I joined the Research and Testing Division. As a teacher, I realised the importance of assessment and so when I did my Masters Course, I specifically took up modules on assessment. After completing my Masters, I was able to deal with assessment matters more efficiently.

My job with the Research and Testing Division required more planning and a deeper understanding of pitching educational aims to outcomes. This included

writing test items and rationalising new ideas. We had to work with and learn from other practitioners. We had to also work closely with external examination boards. For example, we had to review test papers and try out new examination approaches with Cambridge University.

Q: As a Literature Teacher, which books did you enjoy teaching the most?

A: 'To Kill A Mockingbird' is a great book for students as it is about racism and prejudice as seen through the eyes of a child. There are many aspects of life which can be explored in the classroom through this book. 'Little Ironies', a book written by Catherine Lim (a local author) was greatly enjoyed by my students as they could easily relate to the local context in which the stories were set.

Q: How has your experience been with CVSS students during the EL ASP?

A: CVSS students are able to come up with sustained and varied answers for the conversational topics. The teaching strategies employed by the teachers have been effective in eliciting students' creative and original responses. More opportunities can be provided for

Oral Presentations as this will help students build up their confidence and competencies in addressing an audience.

Q: How is your daughter adapting to life in CVSS?

A: It is evident that my daughter has had more opportunities to develop herself after coming to CVSS. I am thankful to her class teachers who have been very supportive and have helped her adjust to her new environment. I have full confidence that the school will help her realise her star within.



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