



# C O R R I connections

*Inspiring a spirit of excellence, Nurturing a culture of compassion*

## Passion and purpose

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Page 2-3

**Brain-based Learning@SACSS:**  
Enabling effective Teaching & Learning

Page 4

**Student Leadership@SACSS:**  
Empowering to contribute

Page 5

**Canossian Induction Programme:**  
Advocating the true spirit of a Canossian Educator

Page 6

**Getting to know our new Vice-Principal (Admin):**  
Ms Grace Chew

**2016 Discipline Committee:**  
Perspectives from the new leader

Page 7

**Improving teaching practices:**  
Mentoring Programme

**Review:**  
Arts Alive! 2016

Page 8

**Lifelong Learning**  
An overview of our educators' innate desire to learn

- 10-week Professional Development Programme at Sacred Heart Canossian College
- Certificate in Education Support
- Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) programme

# ENABLING EFFECTIVE TEACHING & LEARNING

**In 2010, I conducted my first Brain-Based Learning (BBL) Workshop for teachers at SACSS. I knew little about BBL then and had to research the topic. At that time, most teachers had not heard of the term 'brain-based learning' – some even thought it had something to do with the anatomy of the brain! Today, BBL is not only practised in the classroom, it has also become an integral part of our routine and is now entrenched as part of the culture in SACSS.**

Brain-based learning refers to teaching methods, lesson designs and school programmes that are based on the latest scientific research on how the brain is designed to work. SACSS embraces scientific findings on how the brain works as the basis for implementing educational strategies and programmes to optimise students' learning.

A key BBL principle is the impact of emotions on learning. Research has shown that emotions cannot be separated from cognition. As such, when students are stressed, they are unable to perform higher order thinking as their brains will be focused on the flight response. An example

of this is 'examination blackout' where students struggle during the crucial moments to recall what they had studied – only to remember everything as soon as they step out of the examination hall. For effective teaching and learning to take place, teachers need to establish a positive emotional climate in the classroom. It is not about eliminating all forms of stress in the classroom, but rather about maintaining a state of eustress to provide our students with just the right amount of challenge to motivate them in learning.

In today's fast-paced digital world, students are constantly stimulated by their 'smart devices' and it is difficult for

them to practise mindfulness. To mitigate this, SACSS has introduced a daily two-minute quiet time segment at morning assembly which began in 2013 for our students to have a calm start to their school day. The school also introduced the EAGER protocol which includes a fixed set of routines at the start of each lesson. This involves checking the Environment, the students' Attire, Greeting, setting the Expectations of the lesson and a final check for students' Readiness in getting their lesson resources out. Routine is important as unpredictability is a source of stress for students and when students know what





is expected of them, they can focus on their task and not be distracted.

SACSS believes that everyone can improve with hard work and dedication. Recent discoveries in cognitive science reveal that our intelligence is not fixed and that the brain changes when it learns. Our lower secondary students are taught how the brain works and what they can do to 'grow it'. For students who believe that they are 'not smart' and that there is nothing they can do about it, the realisation that they can improve on their learning motivates them to work on it.

Knowing what happens during learning enables us to be more effective learners. When we learn something, our brain cells make connections. The more times these connections are used, the easier it is to retrieve the information learnt. Similarly, connections that are not frequently used will be removed. Students are taught study strategies such as 10-24-7 that encourage them to revisit what they have learnt immediately so as to retain newly gained knowledge in their long-term memory bank.

The teachers at SACSS constantly keep in touch with the progress of brain

development in teenagers to better understand students behaviour. A teenager's thinking brain (pre-frontal cortex) is still developing while their emotional brain (the amygdala, the limbic system) is in overdrive. The latter causes the risk-taking, impulsive and emotional behaviour of teenagers. The school's discipline system, the Responsible Thinking Process (RTP) poses students with a series of questions to help them think through the consequences of their actions when they commit an offence, which in turn promotes the growth of the thinking brain. The school also conducts lessons on problem-solving skills as part of Values Education to allow our students to gain insights into the consequences of reacting impulsively. They learn to keep calm and this allows them to think through their actions first.

With an in-depth understanding of BBL, our teachers recognise that it is not an educational fad but a critical strategy relevant to all educators. It is our aim that our students are equipped with brain-based strategies and are able to apply what they have learnt in life.



