

SCREEN TIME GOING ONLINE TO HANG OUT B10

EDUCATION

Instilling a sense of duty, empathy

In the second of this three-part series, **The Straits Times** looks at the Values In Action programme in schools. This week, we look at how students from Chung Cheng High School, Bowen Secondary School and Hougang Secondary School make a difference to the community.



The butterfly garden is now central to Chung Cheng High School (Main)'s Biodiversity Enrichment Programme for Sec 1 students, which accepted its first intake this year. Under the programme, students create awareness about the diverse biodiversity in Singapore. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Grooming socially responsible citizens

The Values In Action (VIA) programme aims to develop students into socially responsible citizens who contribute to the building of stronger communities.

It replaced the Community Involvement Programme (CIP) in 2012, and is compulsory for students in primary and secondary schools, junior colleges and centralised institutes.

The change signalled a shift in emphasis, from providing community service to developing desired values in students.

Through the new programme, students learn about community issues and the needs of others, and come up with proposals on how they can contribute to improvements in school, at home or in the community.

At the primary school level, the programme focuses on the home and school community.

Students focus on the school and wider community at the secondary and junior college levels.

Unlike CIP, there are no minimum hours to fulfil but students would have had some opportunity to go through the new programme in the last five years. Students are not graded for their contributions to the new scheme.

Schools can customise their VIA programmes. Curriculum time is set aside for students to reflect on questions prepared by the schools.

Chung Cheng High (Main): Lessons from butterflies

Tang Fan Xi

What started as a small Values In Action class project in Chung Cheng High School (Main), to find a butterfly to represent the nation two years ago, has now evolved into a full-fledged butterfly garden and school enrichment programme.

After the class project ended, an opportunity came up for schools to

partner with the Jane Goodall Institute to create a butterfly plot in 2015, and the students grabbed it.

But developing the garden was no bed of roses. Matthew Lee, 16, who is in Secondary 4, said: "The debris, laying of the steel rods, all posed problems because we simply had no prior knowledge on how to build a garden from scratch. It took us about two to three weeks to finish just the digging, as we also had to battle with

rainy and hazy weather."

But the students pressed on, returning to school during their December holidays that year to spend two weeks digging, planting and laying the foundation for the garden.

Fast forward two years, the garden is now central to the school's Biodiversity Enrichment Programme for Sec 1 students. It accepted its first intake this year.

Under the programme, students create awareness about the diverse biodiversity in Singapore. They participated in outreach events during the Festival of Biodiversity by the National Parks Board in May, where they volunteered and shared their knowledge about butterflies with the public. The students also take home

caterpillars to raise until they metamorphose into butterflies.

Lucas Wong, 13, said of his experience of raising the blue pansy butterfly: "I did not anticipate their huge appetite. When I ran out of leaves ... I searched my entire neighbourhood to find the *Asystasia* plant that they ate, but it was to no avail. I had to come back to school on a weekend to retrieve more leaves as they are very picky eaters."

Ms Teo Jo Hsuan, one of the teachers in charge of the programme, said: "The butterfly garden is a good place to begin learning about nature... Students will also inevitably learn about plants as the host plant for the butterflies and their caterpillars are inextricably linked."

The hands-on process meant students could observe the life cycle of a butterfly up close to learn minute details, such as how the caterpillars affix themselves to a plant before turning into a pupa. These experiences allow the students to "see what happens when things go wrong", which are lessons that cannot be learnt elsewhere, Ms Teo said.

Although the programme has been running for only a year, it has already changed students' perception of plants and insects. "I reared the butterflies like they were my children and when they finally became ready to fly away, I felt so satisfied and proud," said Cedric Koh, 13.

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Bowen Secondary student and returning volunteer N. Shri Raman, 14, making a soccer pass before an Awwa student (in light blue) and first-time volunteer Benjamin Chionh, 14. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Bowen Secondary: Caring for special needs kids

Lim Min Zhang

The school's community service scheme has ended, but over a third of the students who took part in it now volunteer on their own at nearby welfare groups.

Students from Bowen Secondary in Hougang still reach out, for instance, by playing sports with special needs kids.

They were in last year's Changemakers in the Community scheme, part of the Values in Action (VIA) programme, run by the school at one of the three welfare organisations across the road: Awwa School, Bright Vision Hospital and

Mindville@Napiri.

At Awwa, which offers special education for children aged seven to 18, students from both schools take part in activities based on common interests, including football and cooking classes.

"It is not about accumulating hours. We want our students to really know who and why they are helping," said Mr Dominic Goh, 40, who is head of department for character and citizenship education, which encompasses VIA.

"We want to inculcate the values of community service, so they become empathetic and motivated to serve the community in their own way," said the mathematics teacher.

Said Secondary 3 student Nuh Syazwan Suhardi, 15, who has continued to volunteer: "I'm friends now with some students from Awwa, and am more confident and comfortable with those with special needs. If we meet them in public, we do not feel awkward."

Ms Hannah Fan, who is head of programmes at Awwa, said: "The presence of Bowen students provides a good platform for our students to practise their social skills."

"It provides an authentic experience for mainstream students from which they can develop character and learn to accept others who might be different from them."

Said Sec 3 student N. Shri Raman, 14, who is also still volunteering: "People who need glasses have special needs, and we don't think they are different, so we should not think special needs children are different either."

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Adrian Chua (far left) and Timothy Toh, both 14, helping Yio Chu Kang Primary pupil Eugene Aw, 10, with his school work during a peer tutoring session. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Hougang Secondary: Teaching juniors

Can you spend two out of the 168 hours in a week helping others?

That is the challenge Hougang Secondary School has set for its students under the 2:168 Mission Troopers programme.

Students can do community work such as tutoring pupils from primary schools in the neighbourhood.

The time taken by students to plan, serve, debrief and reflect usually comes up to about two hours a week.

"Rather than one-off programmes, we want students to be consistently engaged in long-term projects, which is better for cultivating the values we want in them,"

said Madam Soon Suet Peng, 44, coordinator for the school's Values In Action programme.

Secondary 2 student Khong Si Yi, 14, has taught pupils at Yio Chu Kang Primary School for 1½ years. These one-hour peer tutoring sessions are conducted once a week.

She said: "We really enjoy teaching them."

"We've become their friends and some even show their appreciation for us by giving us food."

One of the primary school tutees, Ravi Roshni, 10, said she enjoys the lessons because "it is okay to make mistakes".

"If I don't know something, (the tutors) will teach me again."

"They are not as fierce as some teachers," she said.

In order to achieve the goals set by the school, it is crucial that the programme is a long-term one.

"The school values of gratitude, respect and compassion are not just something students memorise and recite - we have seen our students practising them, after they have gone through the programme," said Madam Soon.

Secondary 2 student Timothy Toh, 14, has taught mathematics to Primary 3 and 4 pupils for three months.

On what he has learnt, he said: "To be respectful and empathise with what our teachers go through."

He added: "Sometimes, our tutees are easily distracted by their friends, so it must be more difficult for our teachers who have to handle a class."

Lim Min Zhang