

# CONTENTS

- 3 Foreword
- 5 Weaving the Shuqun Tapestry
- 7 A HEARTy Shuqun
- CELEBRATING EFFORT**
- 12 Reliving My Life in SQSS Again
- 15 Soaring Towards Excellence
- 17 Reaping What You Sow
- 19 One Dream
- 21 Mobile Robot Race
- 22 Water Craft Design and Race Competition
- 23 NPCC
- 25 SWO
- 27 Junior Chef at Café Hideout
- 28 Our Dream Garden
- 29 2013 Biennale Peer Guiding
- 31 Welcome to Jogjakarta
- 33 Singapore-Hong Kong Exchange Programme 2013
- 37 Giving Back
- 38 Resilience and Adaptability through ACE
- 42 Upflow – Hip Hop Dance
- INSPIRING SUCCESS**
- 45 Dawn of a New Era in Teaching and Learning: SPARCS
- 47 A New Chapter in Teaching Pedagogy (review & reflection)
- 49 Learning Beyond the Shores of Singapore
- 51 ThinkBOX for students’ learning – Student-centric approach to creating a Design Resource Room
- 53 STARS of Shuqun Secondary School
- 57 Teaching at Shuqun: A Practicum Reflection
- 60 An Anchor, A Diving Board and A Shining Star
- 62 Reflections for Heart of Shuqun
- 65 Journey through Art
- 66 More Than a Face in the Crowd – My Time in the Forest of Inspiration
- 69 Shuqun Family Day



## FOREWORD

This is the sixth volume of a series of books started by ex-Principal Mrs Chua Yen Ching to capture the stories of Shuqun students and staff. In it, you will also find reflections from visitors and other stakeholders such as parents, community partners and School Advisory Committee (SAC) members who help make the work in the school possible.

Recipients of these books who know about the Hearts of Shuqun project often tell me that it is a meaningful one. Through these pages, they begin to get a sense of the true cost of saving one child. This is not only in terms of the money and resources that the state commits but also in terms of the hours of discipline, of love and care, of simply listening to and believing in the child while hoping for improvement and turnaround, put in by our teachers, parents and partners.

I have often fielded questions on the difference between teaching and leading in the different schools across the entire spectrum, from top Junior Colleges to specialised independent schools helping the academically weakest. My answer is always the same – in the places where night is darkest, where hope cannot be provided by privileged circumstances, support of a complete family, positive peer influence or academic confidence, our stars must shine the brightest.

In 2012, Minister for Education, Mr Heng Swee Keat shared his belief that “every school is a good school”. I believe him when I see what happens in schools like Shuqun Secondary every day. In fact, given my personal experiences, I would venture further. While many of the children come into Shuqun Secondary at a low level in terms of their academic confidence, social emotional maturity and discipline, we remind them that the society’s expectations of them are the same as everyone else when they graduate at the end of Secondary 4 or 5. Students who come into the school with a PSLE (Primary School Leaving Examinations) aggregate of just over 188 and who barely make it to the Express stream must still meet the demands of an O-level curriculum in the same way as another child

with an aggregate score 70 or 80 points higher and with stronger academic foundations. If we can help these children bridge the gaps in the same 4 or 5 years that we have with them as everybody else, with few other sources of external support, we can be confident to help any child, in any school.

Hearts of Shuqun gives a glimpse of the work that goes on in the school, but does not present our full story. For every page that you see here, another story of triumph and overcoming the odds exists and could not be included. The heritage wall in the school features the story of a recent student who went on to Anglo-Chinese Junior College and was one of the 20 students in Singapore awarded the overseas A-star scholarship. Another ex-student recently wrote a letter of thanks describing her journey in Shuqun from Normal Academic stream to Express stream, to Polytechnic and finally now as a police officer with the Singapore Police Force. Many other heart-warming accounts of student success reside only in the memories of our staff. In the many difficult moments, these stories of how our former students have soared to greater heights encourage our current students and strengthen our belief that every child we receive can succeed eventually.

At the end I would like to thank all the SAC members, parents as well as the government, business and community partners who have understood our mission of education and stood by us. Your support in terms of money, expertise and time reminds us that we are not alone in believing in these children. Thank you for measuring success not simply by distinctions and accolades, but by the meaningfulness of helping the last, lost and least. The first step of a child might not seem like much to the world, but it means the world to the child. In a closed session, Permanent Secretary (Education Development), Mr Neo Kian Hong spoke passionately about the “heroics” that schools and staff perform with their students to help them triumph over adversities in learning and life. I am proud to work in a place where heroes, not only among the staff and partners but importantly among the students, are quietly being made every day.

***Mr Chia Hai Siang***  
***Principal***

## WEAVING THE SHUQUN TAPESTRY

On a late morning in August 2013, a visitor entered the school's General Office and requested for permission to tour around the school compound. After further conversation with the visitor, I learnt that he graduated from Shuqun Secondary School in 1999, subsequently went to a university, found a job with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was based in South Africa. He had been away for 2 years and, while on vacation leave in Singapore, decided to return to his alma mater to pay a visit. (Recently, he returned for Alumni Lunch on 15 February 2014 and reconnected with some of his teachers – Mrs Wee Kim Eng and Mr Dennis Tham.)

Separately, on one weekend morning, I ran into a former colleague who is now a Senior Curriculum Specialist in Chinese Language. As we chatted, we realized we had something in common – she was a Shuqun graduate in 1985 and I am serving in Shuqun Secondary School now. That serendipitous moment spurred her on to share with me how Shuqun Secondary School of her time had held internal competitions to invite students to design a new school crest and compose a new school song to commemorate the significant transformation from Seh Chuan High School to Shuqun Secondary School.

As I reflected on these two encounters, I began to wonder what made school life memorable. Was it the Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) practices we had, the tests we scored well or badly in, the teachers who encouraged us, the classmates whom we debated with, the messy classrooms we inhabited, the laughter and noise from the school canteen, or the quiet solitude in the library? To me, I think every single fragment of the school environment that appealed to our five senses helped piece together the memories that we took away with us when we left school and would later fondly recall these with amusement and nostalgia.

Human beings are creatures with great emotions. As much as we were taught logic and facts, deep down inside, we actually feel before we think. The senses that we take in make a deep impression on our amygdala

and remain stored in the deep recesses of our brain. This is probably why many adults talked about the ‘pop’ sound of hydrogen, the smell of ammonia gas and the colours of different solutions when they recall their chemistry lessons. It is this knowledge that made me realize how powerful every individual’s actions (and decisions) are in shaping one another’s experiences and memories.

How often have we paused to think about the effect we have on one another through what we say, think and do? My daily experiences reveal to me the effort that each staff has and had put into to make Shuqun an inviting school. I saw a form teacher checking in with his student who had been away for a few days about his well-being and his father’s medical condition besides collecting the medical certificate, the experienced colleagues spending time with younger teachers to encourage them and discuss strategies to teach difficult concepts, the operations staff efficiently preparing the stationery items within a short time easing the job of the organizing committee, and the list goes on... These minute subtle actions provide a sense of community and have gone beyond to impact the students. We were absolutely elated to learn that the alumni members are willing to spend time tutoring the graduating students in the evenings. Just like a returning boomerang, we are seeing our former students giving back to the school in their own ways.

I believe each extra mile we take goes a long way in creating positive memories of our interactions with one another. Certainly we can always do better, yet let us not forget to acknowledge and cheer ourselves on, for it builds positive energy to carry us further. As we journey on to make Shuqun Secondary an inviting school and persevere to bring out the best in every student and staff, may we remain mission-focused to touch the hearts of each and every Shuqunite, young and old, past and present, and inspire learning of ways to make the community a harmonious and caring one.

***Miss Britta Seet***  
***Vice-Principal***

## A HEARTY SHUQUN

It was in late November 2011, when I first walked into Shuqun Secondary School, I came into contact with the staff of Shuqun. I was overwhelmed by the warm welcome I had received, even though, they did not know who I was. I introduced myself and made new beginnings with the front office staff. One of the staff greeted me and offered his assistance to help. I mentioned to him that I will be posted to Shuqun as a Vice-Principal on 15 December 2011 and I was there to meet the Principal, Mr Chia Hai Siang. He was intrigued and the first question he posed to me was what I had heard about Shuqun. I told him, ‘I have not heard anything.’

He asked me again, and I repeated what I had said earlier. He started sharing about the history of Shuqun and I continued to listen attentively to him. It was impressive that he was able to share the 86 years history of Shuqun Secondary in eight minutes. Before I left to see the Principal, I mentioned to him everything starts anew and we will build upon our strengths and mould the future of Shuqun together. That was the beginning for me in Shuqun.

As I am now in the midst of my studies, I read a book called “The Leader, The Teacher & You: Leadership through the Third Generation” by Mr Lim Siong Guan. Some of the quotes stated in the book deeply resonated with me during my two year tenure in the Shuqun.

“Nothing in our past is wasted. Everything can be built upon to help us make the future”.

Shuqun embarked on the journey to apply for Niche school status for “Developing Character through Volleyball” due to its strong tradition. The school was awarded the Niche status in volleyball, an endeavour which allowed the students to participate in the sport in both their Physical Education lessons and as a Co-Curricular Activity (CCA). Volleyball became the platform to offer our students a rich experience in shaping character and nurturing talent.

“You don’t need to know everything or even anything to undertake a task. You just need to be willing, able, and prepared to learn”.

Shuqun went through a series of changes in response to student-centric values-based education and I believe it responded aptly even though change is not everybody’s cup of tea. The focus was always student-centric, to provide a balanced and holistic education in terms of length, depth and breadth. It pitched its curriculum to provide rigour and relevance across various subject disciplines. Some examples of the changes were a Tutorial Relationships, Flip Curriculum, Character and Citizenship Education and a centralized SQSS Portal with data on both academic & character available real-time for all its stakeholders. These were the big rocks for change that resonated with Shuqun’s mission of Touching Hearts, Inspiring Learning under the Curriculum Leadership of Shuqun staff.

“There is something very special about being a teacher. The teacher has to deal with largely indefinable outcome called ‘helping every child realise his or her potential’, and the ultimate test has to be whether each child actually realizes his or her potential to the fullest”.

I believe this is a challenge for Shuqun Secondary School teachers, taking into account the profile of its students. It has been mentioned that teaching is a calling, not everyone can sustain in this profession unless you have the passion and purpose to nurture the students under your care and develop them to their fullest potential. I saw it with my own eyes in Shuqun Secondary School where teachers have that stamina and drive to help every child under their care succeed in life. It was motivating and heartening to see how Shuqun Secondary School teachers going the extra mile and never giving up hope on their students. Some examples were late night house visits, providing support for needy students and their families with their own money, staying back during weekday evenings, Saturday mornings and afternoons to conduct extra CCA sessions or remedial lessons. It is through such a culture of care that Shuqun Secondary School has been able to grow men and women of character.

“While the teacher has a significant influence on the development of the child’s attitude for the rest of his or her life, the starting point always has to be child’s parents and family”.