*By Mrs Yip Seok Hwee, Senior Teacher, Science*

# Empowering to contribute



Ms Nicole Quek was recently appointed Subject Head, Student Leadership. She has designed a comprehensive school-wide leadership training programme catered to different levels of leaders. One of the key tenets of Ms Quek's personal leadership style is her belief that students should be empowered

to contribute in order to make a difference. She provides students with many opportunities to display their leadership and to develop a sense of ownership in whatever they do. In my conversations with Ms Quek, I have come to realise that she is a selfless leader. She does not change things to gain any credit or glory. Her aim has always been to improve a situation to serve the greater good of the student body. She also believes that personal leadership is perennial in every teacher and student leader so that we can walk the talk and be good role models for each other.

We spoke to a few student leaders about some of their enriching experience in the various leadership training programmes. Here are some of their responses.

*By Mrs Monica Menon, Special Projects Officer*

The Leaders-in-Training (L-i-T) programme has made me realise how much time and effort the student leaders put into serving the school. When planning for the Teachers' Day concert, I gained insights into the challenges the Events Council had to overcome to ensure its smooth running. The behind-the-scenes work by the student leaders is not always noticed. It can range from doing the seemingly insignificant acts such as the pinning of badges to the more important ones such as the passing of the torch during the Student Leaders' Investiture that reinforces the renewal of servant leadership.

*– Estelle Lee, Head of Events Council (Sec 3.8)*

I discovered what leadership is all about and experienced the joy of serving. Going through the L-i-T programme has helped me to be more aware of myself, to find meaning in service and to develop a passion for leading. I can now relate to the notion, that servant leadership is addictive.

*– Irene Lai, Vice-Head, Events Council (Sec 3.2)*



Serving in the leadership role has inculcated values and skills in me. I appreciate the CORRI quality of developing an 'Inquiring mind' when our teachers pose questions that engage us in critical thinking in order to challenge processes. It has taught me to view things from a wider perspective.

Given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Student Council as the new head girl during the Student Leaders' Investiture was indeed an eye-opening experience for me. Towards the end of my speech, when we experienced some technical difficulties while playing the video, I felt that I had lost my standing on the podium. But it was only when I calmed down and quickly thought of a plan to close the ceremony with a touch of humour that I managed to trigger smiles in the audience. From this spontaneity, I learnt the importance of exercising quickness of thinking. It also reinforced the importance of having an inquiring mind in order to confront challenges we face in life.

*– Fernanda Chua, Head Girl (Sec 3.8)*

The Leaders-In-Training (L-i-T) programme has moulded me to become the student leader that I am today. When I took the leaders' pledge, it affirmed the promise that I made of being a good servant leader. The rigorous training has provided me with insights into the different leadership styles, the importance of being a good listener and the need to temper the needs of the student council with that of the school community. I have also learned that to lead, our roots must be anchored in our original purpose and drive of why we wanted to become student leaders. Most of all, I learnt the importance of serving the school with integrity... with ONE heart, ONE mind.

*– Anna Lau, Vice-Head Girl (Sec 3.8)*

'Why do I do what I do?' – This question from my teachers and seniors has given me the opportunity to challenge my thought process and helped me to grow into a reflective leader to serve others without expecting anything in return. The experiences have made me grow to become a much stronger person and to look at the positive side of things even during difficult times.

*– Ansura Khatun, Vice-Head, Welfare Council (Sec 3.6)*

# ADVOCATING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF A CANOSSIAN EDUCATOR

The annual Canossian Staff Induction is made up of a series of programmes conducted over two sessions. Through these programmes, our Staff will grow to understand and appreciate the values and philosophy espoused by Our Foundress, St. Magdalene of Canossa – that of having our lives built on love.



The sessions incorporate programmes facilitated by the Chaplaincy Team, comprising the Canossian Sisters and the Teacher-Chaplains from the different Canossian institutes. For this particular induction, two new members of the School Leadership Team, Mr Jimmy Choo and Mr Seck Hon Meng shared their views. Both of them attended 2 sessions. The first session featured interactive activities which focused on the lives of St. Magdalene of Canossa and

St. Bakhita as well as the Canossian Missions around the world, and served to bring our Canossian Staff together as one family. The second session was conducted as a learning journey to some of our Canossian institutes which include Kindergartens, Canossaville Children's Home, a children's shelter, and St. Joseph's Home which is a nursing home for the elderly.

*By Ms Sharon Yu, Subject Head,  
Pastoral Care and Career Education*

Summing up their experiences, Mr Jimmy Choo and Mr Seck Hon Meng shared...

