

You can't just drill numeracy and literacy and expect it to work. The BDS teachers found that to make learning in alternative settings work, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is needed.

The SEL framework (Ministry of Education, 2009) was designed to help our students become better

citizens who behave responsibly towards themselves and others.

The framework works on five core SE competencies, which include:

1. self-awareness,
2. social awareness,
3. self-management,
4. relationship management, and
5. responsible decision-making.

As our students develop into socially and emotionally competent individuals, they will then be able to play their part in society. This is reflected in the SEL's four guiding principles, all of which have the nation and school values at the crux.

to brainstorm, research, write proposals, and make presentations. Every part of the project is graded.

But with such innovative teaching and assessment alternatives, support from other stakeholders is a must. "Support from school leaders is very crucial," says Zubaidah.

And not only are the students happier learning this way, their parents are also pleased with what the school is doing for the NT students.

Parents have told Samuel how happy they are that their kids aren't just learning in school, but learning in the field. Halimah recounts how one parent readily paid for his wheelchair-bound child to be ferried to IKEA for the Math lesson.

"Parents really appreciate that this is one school that does a lot for NT students and is daring to do that much," says Zubaidah.

What BDS has shown is that students really benefit from and enjoy holistic learning in alternative settings. This needs passionate teachers, as well as supportive school leaders and parents. It really is a whole community effort.

References

- Bedok South Secondary School. (2011). *Project work*. Retrieved from <http://www.bdscyber.org/cos/o.x?c=wbw/pagetree&func=view&rid=1110993>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2009). *Social and emotional learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/social-emotional-learning>

TeacherED

Bringing Out Good Character

"You are who you teach," wrote Parker Palmer in his book The Courage to Teach. Who you are as a person is very important in teaching, especially when it comes to character education. Teachers must first develop the best in themselves before they can bring out the best in their own students.

"To develop character is to bring out the goodness from each person," says Dr Vilma D'Rozario, Sub-Dean of Student Counselling and Liaison with NIE's Office of Teacher Education.

This is exactly what she has been seeking to do in the course of developing student teachers in NIE over the last 15 years. But before we can do this for others, we must first be able to recognize the goodness in ourselves.

Knowing Yourself

"I feel there is good in everyone, so there is good character in everyone. It is a matter of bringing out the goodness in yourself," says Vilma.

For her, knowing yourself and being at ease with who you are is a crucial starting point if we want to develop character in our students.

"If you are not comfortable with who you are, I don't know how you are going to help the kids be comfortable about who they are," she explains. "You need to develop yourself to be comfortable with yourself, to know who you are and to be able to bring out those strengths."

She points out that the Ministry of Education's student outcomes—to be confident persons, concerned citizens, active contributors and self-directed learners—come from character growth.

Article highlights

- Why is character development so important?
- What kind of teachers bring out the best in their students?
- How is character best developed in students and teachers?

Vilma D'Rozario is Associate Professor and Sub-Dean of Student Counselling and Liaison with NIE's Office of Teacher Education. She returns to full-time teaching in the Psychological Studies Academic Group in July 2012.

“Those are outcomes of good character. If teachers don’t develop those outcomes in themselves, how can they begin to develop them in their students?”

Developing Character

Vilma explains that character cannot be taught but “caught” through the experience of doing and then reflecting on your experience.

“It is not teaching character but experiencing situations where you can observe character in action,” says Vilma. “They may not realize it until they are put in a situation.”

In NIE, one of the key programmes for providing student teachers with rich learning experiences is the Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL), which Vilma helped to develop.

The programme aims to bring out the best in the student teachers by discovering their potential while serving others and learning from the ones they serve.

“We tell them that when you go out and serve the community, it is not about you making better their situation,” says Vilma. “Instead, the community becomes your teacher and you are learning about them and yourself.”

Through this experience, they may discover good as well as bad elements in themselves. “It doesn’t mean you don’t have it. It means you have to develop it.”

Learning through Serving

Vilma strongly believes in learning through serving. Qualities like empathy, humility, gratefulness and resilience are often nurtured through such service learning experiences.

Her own thoughts and philosophy on service were shaped by service in NIE and as a volunteer wildlife conservationist. “I learned more about being a good citizen and treasuring what we have in Singapore.”

She believes that the self-awareness gained through experiences like GESL will in turn benefit the students they teach. “This would help them discover themselves again and how they can be more effective in a multicultural classroom.”

In addition, service learning can have academic value too. What they learn from the community can be related back to what they teach.

Knowing themselves and serving the community mustn’t stop at the doors of NIE, says Vilma. Now that they have the motivation to develop those qualities, the process must continue.

“There should be opportunities in schools not only to lead but also to experience service learning projects. They need to go through more experiences with the community to grow themselves.”



It is not teaching character but experiencing situations where you can observe character in action.

- Vilma D’Rozario,
Office of Teacher Education

Reference

Palmer, P. J. (1997). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The GESL Experience

Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL) was introduced in 2004. The compulsory programme helps student teachers at NIE discover the best in themselves while serving others and learning from the ones they serve.

In groups of 20, student teachers discover in themselves organizational skills, empathy, resilience, gratitude and humility

as they serve in community projects of their choice.

To date, 15,000 student teachers have had meaningful experiences in myriad community outreaches.

Vilma believes that teamwork adds much to the experience. “You get that sense of belongingness, and you acquire interpersonal and intra-personal skills, to know

your strengths and what can be improved upon.”

Some of their stories and lessons learned have been documented in books. They are available online:

- *Journeys of the Heart*
- *Treks, Tracks and Trails: Ventures and Adventures Abroad in the Spirit of Service-learning*