I have always heard these words in Mr Chia’s speech during his interaction with Shuqun parents, that the staff in Shuqun are always the steward of their child. He further emphasized that Shuqun staff will always do their part from the school front but he also requested the parents to do their part in monitoring their own child’s development. Furthermore, to strengthen the home-school collaboration, Shuqun Family Day is one example where Shuqun parents and students bond or even adopt other students and spend meaningful time together. I remember during the first Shuqun Family Day, one student thanked the school for organising the family day. That was the only day he managed to spend quality time with both his parents for a whole day. It was heartening to see that the event made a positive impact on both our parents and students.

“Reasoned is a matter of the mind. Reasonable is a matter of the heart.”

In my humble journey in Shuqun Secondary School, I had to strike a balance between Reasoned and Reasonable. I always had to reason why change or certain decisions needed to be made or be considered in Shuqun Secondary School. The reasoning helped me to rationalize and make changes or decisions that were fair, transparent and added value to the ecosystem of Shuqun Secondary School in the best interest of all the stakeholders. Moreover, the rich experiences and opportunities in Shuqun Secondary School helped me to build my competence and character as an educator and further strengthened my calling for the profession.

To “Be the Best We Can Be” entails three elements:

Each person in the organization doing the best he or she can.

Each person in the organization being the best he or she can be.

Everyone in the organization working together for the best results.

The core success of any organization is its people - Doing their best; Being their best; Working together to deliver their best. The visionary desire to create an inviting school to bring out the best in our students is pervasive

among the Shuqun Secondary School staff, and every stakeholder sees themselves as having a stake in it. I am proud to say I was given an opportunity to serve Shuqun Secondary School during my tenure. To me, Shuqun Secondary School has always been a HEARTy family, where everyone has a mind to be reasoned and a heart to be reasonable to lead, care and inspire Shuqun Secondary School to greater heights.

***Mr Sivakumar S/O Viswanathan***  
***Vice-Principal (2012 – 2013)***

# CELEBRATING EFFORT

## RELIVING MY LIFE IN SQSS AGAIN

It has been four years since I left Shuqun Secondary school (SQSS). As I move on with my life, there are certain memories that will stay with me forever – one of them is definitely my life in SQSS. It was a place where I met many good friends, teachers and volleyball coaches. Most importantly, it was the place where I grew up most.

Being a competent volleyball player in my primary school, I was given a chance to enrol into Fairfield Methodist School through Direct School Admission (DSA). However, I did not accept the offer as I felt that I was not capable enough to cope with the school's standards. Being an average student, studies was never really my priority in primary school. I devoted most of my time to volleyball trainings and competitions. Thus, when I got an aggregate score of 204 for Primary School leaving examination (PSLE), I was pretty contented as I knew I was able to enter SQSS. Moreover, it was a school that was very well-known for its volleyball achievements.

I did not set any expectation for myself when I first got into the SQSS. It was a very foreign place to me as I did not have any friend with me on the first day of school. Most of my friends did well in their PSLE and had entered top schools. Also, most of my teammates had got into Fairfield Methodist School through DSA. Being alone for the first few days, I began to feel a little terrified of attending school. Almost every day, I could see policemen in the general office or canteen. It seemed as though they were students of SQSS. Squabbles and minor fights among students were common. As a lower secondary student, I was afraid of being targeted or bullied. However, life was not as bad as I thought it would be. I was fortunate to meet many good and helpful friends in my class. They motivated me to work hard and influenced me to strike a balance between my studies and co-curricular activity (CCA) well. Everything went very smoothly when I was in lower secondary as I was still a young girl trying to adapt to the school and the secondary school system. When I was promoted to upper secondary, things became a bit different.

Everything seemed more serious in the upper secondary level. My upper sec teachers began to communicate with me in a very different style compared to my lower sec teachers. They questioned my answers and sought my opinions during discussions in class. They treated me like a young adult. Surprisingly, that actually increased my interest in studying. I liked the engagement and discussions in classes with my teachers. They made me understand that academic results might be important but definitely not more than the learning process. Also, my subject teachers did not just teach me subject contents, they also taught me many life skills and life lessons that I am still practising today. Their dedicated efforts and selfless sacrifice encouraged me to work even harder.

Also, after spending a few years in the school, I got closer with my friends. They were always there for me when I needed them, even now. We stood by each other, especially during hard times like the days drawing near to O-level examinations. I still remember the time I broke down in the classroom due to poor results. I was devastated as I realised that my effort had not paid off. Thankfully, my best friend came over to my table and gave me a hug. She encouraged me and showered me with comforting words. In SQSS, I have met friends whom I knew that our friendship would really last forever.

On 10 January 2011, the day O-level results were to be released, as usual; I was worried that I would be disappointed. I was worried that I might have wasted all my teachers' effort and time on me. I was worried that all the muggings and preparation might not paid off. Surprisingly, I did quite well achieving five 'A2's and two 'B3's, and was one of the top students for that year. Most importantly, I was admitted into my dream Junior College – Anderson Junior College.

After two years of hard work in Anderson Junior College, I finally graduated with an A-level certificate. I was so excited to start my journey in National University of Singapore. Before that, I had 8 months of holiday. The first thing that came into my mind was to be a relief teacher at Shuqun Secondary School. I wanted to contribute back to the school that meant so much to me. When I returned to the school, once again, I felt as if I

was in a foreign place. This time, the feeling of the school was positive. The school had undergone a major change. Not just the physical structure. There were many new teachers whom I have not seen. There were many new faces of students and employees. The culture of the school has also changed. The students were well-behaved and their grades were so much better than ours. However, one thing remained unchanged – the warmth and homely feeling I got when I was a student in SQSS. My two weeks in SQSS as a relief teacher allowed me to share my personal experience with my juniors and most importantly, to feel the pain my teachers had gone through and the unique sense of satisfaction being a teacher. Though only for a short stint, I had an amazing experience.

Life in SQSS was great. Although there were occasional down periods, I had good friends and teachers to guide and teach me to be a better person. I am very grateful for all the teachers who had shared part of my life and experience in SQSS. They have made a great impact in my life. If I were given a chance to go back in time and repeat my secondary school years in SQSS, I would be more than willing to do so.

***Kimberly Quek***  
***Secondary 4C (2010)***

Kimberley was one of the top students in Shuqun Secondary School in 2010. She is currently pursuing her tertiary education at National University of Singapore.

## SOARING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Good morning Ms Grace Fu, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, 2nd Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and 2nd Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Chia, the Principal, Ms Seet, the Vice-Principal, teachers and students. I am Coco Chiang from class 4D of 2013. It is a great honour to be here representing the students of 2013.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the school, all my teachers, friends and family members who have always helped me and guided me along the way. If not for them, I would not be able to stand here in front of the school, as the valedictorian.

I still remember when I first entered Shuqun Secondary School, almost two and a half years ago; I was really afraid and lost. Everything was so new and the transition to a secondary school in Singapore was overwhelming as it was different from my school in Taiwan. However, it did not take too long for me to meet and make new friends. The people I met here are genuinely warm and caring, which made my secondary school life enjoyable.

Furthermore, I was delighted to be given the opportunity to participate in a 2-week Science trip to America in 2013. It was a meaningful trip which had taught me to be more independent. However it was not all fun and games as the intensive revision for the examinations started not long after that. I was worried that I could not catch up with the lessons after I came back from the USA because I had missed Camp Victory which was held in June for the secondary four and five students. With the teachers' help and encouragement from my classmates, I eventually managed to catch up. In addition, I believe in the power of teamwork. I remember how my class formed study groups so we could study together. We helped to clarify each other's doubts. More importantly, as I teach others, I learn from them too. It was truly a good way to study. We would not forget the productive night-study sessions in the school library with teachers who stayed with us till the library closed its door after 9pm. I am grateful for their help and

support which has brought me to where I am today.

At this point in time, I want to take this opportunity to tell the lower secondary students to enjoy your days in Shuqun Secondary School and brush up your foundation so that you would not have to struggle too much during your upper secondary years. On the other hand, it is important for the upper secondary students to balance having a great time in school and preparation for the major examinations. Just this time last year, I was like you, worrying about the GCE-O level examinations, but I told myself to persevere and yes, we have made it!

Before ending my speech, I just want to express how glad I was that I did not opt for a change of school when I first got admitted to Shuqun Secondary School. If I had done so, I would never have been able to find myself. I would never learn the meaning of being a shuqunite and I certainly would not have such wonderful memories here. Though it was only for a short two-and-a-half year, all the hardships and joy we had shared together with our teachers and friends were really unforgettable. It is something money can't buy.

Last but not least; Shuqunites, don't forget to soar to greater heights; never allow anyone to restrain you from your dreams. I shall end with this quote by Nicholas Sparks: Nothing that's worthwhile is ever easy.

Thank you.

***Coco Chiang Chil-Lin***  
***Secondary 4D (2013)***

Coco Chiang was the top student in Shuqun Secondary School in 2013, scoring 7 distinctions of 8 subjects, with an aggregate of 5 points for L1R5. She is currently pursuing her pre-university education at National Junior College.

## REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

Good evening Mr Chia, our Principal, Ms Seet, our Vice-Principal, parents and fellow Shuqunites. My name is Yinghui and I am currently a Sec 5 student. I sat for my GCE N-level examination last year and achieved 10 points for my EMB3. This evening I would like to share my experience and how I had prepared for the N-level examination.

Frankly, one of the biggest challenges for me was English as it was not my first language. The very first step I did to improve my English result was to pay attention in every English lesson. It was very useful in helping me understand the skill in answering comprehension questions, formats and structures for writing and basic grammar rules. Learning English requires consistent hard work thus what we can do on our own is to read English newspaper daily and talk to people in proper English. As the saying goes “Rome was not built in a day”. We should put more effort into the subject that we are weak in and not throw in the towel easily.

Talking about coursework, I am more than certain that many of you are stressed about the deadlines. Well, keep calm and do everything calmly and steadily. Take up the challenge and see it in a positive light by encouraging and motivating one another. You may want to try working on your coursework an hour, on a daily basis instead of rushing through it at the last minute. This will save you plenty of time when it comes to revision for other subjects. Next, do listen to the teacher’s suggestions as they can help you improve on your coursework. Moreover, you should make full use of the Camp Victory period and get your coursework completed by that time.

On the subject of science, it is crucial to know the concepts well and they must be at your fingertips, as this is the subject, which requires you to have good foundation knowledge. This is the same for learning Mathematics as well. In order to understand the concept well, you must work on questions in your Ten-Year-Series (TYS). The repeated practices will reinforce the concepts and you will get used to the types of questions that you will

encounter in the N-level exam. Besides practising with the TYS, giving yourself time to process the information is also vital. What I did regularly was using a mind map to record all the syllabus outline in every chapter that I had learned. It guided me in understanding the appropriate content effectively and efficiently. Therefore, I could remember better.

For Combined Humanities, I have to admit it was difficult to memorise every word from the textbook. Thus, what my friend and I did was to understand the concepts well and then in a story-telling manner, recite the content to one another. I found this an effective way to remember the concepts as we were comfortable talking to our friends and feel less stressed about studying for Combined Humanities. In addition, by saying it out loud, it enhanced our memory. Lastly, please do not take the risk by studying only certain topics. You will never know what questions would be asked. To be safe, just learn every chapter well.