**"I gained new insights about the school during the Canossian Induction Programme and the significance of the 3Cs which every Canossian student will be instilled with. These values are also relevant to me both as an educator and a person. To internalise the 3Cs, I will be COMMITTED to respect the dignity of others, be COMPASSIONATE to do more for others and be CHEERFUL to share our joy with others."**

*– Mr Jimmy Choo, Subject Head,  
Co-Curricular Activities*

**"Besides gaining a broad overview of the formation of the heart, which is the core focus of the Canossian Education, the personal experiences shared during the programme by the Sisters and colleagues on how they were rejuvenated in teaching re-ignited their passion for the profession through their engagement with students and parents. The warm and caring culture of the Canossian fraternity that perpetuated throughout reassured me that my teaching journey at SACSS will definitely be a meaningful and purposeful one."**

*– Mr Seck Hon Meng, Subject Head,  
Information & Communication Technology*

## Miss Grace Chew



**"As a coach, I have always considered the netball court a living classroom. Sports is definitely a good way to galvanise people around you, facilitating closer communication through actions. Joining SACSS, I am excited to be part of an even larger life classroom, and look forward to working with colleagues and students to make SACSS, a home away from home."**

– Ms Grace Chew, Vice-Principal (Administration)

Ms Grace Chew got to know the school well within a short period of time. Her 1½ months of PE relief teaching in the school prior to her VP appointment gave her a headstart because she got to know a fair number of colleagues and students in a different capacity. As a user of the school facilities, she had a first-hand experience on its usability and the various areas for improvement.

Ms Chew spent her first weeks as VP (Admin) talking and walking the grounds with the colleagues that she worked closely with. I agree with Ms Chew that connecting with the people we work with is critical. We are a team and we need one another's support and input to make the school an inviting environment and an effective organisation for all.

It is Ms Chew's personal aspiration to be working in a school for the last lap of her career. She wants to play a part in the nurturing of our young and I am confident that her calling will be fulfilled at St. Anthony's Canossian Secondary School.

– By Mdm Mak Lai Ying, Principal

## Perspectives from the new leader

As an alumna of SACSS, some of the teachers I considered to be the best were also the strictest of disciplinarians who made students turn and run in the opposite direction, hushed a hall full of students into silence with their presence, or caused a mild state of panic with their intense stares. In the early days of my teaching career, these were character traits I identified with. Over time, it became apparent that being a teacher tyrant was not going to be effective in all situations. Fear should never be the driving force. I drew from my experiences with these teachers and distilled the qualities they had in common. These are firmness, respectfulness and consistency – traits which I aim to emulate.

Students know that in every situation, there are choices to make and that these are consequential. I view discipline as a process to guide the students to think, equip them with a moral compass and give them an avenue to reflect on their choices. It is also an opportunity for the formation of the heart and mind, for me to set them on the right path and to give them the necessary tools to make good, moral decisions in the future. In doing so, students will know that their teachers care for them and are avidly working with them for their development and well-being.



The students at SACSS are sincere, good-natured, expressive and very teachable. Over time, I hope to be able to instill a higher level of self-discipline within them. This starts with small, everyday routines, from their attire, to observing silence upon entering the hall for the Early Bird Reading Programme. These practices must also be religiously observed by the staff to build a culture of self-discipline in the school. When we lose the consistency and discipline, we cause disruption in the classroom. If a student is not disciplined in the everyday aspects of her life, it would be difficult to imagine how disciplined she would be in her studies.

There is a need for teachers to hold students up to higher standards, and a greater need for us teachers to step up and play our part so that we are clear about our own stance. As a new leader, I will work towards leading by example and in doing so I hope to inspire my team to do the same.

By Ms Tiffany Cheok, Subject Head, Discipline

## MENTORING PROGRAMME



The school is blessed to have many senior and experienced teachers who offer quality time to serve as role models in the Mentoring Programme for novice teachers.

Our Senior Teachers are also attached to mentors from other schools to deepen their own learning. An example is Mrs Esther Boo who collaborated with Mdm Julie Koh, Lead Teacher (Chemistry) of Tampines Secondary School in a lesson research on the usage of ICT tools for teaching and learning of Chemistry. Their research paper has recently been accepted for the International Conference on Teaching & Learning with Technology.

The school is also privileged to have a group of dedicated teachers such as Mrs Yip Seok Hwee, Mrs Monica Menon, Mrs Mary Ann Joseph and Mrs Esther Boo who stepped forward to conduct the weekly 1-hour school's Structured Mentoring Programme for our younger teachers. The range of topics covered includes 'The Bilingual Policy', 'Brain-based Learning' and 'The Ethos & Value of Education' to broaden our teachers' perspectives of the Singapore Education System. Another dedicated teacher-mentor, Mdm Tay Hui Cheng, covers issues pertaining to leadership and the role of key personnel in leading the school.

The caring relationship built through the mentoring programme will allow the school to continue building and improving the standards of teaching practices.