Many of us have the tendency to give up on the subjects that we are weak in, however, this is not the right attitude. There is no doubt that you and I face problems in studying. However, we need to find ways to improve the situation. What we can do is to have a positive mind set which will help boost our energy and heighten our inner strength. Whenever you have doubts about one particular question, just approach your teachers and clarify with them. I am sure they will be more than happy to help you.

I strongly believe that with perseverance, better time management and good attitude towards studies, you can definitely reap what you sow. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the dedicated teachers in Shuqun Secondary School. I truly appreciate your selfless contribution.

Thank you.

*Liu YingHui*  
*Secondary 5A*

## ONE DREAM

Having to come to Shuqun with no volleyball background, I was still selected to join the school's volleyball team due to my height. It was so awkward at first playing volleyball because in primary school I played soccer but as time went by I actually managed to adapt to this new sport. Training was hard and tiring both testing your mental power and physical strength. But this taught me to face challenges, to be more responsible and resilient as a person. Volleyball is a niche sport in our school; so much effort and resources have been put in to maintain its high standard. Our training schedules were tight. Sometimes training took place for 4 days in a week and the worst was 6 days a week during the national seasons. Sometimes I reached home at about 7.30pm. The worst part was that it was actually hard to carry out my revision after dinner because by then I was too exhausted.

It was extremely nerve-wrecking during competition season as I not only had to cope with my volleyball training but also my schoolwork. I honestly felt like giving up at secondary 2 as it was very demanding and stressful. As a result, my result went downhill. However, thanks to the teachers who supported and encouraged me to focus and get better results, I managed to turn things around. Other than academic studies, the teachers here taught me how to manage time and also gave me word of advice.

Thanks to my teachers who willingly gave me extra lessons, my teammates and friends who made time to dutifully collect my homework when I was away for competition and also who guided me after school, believing in me that I could do well. I managed to persevere, endure the hardship and score good results in my GCE-N examinations.

Through training, I mastered teamwork and gained true friends. My teammates and I spent a lot of time together, much longer than anyone could imagine. I admit that we had a few fights but through these, we became stronger as we overcame our problems and differences.

The day came when it was our turn to take over as seniors, to represent the school. Proudly I must announce that throughout my participation in Shuqun Volleyball, I had won two West Zone and one National Championships!!!

I wish one day I could contribute to the school like what they have done for me.

***Muhammad Fadhli***  
***Secondary 44 (2013)***

## MOBILE ROBOT RACE

We applied for the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Skills Competition. My friend, Swee Ban, and I had to go to ITE West for the Mobile Robotics training. At first, I thought it would be too difficult for us but I prayed that everything would be easy and smooth.

During the training, we tried to get things right although slowly. The aim of the competition was to build a robot that could finish the course in the shortest time. During the training, we had to move our robot at different speed. After the training, we understood better how the robots worked.

We had to go back to school during the holidays to set up the robots, make plans to programme the robot so that it would be able to complete the course without going off-course at the shortest time. We also created test tracks for the robot. We persevered until the robot could complete the task without going off-course.

The competition was held on a Sunday in August. On that day, we had to go to ITE Central and the journey there took a long time. Once we reached there, we started our preparations. We were very nervous because we would be competing on unknown tracks and there were two testing tracks too. After drawing lots to see which team would go first, we ended being the first team to compete.

We performed very well in the first round and even better in round two. For the last round, the organiser did not reveal our timing during the course. We were so worried that we moved our robot faster. Thankfully, our robot only shook quite a bit but did not fall off the course.

After the competition, the organiser announced the winners. We were overjoyed when we emerged as the First Runner Up in the Mobile Robot Race.

***Tay Ye Long***  
***Secondary 42***

## WATER CRAFT DESIGN AND RACE COMPETITION

When my teacher told us that we would be representing my school to challenge other schools by making a water boat at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), our first feeling was happiness because that would be our first time representing the school in a competition. We went home and told our parents about it. They told us that it was our chance to make the school proud and we must do my best.

When we first heard the news, it was during the June holidays and we were not really in the mood to start working on it. We had to research on how to make a good propeller and the fastest boat out of recyclable materials. By the end of the June holidays, all the research did not yield what we wanted and we still could not come up with a design of a boat. At the same time, our teacher constantly reminded us that we were running out of time and that we had to stop fooling around and produce a boat. Eventually, he had to hold us back after school to work on the design.

While researching on our own, we chanced upon a website which demonstrated how to make a boat. I tried constructing it using waterproof cardboard with my father (Jing Yang). I was overjoyed when the boat floated and balanced on the water. My teacher brought us to the pool and tested out the boat again. After a few more tries, I finally mastered how to handle the boat so that it would stay afloat.

On the day of the competition, we were very worried about how to handle the boat. We were exhilarated when our boat came in as one of the Top Five Fastest Watercraft in the race. We are grateful to our friends who gave us great ideas and our Mobile Robotics teacher who helped us with the propeller and gave us a chance to participate in this competition. Without our parents' support, the project would not have been successful too.

***Quek Jing Yang and Goh Kim Yong***  
***Secondary 42***

## NPCC

When I first entered Shuqun Secondary School, just like everybody else, I was uncertain about which Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) I wanted to commit myself to. However, after much consideration, I decided to join the Shuqun National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC).

To be frank, I initially joined the NPCC just to fulfill the school's requirement of being in one CCA but after spending a month participating in the CCA with many other schoolmates and seniors, I began to develop an interest in it. After attending my first annual camp with my squad mates, I realized that NPCC was not only about discipline, foot drills, marching and commanding, but it was also about developing life skills such as pitching a tent and being an ambassador to promote crime prevention to the public. All these knowledge and experience are useful in times of danger and more importantly they would help to develop me into an independent individual, ready for anything that may come my way. In addition, I also found myself bonding and clicking very well with my squad mates and seniors. We became more than mere schoolmates, we were good friends!

After two years of training as a cadet and, eventually, a leader, then came the time when I had to pass down the knowledge that I had gained to my juniors. Little did I expect myself to be part of the training department, holding the high post of Head of Training. This meant that I held many huge responsibilities which included the planning of weekly trainings and also being in charge of my fellow squad mates. Furthermore, I realized that I then had to plan for the annual camp. Although it was stressful and hard to cope with at times, it was a very enriching experience which had developed and trained me to be the leader I am today, and I am very grateful to have been given that opportunity.

Leading my squad was a totally new experience. Very quickly, I developed creative and analytical thinking skills. I had to make sure that not only the trainings but also the camps and other various events were running smoothly with minimal hiccups. Thankfully, I did not have to run a one-

man show, I had two other squad mates who were part of the training department to share my duties and responsibilities with. We worked well as a team and became closer than ever.

Finally, when I had to step down, I was awarded the Station Inspector Rank in appreciation of my devotion and contribution towards NPCC. I felt extremely happy! I have indeed benefitted and learnt lots of great things from NPCC.

The expression 'time flies really fast when you are having fun' is indeed true, as 4 years in NPCC went by in a blink of an eye. The bond between my squad mates and I is a special one, and I am sure that we will continue to be friends, putting the skills we have picked up in NPCC to good use. All I can say is, I am very happy to have chosen NPCC as my CCA, and I am proud to say that I am, and forever will be, a part of the Shuqun NPCC family.

***Soamu S/O Nadarajan***  
***Secondary 4B (2013)***

At the end of 2012, MOE changed Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) Central Judging to SYF Arts Presentation. Its motive was to tone down the competitiveness of this event. However it did not affect us, members of the Shuqun Wind Orchestra (SWO). From the first moment we received our scores, we practised day and night, aiming for the brief moment on stage that would be kept in our memories for life.

Other school bands had long started their practice since December 2012, but due to our overseas exchange program with a Taiwan's school band, our time for practice was nearly one month less than the others. All of us knew that we had to work even harder as a band to catch up. In the following three months, we pushed ourselves to our limits and gave the best that we could. Especially a week before the actual day of event, 6 hours of practice a day made us all exhausted. In the end, we were all satisfied with our actual performance in the Singapore Conference Hall.

There was a period of time after attending the Adam Khoo workshop, the Secondary Four and Five members were so motivated to study that they thought of quitting the performance to focus on their studies. Even so, their enthusiasm towards the band pulled them back from the thought. Personally, I think it was very good training and experience for the members to juggle between tight band practices and demanding school work. They had to learn to manage their time and not get distracted so that that they could complete both tasks perfectly.

At one point, I think the members lost focus. Some did not treat the practices seriously. They were unaware of the limited time we had left and were still fooling around during practice time. Some juniors were unwilling to improve on his or her own playing skills, delusional in their thinking that 'I'm the best'. The band lives by this motto, 'A band is as strong as its weakest player'. What good does it do if one member is able to play well? We have to help others improve and give encouragement to one another to boost the morale of the entire band. One person's negative

thoughts and the loss of passion could spread and influence the whole band. We did not have any idea how to overcome these problems but gradually, we could see seniors patiently teaching the juniors, advising them to be more humble and yet play well.

Nevertheless, our school had played an important role in the process of preparations for this event. We were lucky to have our Principal, Mr Chia and our band teacher, Mr Ong, who understood our need of money for extra tutorial lessons and time for more practices. Hence, we were allowed to have our band intensive practice camp during the March holidays, while the school paid for band instructors who travelled from Taiwan and Malaysia to teach us.

I was grateful to all my band members who behaved well and our supportive teachers. As a result, we were able to bring out our best and keep a common goal of working hard together as a band. Although we were awarded the Certificate of Distinction at the end of the SYF Arts Presentation 2013, each and every SWO member waited for the release of our actual score for SYF in May 2013 with great anticipation. We wanted to know if we had performed better than in the previous central judging. Only with true improvement did we consider ourselves successful after putting in so much effort and sacrifice.

***Ng Jue Yin***

***Secondary 4D (2013)***

## JUNIOR CHEF AT CAFÉ HIDEOUT

During the Secondary Two subject selection, I chose the subject Food and Nutrition as my elective subject because I have always been interested in cooking as well as nutrition studies.

Last year in Secondary Three, I had the chance to be involved in the Café Hideout as a junior chef. We had to go through a Food Handling course where we had to earn our certification before we were allowed to handle food. In the course, we learnt some stringent safety procedures to handle food products.

At the same time, I also had the privilege to go behind the scenes, and prepare food for the Mandarin Oriental Hotel guests and Formula One racers during the Grand Prix race in November last year. It was fun, yet tiring because the work environment in a hotel kitchen can be very stressful as everyone there works at a very fast pace as they need to get the dishes ready very quickly. All my classmates felt tired after a long day of work.

However, through this working experience we learnt that working in real life is not easy at all. We shared memorable experiences together and one of which was the opportunity to cook for all the famous racers and in addition, we also get to hear the sound of the speeding racing cars roaring by! This makes me excited to go to work every day.

In addition to all these wonderful experiences, I felt extremely honoured to have a chef from Mandarin Oriental Hotel guide and teach us how to cook some exquisite hotel dishes last year such as a meat dish called Chicken Cacciatore and a main dish known as Mushroom Penne with Cream Sauce. I felt very appreciated when our Principal, Mr Chia came to the kitchen to thank us for our involvement in the Grand Prix. I even had a chance to talk to some invited guests who gave us feedback that our food was very tasty. At that moment, I felt that all our hard work and efforts had not gone to waste and I felt extremely proud as a Café Hideout Junior Chef!

*Michelle Nah Xin lei*  
*Secondary 43*

## OUR DREAM GARDEN

In 2013, Shuqun Secondary School was invited by Housing and Development Board (HDB) to adopt the garden just right beside the school's basketball court, an open space at Block 232. This great opportunity enabled students and residents at Yuhua constituency to work together, yet again. After the site was confirmed, it was time to design for the green space. Students from Science and Environmental Club were also invited to share their initial concepts through drawing 'Our Dream Garden'.

Students from the Club were given a chance to show the residents how their dream garden would look like and how they would want it to be. The green plans were then displayed at a community event in March to gather residents' feedbacks. My Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) mate, Cheryl and I represented our CCA to attend this event to introduce and explain our green plans to the residents.

After that, HDB then facilitated a Design Planning Workshop at the school in mid-April for the club members. Yuhua Zone 2's resident gardeners and Science and Environmental Club students then worked in groups to propose suitable and realistic garden layouts. Before this workshop, our club also split ourselves in groups to research on many different types of herbs, spices and vegetables that cultivate best in that particular area and even find out what their benefits are. We also thought of the residents and perhaps the school could use these herbs and spices in their cooking. I mean... what is better than growing our own crops? It will be well taken care of by the teamwork of the residents and students.

Being in the Science and Environmental Club really gives the students many opportunities to be able to have partnerships with the residents. We are able to communicate with one another through gardening and to gain experiences from them as they are knowledgeable. It is much better than researching on how to cultivate a plant properly, instead we could approach real experts when in doubt.

***Carine Wee Li Jing***  
***Secondary 5B***

## 2013 BIENNALE PEER GUIDING

If you could change the world, what kind of world would you want it to be? What changes do you want to bring about?

“If The World Change” was the theme of 2013 Singapore Biennale, an art exhibition that takes place once every two years. I was very delighted to be chosen as one of many other art students to represent our school in the Biennale Peer Guiding programme, together with my two friends, Emerik and Pimpisa.

Three of us attended a three-day training of Biennale Peer guiding accompanied by Ms Izyan, Mdm Rafilah and Mdm Suhana at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). I thoroughly enjoyed the three days of training as it was a brand-new experience for me. Trained by SAM’s experienced docents, I learned much new knowledge and acquired many pieces of good advice from them. There, I also met Valerie, the docent who guided us through the three days. Valerie was very supportive and always encouraged us to be more confident and I had learned so much from her. The training consisted of presenting our choices of artworks to our fellow trainees and exploring other artworks in depth. Three days went by so fast while we were engrossed in the activities.

Tuesday, 11th of February 2014, was the day we conducted the tour for the Secondary Three Express and Normal Academic art students of our school at the Singapore Biennale. Although I was guiding my own juniors, I was still very nervous and scared that I might forget everything that I had prepared. I was glad and thankful to my juniors for being attentive and responsive. Unfortunately, the tour had to be cut short as time did not allow me to complete the whole visit. I was very sad and disappointed but there was nothing I could do about it. My juniors on the other hand, kept asking me questions about other artworks as they were eager to find out more. Therefore, I left them with a simple question that could help them think and relate to the artworks.

Although I was unable to conclude my tour, I still felt very happy to have been given the once in a lifetime chance. This experience has helped me to understand what goes on in this world especially in Southeast Asia and the importance of simple and little things that we normally take for granted. If the world were to change, I want to make that change, starting from me.

***Ng Catharina Enggar Kusuma***  
***Secondary 4A***

## WELCOME TO JOGJAKARTA

In mid-October, our art teachers organised an Art Immersion Programme to Jogjakarta. We were excited as it was our first time participating in a study trip overseas with our schoolmates. In addition, the trip to Jogjakarta meant a short trip back to our homeland and we could finally indulge our taste buds in Indonesian food that we sorely missed.

Our flight departed at the wee hour and all of us, including the teachers, slept like babies on the plane to Jakarta and Jogjakarta. The moment we landed in Jogjakarta, we jumped in joy, looking forward to the activities that awaited us.

The four-day-three-night trip left us in awe. We visited art museums such as the Oei Hong Djien (OHD) Art Gallery, Affandi Museum and Ruang Mes 56. We met Dr. Oei in person during our visit to his gallery and he kindly gave us a tour around his gallery. Some of us also attended an immersion programme recently as we were invited to one of the founders of Ruang Mes 56, Angki Purbandono's exhibition opening at the Mizuma Gallery, Singapore. We had never thought that we could get such a chance and it was an honour for us to meet him, interview him and explore his artworks closely. As Indonesians, we had not visited any museum by an Indonesian artist in Indonesia before since we had always thought that being an artist in Indonesia is very hard as there are only few people who appreciate their works. However, this trip changed our perspective of Indonesian artists and we learned to appreciate them more.

Other than visiting museums, we also went to Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa (SMSR) to work together with the students there. We were welcomed by many enthusiastic and kind students. Immediately they made us feel comfortable as if we had known them for a long time. Although they had difficulties communicating with us, they did not give up and they tried their best to interact and know more about us. We were there for three consecutive days and on our second day, the Principal of SMSR, Mr. Rakhmat, decided to hold a collaborative exhibition of our and SMSR

students' artworks. We were surprised but felt unsure of his decision but we decided to work hard for the exhibition to show our appreciation for his hospitality. The next day, many people attended the exhibition and we were grateful and thankful for the rare opportunity given to us.

All in all, we learned to appreciate artworks better and not only that, the stories behind each artwork taught us to fully appreciate the simple things in life. From the SMSR students, we learned to always give our best and to not give up even under unforeseen circumstances. Thanks to Mr. Chia, Mr. Rakhmat, our beloved art teachers and the SMSR students for giving us this meaningful and once in a lifetime experience.

*Ng Catharina Enggar Kusuma and Emerik Viriya*  
*Secondary 4A*

## SINGAPORE-HONG KONG EXCHANGE PROGRAMME 2013

In July 2013, I participated in the 12th Singapore-Hong Kong Exchange Programme 2013. The programme has been organised for 12 years and in 2013, our school was very fortunate to be chosen to participate in the programme. I was very excited about taking part in the programme because I would like to learn more about the culture of Hong Kong and of course to interact with students of the same age from there. It was a very rare opportunity and also my first time participating in such a programme.

In July, the Hong Kong students came to Singapore and my family and I hosted a student in my home. I was to be the buddy of the student too. Her name was Yan Qi but we all addressed her as Hailey. She was from Tsueng Kwan O Secondary School, and she was very pretty, with dark big eyes. When she was in Singapore, I brought her to many different places that I hoped would make her trip to Singapore memorable.

On her 4th Day in Singapore, my other classmates and I brought all the exchange students out to have lunch at a nearby coffee shop. We wanted them to have a taste of one of Singapore's most iconic local food, Chicken Rice. At the same time, we wanted them to see the differences between food cultures in Hong Kong and Singapore. Although it was not be the best Chicken Rice in Singapore, I believed they had a great time eating there and we took many photos together to remind us of that occasion.

To make Hailey's trip to Singapore more memorable, a few Singapore classmates went out with us to the Marina Bay area to have a look at the Merlion, Marina Bay Sands, the Helix Bridge and some other places of interest there. Those locations were chosen as we felt that every tourist to Singapore should visit them as they are all the signature places of interest in Singapore. While walking around Marina Bay, I explained to them briefly about what the different buildings and their main attractions. Almost every first-time tourist to Singapore would have a photo taken

with the Merlion and we were no exception. After walking around the Marina Bay area, we brought them to Marina Bay Sands so they could have a look at the shopping mall there. We took many photos together and that trip had surely made our day.

Next, all the exchange students together with their Singaporean hosts went to the Universal Studio Singapore (USS) together. We had lots of fun playing together at the theme park. We were so excited about the whole trip that we had not remembered to take any photo at all. We went on the Mummy Rides which we waited for a very long time, the Jurassic Park ride with water splashing onto us, and many more roller-coaster rides. Unfortunately, the Human and Cylon Rollercoaster rides were not in operation that day. As such we did not get to ride on them. We were quite upset about it, but then, we had no choice but to continue on with other stations.

Before they were due to leave Singapore, we brought them to buy souvenirs and shopping at Bugis Street. We chose Bugis Street as it has more items that are more suitable for teenagers. We shopped the whole day and they all had their luggage full of souvenirs to bring back to Hong Kong. Hailey and I had lots of fun when I brought her to the Ice-Skating rink at Jcube on another separate occasion.

The 14-days exchange programme passed by very quickly, and soon it was time for Hailey to go back to Hong Kong. Frankly, it was quite tiring playing host to an exchange student but I believe it was all worth it as Hailey had lots of delightful memories and luggage full of souvenirs from her trip to Singapore. Hopefully, she will come back and visit me again while I await my turn to visit Hong Kong.

Time flew by after Hailey's visit and soon it was November and time for the Singaporean students to go to Hong Kong to meet our buddies there. The flight took three hours and we arrived there in the afternoon. Many of our buddies had been waiting outside the arrival gate for us, eager to take us back to their homes for our home-stay experience with them in Hong Kong.

I took a good look at Hong Kong airport before I met my buddy, Hailey, outside the airport with a woman, her mother. They were friendly and nice to me. That was my first trip to Hong Kong and my research had revealed many places of interest in Hong Kong such as the Victoria Harbour, Mongkok, The Peak and the Cable Car. There were many places that I would like to visit in Hong Kong but before that Hailey brought me back to her home, which was in the opposite direction of the airport. On the way home, Hailey's mother explained to me about the different bridges that we had passed by and, also where Hong Kong Island was located. It had taken a long time before we finally reached her home, which was in Kowloon Area.

Near her home were many beautiful and big bungalows and according to Hailey's mother, were all owned by wealthy foreigners. After taking a look at the surrounding area near her home, Hailey and her mother took me out for dinner. As it was my first day in Hong Kong, I was not used to the food there. It did not taste like the food I had eaten back home. After that, we walked around a mall before we went home for a good rest.

The next day was Sunday and also Hailey's birthday. Her mother had bought her a cake with Chinese words written on it: Happy Birthday, Lau Yin Hei. The cake looked really nice and we took photos with the cake and the birthday girl. After the celebration, Hailey brought me out to meet her friend, Milky. She was from the same school as Hailey although in a different class. Milky loves to eat and everywhere she went, she had food at hand

We went to a community club and played some sports there. Although three of us did not have any experience bowling, we still had fun playing. After a few hours of playing, I wanted to go shopping at Mongkok and we had a great time shopping at Mongkok. All the items there were really interesting and affordable.