*By Mrs Nicole Shen, School Staff Developer*



## Arts Alive! 2016

Arts Alive! is SACSS's signature Performing Arts event that began in 2004 during the launch of the school's Autonomous Niche in the Performing Arts. It is held biennially on "non-SYF years" to provide our budding artists with the opportunity to showcase their talents as well as to create a meaningful platform to nurture our students' passion for the arts. The Performing Arts (PfA) CCA groups featured in the Arts Alive! showcase include the Angklung Band, Choir, Concert Band, Drama Club, Guitar Ensemble, Indian Dance, Modern Dance and Percussion Band.

This year's Arts Alive! theme is Passion for Life! The PfA CCA students were proud to present an exciting repertoire of performances across all three disciplines of Music, Dance & Drama. A refreshing line-up of collaborative performances between the different performing art groups will take centre stage.

An energised performance by the Normal Academic Stream students who learnt to play the percussion instruments for the first time was held outside the Black Box on the 1 and 4 April, 15 minutes before the doors opened. In addition, the Mother Tongue Department also put together an enthusiastic group of students and staff who relived the kampong spirit with a rhythmic repertoire of Dikir Barat songs at the Black Box.

This year, a fusion of the various art forms were presented so as to create a brand new theatrical experience for our audience. Instructors were linked up to create possibilities for collaborative experiences. This provided the various groups with opportunities to explore and experiment with different ways to create an exciting performance for the audience. It is a stimulating process and many students expressed their excitement to be given the opportunity to work closely with another CCA group for Arts Alive!



*By Ms Kang Chee Hui,  
Subject Head,  
Performing Arts Education*

## AN OVERVIEW OF OUR EDUCATORS' INNATE DESIRE TO LEARN

Our foundress, St. Magdalene of Canossa often preached about lifelong learning, and this philosophy is mirrored in the attitude that teaching staff at St. Anthony's Canossian Convent possess. Three teachers, Fiona Chiu, Li Wei and Andrew Seah share on their pursuit of a lifelong learning tenet and their innate desire to better themselves.

Fiona shares that her decision to pursue a Masters degree was influenced by her desire to find answers to issues at the heart of art. Li Wei, who is pursuing a Masters

Degree in Chinese Language, believes that sharing valuable opinions about the Chinese Language and fostering a space to talk about strategies and issues in relation to academic interests is important in the growth of a person, while Andrew's objectives entail wanting to keep up-to-date with the English Language and improve on subject mastery.

*By Mrs Monica Menon, Special Projects Officer*



### Certificate in Education Support

The Certificate in Education Support course covers theoretical evidence and practical strategies for teachers to support students in the normal technical and normal academic streams. I chanced upon this course when I attended a Networked Learning Community Symposium at the Academy of Singapore Teachers.

The course has deepened my conviction in a holistic Canossian student-centric education that the school facilitates to support the students' learning. Factors beyond the classroom affect students' motivation and attitudes. Strategic

questioning empowers students to achieve desired goals and behaviour. A student can improve through mastery of concepts and skills in a gradual progress. Formative assessment builds confidence – using the strengths of the students to overcome weaknesses. Various examples of school-wide formative assessment models were highlighted including one which incorporated a learning journey.

With two more modules to go, I hope sessions on effective classroom management and the leveraging on the students' different learning styles will be explored more deeply.

*By Mrs Maria Loida Inigo, Science Department*

### 10-week Professional Development Programme at Sacred Heart Canossian College

I had the privilege of taking part in a 10-week professional development programme at Sacred Heart Canossian College (SHCC), Hong Kong. My aim was to look into their Mathematics curriculum and programmes, with a focus on their differentiated instruction and learner autonomy programmes.

In their Mathematics curriculum, students undertake a self-access and self-monitored reading enhancement programme and engage in collaborative learning. The classroom observation sessions provided me with opportunities to gain new insights on how best I could serve my students. The attachment in SHCC has provided me with an enriching experience and the extra depth of knowledge for an experienced teacher.

*By Mr Andrew Poh, Mathematics Department*

### Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) programme

When the opportunity to enrol in the Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) programme surfaced, I delved into it. As part of the programme, I had to write and hand in a reflection journal of more than 1000 words every fortnight, read extensively, visit organisations such as 3M, Coca Cola and local educational institutes such as Madrasahs. We even travelled to Australia to visit and learn from the educational organisations there.

During the 16-week programme, I read more books than I had ever done in my 10 years of teaching. I found myself continuing to read even when the course ended. Books are the collective wisdom and experiences of many who have been there and done that.

So, I encourage my students to read and to grow by pursuing continual learning and making meaning in their lives.

*By Mdm Tay Hui Cheng, HOD, Mother Tongue Department*

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