For the following days, we attended lessons at her school, Tsueng Kwan O Secondary School. Her classmates were really nice and friendly. Although they could not speak Chinese well, they still tried their very best to chat and talk to us.

After five days of schooling, we went to the Peak with my classmate, Eugene, and his buddy Sidney. Four of us first visited the Madame Tussauds Museum located at the Peak and I was really impressed with the wax figures in the Museum. The figures were all very well made and they all looked so real. After visiting the museum, we took an hour to complete our walk around the Peak. Although it was tiring, it was worth it as the scenery at the top of the mountain was really impressive and definitely one of the highlights of my trip to Hong Kong.

There were many other places we went to like the Ocean Park, the Star Avenue and all these made my trip really very memorable. If I could, I would like to visit Hong Kong again!! I must thank my buddy, Hailey, for taking me to so many beautiful places and taking good care of me when I was in Hong Kong. Of course, Hailey's mother too. We promised to stay in contact with each other, and of course I would remember this exchange programme forever.

*Ng Xue Li*  
*Secondary 3C*

## GIVING BACK

Holidays are days that everyone looks forward to. However, unlike most of the students who would spend their leisure time at home playing games or being a couch potato, I spent three days in school measuring, drilling, installing, sanding and cutting woods. We were on a mission. We wanted to create a platform under the whiteboard so that the projector could be placed on it. This would help neaten the classroom arrangement and reduce the danger of students and staff tripping over the wires that led from the control panel to the teachers' table.

I learned many valuable lessons that could not be obtained from textbooks during those three days of my December holiday. I would like to thank the school for giving me such great opportunity to gain CIP (Community Involvement Programme) hours through this project besides the priceless life lessons.

Firstly, I learned about commitment. Once I have agreed to do something, I cannot run away from it. Even though it was near impossible to wake up early in the morning for school during the holidays, I kept my promise and arrived each morning dutifully.

Secondly, I learned about teamwork. This project would not be completed if any one of us failed to cooperate. We had to install the platforms in all the classes so teamwork was essential to our success.

Thirdly, I learned about patience. When measuring the wood, we were prone to make errors thus besides taking the time to measure patiently, I also had to be focused.

Last but most importantly, I learned to give back to the school. This project had allowed me a chance to contribute back to Shuqun Secondary School since it has provided me with so many things such as a conducive and supportive learning environment.

Thank you Shuqun Secondary.

***Margareta Siswana***  
***Secondary 4A***

## RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY THROUGH ACE

As part of the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) lessons for Secondary Three Normal Technical students, the school planned for activities which are in line with the objectives of the school's Activities for Character Empowerment (ACE) programme. ACE aims to instil life skills and character through physical or sports activities. The three activities selected for the students in 2013 were Silat, Aerobics and Fitness. The students would first indicate their preference, but due to the limited slots; they might not be allocated their first choice. The activities spanned over 10 weeks. The instructors also incorporated the selected value and skills that the school would like the students to develop through the activities – namely resilience and adaptability.

### Silat

On the day we were to find out the activity we had been assigned, my heart beat so fast. When Mr Said announced the result, I was both shocked and disappointed that I was not assigned what I had chosen. I wanted to join Fitness but I was given my second choice, Silat. It was difficult for me to join Silat as I had no interest in Silat at all.

I met Mr Shek Alauddin, our coach from Singapore National Silat Association and felt grateful to have such a talented coach teaching us. After learning some kicking tactics and art of defending, I felt the session was no longer boring. Silat was a great and awesome activity.

I learned lots of new stunts and kicking tactics from Mr Alauddin. I loved it when he complimented me when I practised my kicking tactics on him. I learned some unexpected lessons too such as respect, resilience, and responsibility; three of our school values. We showed respect by first bowing to our opponent. We practised resilience when we continuously punched the bean bag, often with much encouragement from Mr Alauddin.

We learned responsibility by attending our lessons regularly.

Silat is such a great activity that I would recommend it to my friends and classmates. I felt honoured to be trained by Mr Shek Alauddin, the National Silat Champion. Silat taught me how to defend myself and protect myself from danger. Silat also taught me to be a respectful person and to have self-discipline. I hope to be trained by Mr Shek Alauddin again and I appreciated the school for giving me this training.

***Siti Nur Jannah Bte Adis***  
***Secondary 4/1***

### **Fitness**

I was very happy when I found out I was selected to attend Fitness elective lessons. I followed the instructor's instructions on how to use the equipment as we knew the coach and teacher cared about our safety.

Although I had used the equipment in the gym before, I still made many mistakes and the coach corrected them. I tried the dumbbell and treadmill on the first day of lesson. I hoped to train hard for my National Physical Fitness Award (NAPFA) as well as for my own health. I would like to teach my friends who have no experience using the gym equipment the proper way to handle them to prevent any injury.

I worked hard to develop my muscles and I have increased my body's muscle mass. I shall continue to improve on my health.

***Ong Kai Siang***  
***Secondary 4/1***

I did not react much when I heard I was in the Fitness elective lessons because I thought I could not exercise in the gym due to my leg injury. The doctor had told me to refrain from Physical Education but I went to the gym anyway that day. I had no friends and no idea what to do.

The coach and my teacher assured me that though my leg was injured, I could still exercise my upper body. I made two new friends while training that first session. I was glad that the exercises developed my arm muscle and so I trained even harder. I learned many ways to develop my muscles.

When I was angry, the training helped me to manage my anger. Even my father commented that my arms looked bigger and I spent less time playing computer games too. I trained even harder as that made my father happy.

***Quek Jing Yang***  
***Secondary 4/2***

## **Aerobics**

I felt quite sad when I was given Aerobics rather than Gym. I thought it would be tough as I did not like dancing or attending dance lessons. However, after the lesson, I learned to dance in a group or on my own. The most important thing that I had learned was communication through dance. Dance became a fun way to express myself.

The instructor was friendly and was patient in teaching us the dance steps so we all could be better dancers.

***Tan Pei Yi***  
***Secondary 4/2***

When I was first selected to join Aerobics, I thought the sessions would be boring. However, the instructor made me feel happy after the first song. I liked the way he taught us; he was patient even when we made mistakes and he always had a smile on his face. After that, I promised myself I would not skip any lesson.

We learned how to keep fit and from then onwards, I practised aerobics at home every day. The most difficult dance was the ‘letter dance’ but I would still recommend this activity to every student in the school. I wish to have more aerobics lessons in future.

***Sharmita D/O Pugazhenth***  
***Secondary 4/1***

## UPFLOW – HIP HOP DANCE

“I have a passion for dancing. I have been dancing for 6 years now and I feel I become a better dancer each time I attend the dance classes. I felt that the dance classes for our group Upflow had taught me the most. I really enjoy dancing with our dance group Upflow. Uncle Pat and Alex were really good instructors and they never give up on us even though we made a lot of mistakes. Before attending the dance classes a few weeks ago, I was a shy person who seldom talk to people much. After making more friends through the dance class, I felt more confident of myself and was better able to communicate with the peers around me. Thank you Singapore Esplanade and AVIVA for giving me the chance to be a better dancer and a better person. I will continue to work hard and hope Upflow will strive on.” - *Siti Nurhaliyana*

“I had learnt a lot from Hip Hop dancing. It was very fun and there were a lot of interesting things to pick up from the training and experience on stage. I made numerous friends through the dance sessions and learnt about teamwork when we were dancing together. By performing in front of everyone in school, I felt the school recognizes my talent and is grooming me.” - *Silvester Teo*

“My experience with Upflow and with the Hip Hop dance classes was very unforgettable and memorable. It was a huge honour to be trained by the professional dance instructors. I had learnt a lot from the lessons conducted by them. This whole experience made me a more matured person and now, I understand that Hip Hop is not just about dancing, but about the passion in expressing the feelings to the tune of the music and about letting the audience feel happy as they watch the smiles and moves of the dancers. It is also about teamwork and commitment in ensuring that everyone turns up for training and practices, and being there for one another. This experience taught me a lot of other positive things about trying to be successful in life. I am really thankful for the chance to be trained in Hip Hop dancing and appreciative of the dance instructors

who have put in so much for us. I am also grateful to AVIVA, Singapore Esplanade and the school for giving us the opportunities.” - ***Shafiq***

“I love to dance and I really enjoyed myself learning from Alex and Uncle Pat and they are such great people. Alex and Uncle Pat are very good instructors and they taught us a lot of things. The whole experience taught me how to be a more disciplined person, attending training faithfully even though it was rather late in the afternoon, and to give my best for the team even though it was tiring. I appreciate everything that was done for us. Thank you for the encouragement given by Uncle Pat and Alex in the process in learning the dance.” - ***Nur’ain***

“I am interested in dancing and have been dancing without any coaching since I was young. I got to know about the Hip Hop dancing and became very interested in the dance. It was Teachers’ Day last year when I first danced. Subsequently, I took part in the Scape Dance Competition and then joined this Hip Hop dance team called Upflow organised by the school. I found myself enjoying the dance very much and was able to make new friends in the group. The training was hard but it was great fun! When we went to the Esplanade to visit the dance studio, it was an unforgettable experience. It was a rare opportunity to visit the place. Alex and Pat were the best instructors I have ever met. They gave us invaluable tips and kept helping and reminding us of what we need to do. Over the few weeks of training, I learnt much from them. Thank you for helping to put us together and teaching us how to dance. You have made an impact to our lives. This experience had been memorable and meaningful!” - ***J. Premath***

Upflow is the name chosen by the students for a Hip Hop group formed by Sec 4 students under the guidance of professional trainers from Esplanade. This programme is sponsored by AVIVA Singapore as part of their corporate social responsibility (CR) efforts to help at-risk students stay engaged in school. As part of the programme, the students get to visit the Esplanade and experience how professional dancers train and live. Upflow performed at numerous platforms in 2013, including the official launch of the Shuqun Hideout, which was graced by Ms Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Education.

# INSPIRING SUCCESS

## DAWN OF A NEW ERA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING: SPARCS

When I first read about the Flipped classroom, I felt a sense of resonance in my heart. Many years ago when I was still studying in a primary school, I encountered difficulties while attempting my Mathematics homework. Both my parents had to work to support the family and I had no one to turn to when I needed help with my homework. Many a time, we might understand what the teacher had explained in class but when we were asked to apply the skills and knowledge, we were unable to solve the problems or answer the questions.

As a teacher, I have always wanted to have more time interacting with my students and we all know that having a good rapport with our students will allow us to achieve better student outcomes. Flipping the class allows just that as teachers have more time in the classroom for discussion and it allows the teacher to provide more personalised feedback. The most crucial step of learning, where students apply what they have learnt, is done with the support of their teachers in the classroom.

When I initially flipped my lessons, I noticed even my most disengaged student was on task in class. Even though he was not able to solve the problem, I observed that he tried to seek help from his classmates and I also had to opportunity to eventually guide him through while he solved the problem.

We seize the opportunity to embark on cloud computing when Microsoft gave all school students and staff an Office 365 account. Sharepoint which is a part of office 365 is an online portal which allows both students and teachers to share their resources and work. After much discussion with the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) committee, we decided to merge the flipped classroom with modern technology. This allows us the technology to combine students' work and teachers' feedback into one program – fondly termed as SPARCS (Shuqun Personalised and

Asynchronous cuRriculum for Collaborative and Self-directed learning) in Shuqun Secondary School.

SPARCS allows students to learn asynchronously outside and in school. Teachers could provide personalised and asynchronous feedback to students. Students take ownership of their own learning by monitoring their own pace of learning after curriculum time. The journey to implement SPARCS in 2013 was really an uphill learning task for the teaching staff who were deployed as the systems and processes were constantly being improved. We also encountered many unexpected technical issues which could only be resolved through conference call with Microsoft technical support from both Shanghai and USA. Six members of the staff, including 3 teachers, 2 Vice-Principals and myself visited the USA and Canada to learn more about the flipped classroom and use of OneNote and Sharepoint in the classroom.

I believe the numerous lessons that the teaching staff had garnered will be instrumental in preparing the teachers and students for the imminent changes in the workplace. More importantly, the education system should harness the improvement in technology and the availability of information on the Internet to make our teaching and learning experience effective and authentic.

***Mr Tan Kok Boon***

***Subject Head (Information Communication and Technology)***

## A NEW CHAPTER IN TEACHING PEDAGOGY (REVIEW AND REFLECTION)

In 2013, Shuqun Secondary School embarked on a new programme: Shuqun Personalised and Asynchronous Curriculum for Collaboration and Self-directed learning, otherwise known as SPARCS. The SPARCS programme was designed based on a Flipped Classroom model to enable students to develop a greater sense of personal responsibility and initiative towards learning. The Flipped classroom is designed for students to learn at home and do their homework in class, hereby deriving its name ‘Flipped’ from flipping the traditional classroom. Students can then request for assistance and clarification on questions that they have difficulty with in class – something that is unavailable at home and teachers will be able to check and provide immediate clarifications during the in-class practice.

In 2013, the Secondary 1 students in Shuqun Secondary School used laptops in their classes as part of the ICT (Information Communication Technology) directive for students to be able to explore various methods and avenues of learning such as watching videos and attempting online quizzes. Throughout 2013, both teachers and students had grown to adapt and were used to using the laptops and flipping the lessons to help the students to learn better. Some students had commented that the lessons were more interactive and the teachers were able to assist them with problems that they face timely, in class. Teachers were better able to reach out to students who were reticent about speaking their minds in front of their classmates.

This model allowed the teachers the opportunity to relate better to the students as more time is freed up from teacher-directed talk to cater to better teacher-student or student-student interactions. Furthermore, the quality of learning improved too as students were better equipped with prior knowledge of the subject through the pre-reading videos conducted at home as part of the Flipped curriculum. With this initiative, there was a distinct shift from a teacher-directed classroom to a more student-centred

one; focusing on the students' learning and application of skills and knowledge.

SPARCS also supported the students' different level of learning needs and abilities; with some miles ahead of the peers while some continued to struggle through chapter-by-chapter. With SPARCS, it allowed classroom time to be designed in such a manner that allowed the higher ability students, equipped with the knowledge and ability, to work on their own assignments while freeing the teacher to assist the weaker students. This allowed more time for the teacher to coach the weaker students one-to-one, and provide immediate feedback, yet not compromising the learning progress of the stronger students.

Although the preparation for such lessons had not been an easy task, the teachers believed that students' interest and needs came foremost. With the use of 21st Century skills that closes the gap between students and teachers, as well as the multi-modal learning; half the battle had been won.

***Miss Goh Wan Ru***  
***Teacher***

## LEARNING BEYOND THE SHORES OF SINGAPORE

The “Flipped Classroom” starts with one question: what is the best use of my face-to-face class time? –Jonathan Bergman

When first tasked to join the new Professional Learning Circles: SPARCS (Shuqun Personalised and Asynchronous Curriculum for Collaboration and Self-directed learning), the general perception amongst the teachers was that of trepidation and worry. Why do we need a new way of teaching when we cannot even finish teaching the students what we were supposed to complete in the syllabus?

Then came the long and arduous journey that we are still travelling through. Learning about SPARCS, the Flipped classroom, Microsoft 365, OneNote and Sharepoint. We were really inundated with acronyms, processes, steps, routines that we have to struggle with on top of our own traditional curriculum.

However, the journey we embarked upon was not made alone. Mr Siva and Miss Seet, our two Vice-Principals as well as the Subject Head of Information Communication and Technology, Mr Tan Kok Boon, were with us all the way, along with all the teachers and staff who aided us either with moral or technical support. This enabled us to see a clearer whole picture especially when many of us got disheartened by the many obstacles, hardware as well as software glitches. We also realised that we needed to see real life examples of successful implementation of the flip classroom in order to gain a better understanding of what we need to do to stay on track.

Recognising this need, the school decided that a learning journey for the SPARCS teachers was in order and set about planning a trip that took six months to organise and co-ordinate. On November 2013, a team of seven educators visited international schools in the United States of America and Canada to learn from teachers and schools that have implemented similar programmes of flip or Sharepoint.

Clintondale High School was one such school that had Flipped their curriculum completely. This was especially heartening for us since the school shared many similarities with Shuqun Secondary School; the student population, income strata and even abilities of students. For many of us, seeing the success stories in Clintondale made us hopeful of its positive impact in Shuqun Secondary School.

‘We have been able to quadruple the amount of time our students spend with their teachers,’ reaffirmed why the school started out with SPARCS and this rang in my head after meeting Greg Green, Principal of Clintondale High School. The teachers there could spend more time helping the students with questions in class as the students watch the basic videos at home after school and work on their assignments in class. As a result, Clintondale High School was able to improve their grades tremendously within a short period of time. One notable memory of the trip to Clintondale was the use of QR codes by Mr Carpenter. Given the rise of IT-savvy teens, the use of QR codes, blogs, even social media sites like youtube and facebook, allowed students to access the teacher’s videos easily, pass messages or catch up with work if they had missed classes due to illness or other reasons.

At Appleby College where students learn, submit work and assignments through their laptop, we were able to understand first-hand the endless possibilities that SharePoint possesses. This was important since Shuqun Secondary School had decided to make use of SharePoint as the online platform for both teachers and students to work with. The college was very generous and shared their technical knowledge with us, along with the operative side of the programme, allowing us to ask questions and understand the areas we need to focus on to make SPARCS and SharePoint work cohesively.

In 2014, SPARCS will continue and the new batch of Secondary One students will also be exposed to this innovative method of learning. In the years to come, we hope that our students will have the opportunity to develop inquisitive minds and self-reliance. We are very excited and look forward to a brighter and bigger future for our students.

***Miss Goh Wan Ru, Mr Mark Tay Cong Yu, Mr Lee Jun Wei***  
***Teachers***

# THINKBOX FOR STUDENTS' LEARNING - STUDENT-CENTRIC APPROACH TO CREATING A DESIGN RESOURCE ROOM

The Design Resource Room – “ThinkBOX”- was a culmination of the Professional Learning Circle (PLC) project embarked by the Design & Technology (D&T) teachers in improving the learning experiences and eventually translating into better academic performances for our students.

## Conception

As D&T is very much an exploratory subject, the teachers in the department felt that a resource room with models, exhibits and implements would facilitate students' learning and self-discovery. The room would shelf design reference books and magazines for referral and research. Students would also have first-hand visual and tactile experiences in exploring and analyzing the workings of mechanisms, electronics and structures from the display artefacts. The room could also serve as an activity room for collaborative and cooperative learning where students could carry out group projects, design critique and discussions. For the graduating classes, the room could also house past-year coursework materials for their reference and resources.

## Execution

The room was scheduled to be completed in April 2012, in time for the school's official opening ceremony. Students started volunteering their help in January to form a planning/working group. As this was a student-centric project, the students were empowered with the design of the layout of the room. Groups of students from Secondary 1 to 3 were tasked with designing different sections of the room in January. Their proposals were collated and after much discussion, a consensus on the theme of the room was reached. As 'SHUQUN' means a collection of trees in Chinese, the

theme of nature was decided. The students considered themselves young seedlings that would be molded into strong trees of moral characters.

While waiting for the required materials to be delivered, the students discussed further the designs on the walls and the paint colours to go with them. Realisation of the room started in early February. Student volunteers clocked in numerous hours after school to work relentlessly in order to meet the deadlines. They managed to complete the room by end of March.

### **Completion**

The room was declared open on 14th April 2012 by Senior Minister of State, Ms Grace Fu. The students shared their ideas and fruits of their labour with the guests who were impressed with the transformation of an unfurnished room into a vibrant and lively “ThinkBOX”. The students naturally were rewarded with a sense of accomplishment and achievement.

Shuqun Secondary School’s Design & Technology unit was awarded the Best suggestion of the Year Award (School) at MOE Excel Fest 2013 for their work on the “ThinkBOX”.

***Shuqun Secondary School Design & Technology Department***

## STARS OF SHUQUN SECONDARY SCHOOL

The green, yellow and brown theme of Shuqun Secondary School (SQSS) is almost an unmistakable sight in the neighborhoods of Jurong East. I was initially dreading and carrying heavy footsteps to the school as I recalled that it used to be a school, which did not have an impressive “CV” as compared to the likes of Raffles and Chinese High. It was not until I entered the school gates of SQSS, that I experienced an unforgettable, memorable and excellent teaching experience, which completely transformed my impression of the school.

My experience at SQSS aligned greatly with the theme of the book, ‘Hearts of Shuqun’. The experience was a heartfelt and intimate one that I shared with the school members, teachers and the students. I have decided to write about my experience with a ‘framework’ that I came up with, ‘STARS’! ‘STARS’ stands for Serve, Teach, Appreciate, Reciprocate and Support. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how I achieve all these points during my 4-week stay in SQSS.

Serve one self, the organization (Ministry Of Education), community and the nation

During my stay in SQSS, I learnt that it was important for the teachers to know that our service is invaluable, priceless and noble. Through observing and conducting lessons in these four weeks, I learnt that our teaching as an educator can be very influential and our words and advice can be very powerful.

I realized that it seems very common that most teachers know how to serve themselves, relishing the idea of challenges, overcoming obstacles and even achieving their goals. However, many overlook the bigger picture, which is the fact that when they impart their precious knowledge and experiences to the students, they are also contributing in a very major way as we serve the community and nation. I learnt that though it is vital for us to be proud and aware of our accomplishments as professionals, we must

also be diligent and efficient as we keep ourselves competent and relevant. We are the “hands” that mould the future generations of Singapore, hence it is very important that we constantly improve and upgrade ourselves focusing on our strength, flexibility and agility.

### **Teach to Learn, Learn to Teach**

During the four weeks at SQSS, I learnt this amazing quote from my experience, and that is ‘teach to learn, learn to teach’. This experience was from my “unexpected lesson” conducted at the soccer field. I learnt that lessons could happen anywhere, as long as the teachers bother to make every learning possibility occur.

It was out of personal interest that I ended up on the field playing soccer that afternoon. However, I began to notice that the students were warm and friendly, and they quickly opened up to me, especially after I demonstrated and taught them some free kick techniques. I was then able to learn the beauty of teaching to learn, as I suggested that the students on the field learn from me, and thereafter teach their peers who were weaker in taking the free kicks. While imparting their knowledge and demonstrating to their peers, they also improved and became more consistent in their newly acquired skills. Hence, I was able to debrief and share with them the beauty of Teaching to Learn. I benefitted from the session as I was able to learn about the students’ character traits and personalities. It was really important to do so as I opine that while we must be fair and equal to our students, we must also acknowledge that our teaching methods and approaches can not be ‘one size fits all’, because students are simply unique and different in each and every one of their own ways.

Hence, I learnt from my beloved students that in order to be a great teacher, I must also learn about not just content knowledge for my subjects, but also about my students. An understanding and caring classroom setting is an excellent platform to start an effective and enriching lesson.

It is also at Shuqun Secondary that I learnt the importance of appreciate everyone, regardless of strengths and weaknesses and reciprocating the

trust given to us by parents, colleagues and superiors by giving our utmost best to support the different stakeholders of SQSS.

It is never easy to remain objective when it comes to interactions with people. It is in SQSS however, that I learnt that it is very important to appreciate everyone, whether they were fellow colleagues, students or even the cleaning staff in the school. During my time in SQSS, the students taught me that one may not necessary be very academically inclined, but he/she may have other strengths such as IT skills, Art and Music! Hence, it is always important for teachers to constantly remind ourselves that we should never leave any student behind or give up on them. It may be due to our decision to give up on them that in turn, we condemn them to further miseries in their lives, and may also end up burying their talents in other fields.

I also learnt that it was very important for us to reciprocate the trust shown to us by giving our utmost best. I witnessed how my mentors were able to perform and conduct an effective lesson even if they were encountering stresses and problems outside of the classroom. The passion did not burn out as they persevered. When asked about how they were able to that, they replied, "The parents count on us to groom and educate their children, the students look up to us as role models, the school places much emphasis in developing us, hence it is up to us to reciprocate the faith and trust shown by everyone by simply doing our best!" They have exemplified how teaching and learning inculcate the importance of showing care and support to everyone. It is not simply just a profession; it is a social development project that leaves behind a legacy for every individual that we have taught.

A school very much "misunderstood" due to an unfavorable past, SQSS has developed and grown into a school which encourage dynamism, academic excellence and also character building. With a large array of talented and passionate educators, coupled with the warm, friendly and enthusiastic students, a successful formula is created for greater successes and achievements to be attained.

In conclusion, a saying that always catches my eye when I make my way in and out of school, sums up my learning journey in Shuqun as I embark on the next phase of my teaching career. ‘十年树木，百年树人’... It takes only ten years to grow a tree, but it’s a lifelong process in grooming and teaching an individual. Teaching is one of the most noble and rewarding profession as we devote our time, energy and efforts in order to develop our students in the direction of a better future.

***Darius Pang Xuewei***

Mr Pang is a Ministry of Education Teaching Award holder who studies at National University of Singapore.

## TEACHING AT SHUQUN: A PRACTICUM REFLECTION

I was posted to Shuqun Secondary School in February 2013 for a ten-week Teaching Practicum. My short time here, however, had left me with many precious and fond memories. Through my interactions with the staff and students in this school, I have grown tremendously as a person and as a professional. This article will touch on some of the highlights of my time here, as well as some lessons that I will be taking with me as I move into a new phase of my teaching career.

My first few days in Shuqun flew past in a disorientating whirl. After being a student for so many years, I found it strangely surreal to be on the opposite side of the divide. From being solely responsible for myself, I now had to be responsible for three classes of students. From interacting with peers and friends, I now had to learn how to interact with colleagues, mentors and school leaders. In fact, I felt a sense of inward visceral shock when I stood before my students for the first time and heard them greet me as “Miss Teo”. That greeting made me realise the weight of responsibility that now lay on my shoulders. Although I knew that my time with these students was short, I wanted to do my best for them. I saw so much potential in each of these students and I hoped to help them (in whatever small way I could) achieve their dreams.

Fortunately, though, I soon adjusted to the rhythm of school life thanks to the help and guidance of my mentors: Mrs Elsa Quah, Mdm Amy Phua and Ms Goh Wan Ru. Although they had such full schedules, they took time to read through my lesson plans, observe my lessons and gave me detailed and constructive feedback. I learnt how to structure and pace my lessons appropriately, how to create meaningful and challenging assessment tasks, as well as how to manage the classroom environment so that learning could take place. Their guidance and advice had helped me to hone my skills as a teacher, and I am truly grateful for how generously they had availed themselves of their time and expertise.

In fact, many of the staff and personnel in Shuqun went out of their way to welcome my batch of trainee teachers. Whenever we faced difficulties, there was always someone willing to lend a listening ear. Colleagues would also help us with the photocopier, or talk to us in the canteen over lunch, or simply offer advice on how to deal with a challenging situation. There was a sincere warmth and sense of camaraderie in the staffroom which made working in Shuqun very enjoyable.

This notion of care and family extended beyond the staffroom and permeated every aspect of life in Shuqun. For instance, during the annual Shuqun Youth Olympics, I was pleasantly surprised to see so many events listed in the programme booklet! There were inter-class races, inter-CCA races and even a teachers' race. It was so heartening to see many students participating in the races and cheering for one another. At one point, I had the impression that more students were milling about on the track waiting to take part in the upcoming races than students sitting in the stands. Although it would have been logistically easier to organise fewer races, I thought that the day's line-up clearly demonstrated Shuqun's focus on inclusiveness and participation. The success of the day's events was summed up in a deeply moving moment at the end when everyone rose to sing the school song with gusto. Participating in the Shuqun Youth Olympics made me realise that this school is a family, and in this family, everyone has a chance to contribute.

I also saw this notion of care and family expressed in another way during the Secondary Three Normal (Academic) Elective Modules programme. At the end of Term 1, the Secondary Three N(A) students were given a week off to take part in any module that piqued their interest. During that week, I had the opportunity to visit a few modules. I saw the students in the percussion module enthusiastically picking up new beats from their instructor, I watched the hip-hop dance students perform their routine with much sass and pizzazz, and I was treated like a queen by the hospitality students when they served us lunch at the Cabin on the last day of the module. Visiting these modules was an eye-opening experience because it helped me to see how learning can and should be taken out into the real

world. It was also heartwarming to see students blossoming with pride and confidence as they learnt new skills and showcased their knowledge to others in the school community. This activity helped me realise that Shuqun is a school that celebrates the diverse talents of its students.

There were other smaller, though no less insignificant, moments that left a deep impact on me. For example, the first time I had to take a student to task for not submitting his work was difficult, but I learnt how to communicate my expectations in a gentle yet firm manner. Speaking to students after class or along the corridors taught me the value of conversation – that sometimes people just want a listening ear, and that kindness and compassion can go a long way. Conducting remediation sessions after school taught me the value of perseverance – that I need to keep finding new ways of teaching a subject because sometimes the way I learnt it might not be the best way to help someone else learn it.

These are the lessons and memories that I will take with me to my new school. I am deeply convinced that Shuqun Secondary School is a school that brings out the best in everyone – because it has brought out the best in me. I have benefitted greatly from my interactions with the staff in this school, especially as I reflected on the advice that the school leaders (Mr Chia, Mr Siva and Ms Seet) and School Coordinating Mentor (Mrs Wee) gave me. Although my time in Shuqun has been regretfully too short, it has been immensely fulfilling and enriching. It is my heartfelt wish that Shuqun will continue to soar to greater heights even as it remains dear to our hearts. “Let your spirit always be with us!”

### ***Teo Shu May***

After the completion of her teaching practicum at Shuqun Secondary School, Miss Teo was posted to Anglo-Chinese Junior College and now teaches the General Paper.

## AN ANCHOR, A DIVING BOARD AND A SHINING STAR

“So, what’s Shuqun like?” – Friends, ex-colleagues and even present ones invariably ask this question, especially those who know its history. It’s often difficult to respond immediately because there is so much to share that cannot be summarised with a single expression of “Fine” or “Okay” or even “Great”. So, what is Shuqun like, from the perspective of someone who has taught in three different schools in no less than 18 years, under four dynamic school leaders?

First of all, Shuqun is an anchor. Be it for staff or students, the school is the mainstay that provides the support and stability for development. Teachers are strongly encouraged to learn and develop not just teaching pedagogies or strategies but also skills and competencies relevant to students in the 21st century. School programmes and innovations are implemented with the key focus on developing students academically, socially, physically and morally. Where students may struggle with personal or family problems, there are sufficient avenues for them to seek counsel and help. While there may be storms in the form of challenging expectations, the school remains a safe and secure anchor for all to grow into men and women of character.

Secondly, Shuqun is a diving board. The platform of expectations is set high, to motivate staff and students to persevere in order to reach it. The school motto reads “Dare to Soar to Greater Heights”. Yet how does one soar unless one is willing to take the leap or jump off the cliff so to speak? The image of a diving board, I believe, is far more appropriate because a good dive requires not just courage (encapsulated by the word ‘dare’), but numerous hours of discipline and practice, of perfecting moves, in order to ‘soar’. So, staff and students alike are challenged to be more conscientious, persistent and resilient, in order to succeed.

Finally, Shuqun is a shining star. For many years, it seemed as though the light was dim, and those who knew the school associate it with a poor

reputation. At the turn of the century, however, Shuqun's light began to shine brighter. This is a testimony of the tough efforts of visionary school leaders and committed teaching and non-teaching staff, with the support of the community and parents. Shuqun's graduates become useful individuals, with a heart for the community and a resilience to overcome challenges. It is an inviting and vibrant school that shines brightly.

So, the next time someone asks me what Shuqun is like, I would ask them if they have time to listen, and appreciate how special this school is.

***Elsa Quah-Yow***  
***Senior Teacher***  
***(2008 – 2013)***

Mrs Quah is now lecturing at SEAMEO Regional Language Centre

## REFLECTIONS FOR HEART OF SHUQUN

As I write this piece for the Heart of Shuqun series, I am preparing for the next phase of my personal life. I am leaving behind everything that I have experienced, encountered, all that I have known, for the unknown. As you, the readers should know by now, I am leaving the service for another organisation. It is my honour to be writing a piece at the behest of the principal. This piece is about my personal journey, my personal learning points, and how you can apply them to your own life.

My posting to Shuqun Secondary School as a teacher is not a choice that I made. This I have to be honest. The previous reputation of the school was that it was a very rough place, full of unruly students, and always having trouble. And these are the things that I heard about as I received my posting. Why did I come to the school in the first place? My personal story started in June 2012, when I was seeking a change of environment. However my applications to other places were not successful, and as my previous school was deemed to have excess teachers, I was nominated to be posted out and was posted to Shuqun Secondary School by the ministry.

My first reaction was one of shock and disbelief, as it was not something that I expected and wanted. I was willing to change environments, but on my own terms. From this I realised that in life, many things are not within your control. Things will just happen. It is what you do after that that defines the person.

After collecting my thoughts and emotions, I contacted the school and was referred to the relevant Head of Department and Subject Head and we made arrangements to meet in late November. The feelings then were one of trepidation as well as anxiety. What can I expect? Would I be able to manage in a new environment? How are the things here like? All of these questions and more ran through my head as I sat in the general office, waiting. Even after the meeting, I was still in a daze. Too much information in very short of a time. Even though I was brought around the place, it was all new to me. But by then, the sense of acceptance came

over me. When life throws you challenges, you accept them and move on, especially in cases where you have no control. My main impression was how friendly the people were, and how fast the procedures for the administration were done.

First day of school. New classes, new school, new colleagues, even a new canteen. I can fully empathise with the new Secondary Ones. Equally alone, equally lost, equally requiring help. Luckily help came in all forms. My co-form teacher, Miss Hamsa, taught me plenty of things regarding the school administration, and other colleagues and other things, like how to request photocopying services. Having the correct learning mentality is helpful. Since I had accepted that nothing was going to change, I was eager to learn as much as possible, and learned new things regarding teaching as well. And this is also another learning point I wish everyone can take away. Change is good. Change is inevitable. Embrace change. By changing environment, I felt that I have grown as a person and as a teacher. For students reading this, when you change classes as you progress through the years, you should have encountered this. A different class will have a different style of learning, which could aid you or impede you. For me a change did wonders. For the first time in months I was not dreading waking up and going to work. Somehow a simple change of environment re-ignited my passion for teaching.

Honestly Shuqun Secondary School is a good place. I am not writing this out of courtesy, but rather my true, honest thoughts. Having come from a school with higher expectations, it was a genuine surprise that Shuqun Secondary School was a school that gave all students room to grow and develop, not only as students, but as people. CCAs like Shimano and Cabin, which are formed to give students places to go to after school and for guidance, will not exist in a school which only focused on results. Teachers recognise the individual abilities of students and programmes are tailored accordingly such as elective programs for the Normal Academic and Normal Technical students which were unthinkable in my previous school. Add together the very friendly teachers, and caring school leaders, Shuqun Secondary School is a good school to stay.

Why am I leaving then? When opportunity comes, it is a straight choice to either grab it or let it go. The main thing is not to regret your choice, ever. It was therefore an agonizing time for me, when I had a firm job offer from another organization, and had to decide between leaving all that I know and I am comfortable with, or take a risk with something totally different. In the end, the desire to try something else before I get too old and not have the opportunity again outweighed any concerns I had. Therefore the decision was made to leave.

One thing I hope that everyone can learn is that money is not the most important thing. It is true that in modern society, money is very important. However my personal take is that if a person blindly chases the dollar sign, the person will lose sight of what is truly important. Even though my salary will be slightly lower, I am excited by the new challenges. As the Chinese saying goes, “live till you are old, learn till you are old”. Will I regret the move? Perhaps. I am sure that if I don’t grab this opportunity, I will have even more regrets.

To summarise, always have the desire to learn, not only in studies, but in life and pick up life skills as well. Money is not the most important thing. And when you make major decisions, make sure you never have regrets. And you, as students, are very lucky to be in a school as caring as Shuqun Secondary School.

***Mr Soh Chun Fei***  
***Physics Teacher (2013)***

Mr Soh is now a Defense Executive Officer with the Ministry of Defence.

## JOURNEY THROUGH ART

When I was first assigned to the Secondary 3 art class at Shuqun Secondary as a volunteer, I really did not know what was in store for me. Though I had taken art during my lower secondary years, it was definitely not my forte. Thankfully, I was pleasantly surprised and truly enjoyed my time there.

I really enjoyed the art lessons as they gave me not only an opportunity to interact with the students but also to join in the class and engage in the art projects. The hands-on lessons were truly a breath of fresh air from my usual school lessons and I had great fun learning with the students, many of whom were much more talented than me!

They were definitely an entertaining and fun bunch who made me laugh countless times during my volunteering sessions. Their interest and talent in art could be clearly seen in the way they worked on their projects. I am grateful for having worked with this amazing group of students who made my Tuesdays and Thursdays that much brighter! I hope that they were able to benefit and learn something from me as I did from them.

I would also like to thank the teachers for being so welcoming and making me feel very much at ease during all my volunteering sessions. They showed me how important the role of a teacher is and I thoroughly enjoyed their art lessons.

These past few months have definitely been a wonderful time for me and I have gained so much from this experience. It has been a great, unforgettable journey – one that I am happy and grateful to have been part of.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Mr Chia, the teachers and students for having me as a volunteer and allowing me to share the unique Shuqun experience with them!

### ***Shahilah Salim***

Shahilah was a volunteer under the National University of Singapore Give-It-Forward (GIFT) programme in 2013 and spent half a year with the Shuqun students. She is now a third year undergraduate at National University of Singapore and majoring in Sociology.

## MORE THAN A FACE IN THE CROWD - MY TIME IN THE FOREST OF INSPIRATION

We often hear the following paradox posed to us, “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” The origins of this question are hazy but its intention was to explore the relationship between observation and how we perceive reality.

Having spent the last 3 years in MOE HQ involved in policy planning and developing engagement platforms, I felt it was time for me to get reacquainted with what life back in school was like. I was fortunate to be able to have the chance to meet with Mr Chia Hai Siang, Principal of Shuqun Secondary School. During our conversation, he kindly offered me a chance to take a short attachment with the school to reacquaint myself with the school system and look at policy planning from a different perspective. I wanted to experience ‘reality’ anew, within the folds of the school environment.

I will not give a chronological account of the events and lessons I participated in or observed; rather I would like to focus on what I learnt of Shuqun Secondary School in terms of its Identity, the Relationships it fosters and the Choices the school makes.

### **Identity**

I knew right from the start that Shuqun Secondary is a school with diverse needs and challenges. Yet, somehow, I had a very strong sense that both staff and students sought to be more than just another face in the education crowd. Using the analogy of a tree falling in the forest, I felt that contrary to what I had been led to believe, I did not experience that many ‘falling trees’ in Shuqun. At first, I thought that this could be because I was new to the school and did not have the familiarity with what was going on. Maybe I was just oblivious to the real challenges that these teachers faced on the ground. Perception shapes reality, so why was I not able to see this as a

‘challenging’ school?

Rather, my impression of it was of a flourishing ecosystem. Was I too idealistic or removed from the ground? As I pondered the matter, I then realised that every person I spoke to in Shuqun - from the students, to the teachers, and even the Operations Managers; all acknowledged that this was a school with challenges. However, all the staff I spoke to also have a plan what they sought to do to make a difference. Everyone I spoke to told me how they were working to deal with one area of challenge: the various PCCG/CCE implantation plans, to the afterschool care of students, attendance taking, allocating detention, to estate patrols, etc. All these had shaped the Shuqun community into one that is constantly reflective in attention and reflexive in action. As a result, no tree falls alone in this forest.

## Relationships

I spent one very fruitful morning with Linda, the school’s Full-time Counsellor. Throughout our conversation, we had students popping in to chat with her and I felt apologetic that Linda had to turn some of them away because she was engaged with me. What was encouraging was that quite a number of students who made appointments to see the counsellor were self-referrals. They knew they needed help in certain areas of their lives and stepped forward to seek it, with the assurance that they would receive it. In order for this state to exist, it meant that strong relationships of trust had already been built and strengthened throughout the school system. While having these bonds and such relationships of trust did not magically make all student problems and issues go away; nevertheless it created an environment where everyone felt safe to be themselves and acknowledge that there were ways for them to work towards being something more, with the help of their teachers and community partners.

A forest is not made up of trees alone, but of the birds and animals that make their home there. I began to see how Shuqun built and strengthened relationships both within the school and with the community. Thus a forest is never silent and is always filled with sound.

## Choices

In our school system today, many of the choices that we make are often driven by expediency and efficiency. In a highly competitive school system, even our CCAs become avenues for competition. Sports CCAs tend to focus on the competitive outcomes rather than exist as avenues for interested students to learn the sports of their interest. When I found out that Shuqun's B-Boys Volleyball team had emerged National Champions in 2012 and that all of their players were groomed in-house (i.e. no DSA program, no 'imported' players, etc.), I was really impressed.

In today's school sporting scene, you would be hard pressed to find any C or B Division team in the national top 3 that did not come from a DSA programme or were nurtured in their sport only from upon entry to school. The PE Department shared with me their strategy for having a broad-based experiential volleyball programme within the school that exposes all students to the sport and also helps surface talent that can be groomed further. These are conscious choices that the school makes to strengthen its identity and find different areas where their students can always excel.

I saw how the school also provided other options for experiential learning so that their students could find other avenues for success, i.e. such as the robotics programme and their partnership with ITE. Rather than providing a supply-driven education for their students; the school looks at the needs of their students and develops their educational programme from a demand-driven perspective. In the heart of every forest, there will always be one tree that stands out. And in my short time with Shuqun, what I realise is that despite the challenges and constraints they face, the school has made a resolute choice not to be content with mediocrity; but to find a way to allow all students the opportunity to break through the canopy and reach for the sky.

***Mr Randell Siow***

Head, Character and Citizenship Education (National Education), Student Development Curriculum Division  
(2011-2013)

## SHUQUN FAMILY DAY

The Shuqun Family Day was a good opportunity for us to spend time ‘exclusively’ with my daughter. Since our younger daughter was not in Singapore at that time, we were able to take part in the event and spend valuable bonding time with our older girl.

In the morning, my husband played some games with her. Since he was not too keen to play football, both Father and daughter ended up playing Frisbee together. I am not an outdoor person so I could only watch them having a good time.

A simple breakfast was provided and after that, we took part in a simple activity where we got to meet other parents and their children. Lunch was also provided and that was the first time I set eyes on the inside of the Cabin. I was very impressed with the facilities in the Cabin and asked my daughter more about what the students could do in the Cabin.

Thankfully the activity after lunch was the building of a terrarium. That was the most fun activity of the day – the best part was that we got to keep the bottled plant and even now, the little plant in it is still alive and reminds us of how we set it up. There was another activity where we were taught to listen carefully but unfortunately, my daughter was not the one blindfolded. I wonder if she would have been able to fit in all the pieces just by listening to verbal instructions. It appears that teenagers are able to ‘tune out’ what they consider as irrelevant information.

Barbecue at night was later than our usual dinner time. Thankfully, there were gallant ‘gentlemen’ who stood over the hot stove and caring ladies from the Parents Support Group who made sure all the packed food was opened up to be cooked. There must have been a lot of hungry people that night because whatever food that was cooked disappeared from the plates and stoves in no time.

By then, we the parents were already very tired and decided to go home. Our daughter would have loved to continue hanging out with her friends

or stay back to watch Taxi Taxi but she had to give them a miss as she knew we would be concerned about her safety in getting home. All in all, we were grateful to the school for preparing this Family Day and letting us spend time bonding with our daughter.

***Mrs Tan CP***

***Mother of Samantha Tan Xin Hui***

***Secondary 3A***