

Of Gardeners and Fishermen (... & fisher-ladies)

by Ng Yeow Ling



On 30 Dec 09, some 60 of my school staff spent a morning at GardenAsia (along Neo Tiew Crescent – a countryside worth visiting if you have not done so), potting plants and hooking up for a catch in the pond. These experiences offer much learning and serve as a good way for us educators to reflect on our roles once again, even as we prepare ourselves to start the new year.

I believe there is much that gardening can teach us. Being a good teacher is a lot like being a good gardener. Good gardeners are optimistic and patient. They are able to see the potential in those struggling young seedlings and enjoy watching them grow, develop and bloom. They give special tender loving care to those few plants that are struggling and not thriving. They do not blame the plant when it is not performing well; they check the growing conditions. Is the soil the plant is growing in suitable or does it need some changing? Does the plant need more water; does the plant need less water? Does the plant need more sunshine; does the plant need less sunshine. Good gardeners are good problem solvers, but realize that sometimes no matter what you do, the plant still will not grow the way you would like it to.

Good gardeners also know the importance of taking care of themselves. They pace themselves so they will not overdo it and seek relief from the blazing sun. Good gardeners realize that gardening is not all work and no play. They take the time to smell the roses along the way. Good gardeners enjoy sharing their knowledge and helping other gardeners. They willingly pass along tips that have worked for them, share their tools and pitch in when the going gets tough.

At the same time, we had lots of fun trying our luck at fishing, using bamboo rods and mealworms. It strikes me that while we were all 'fishermen and fisher-ladies' alike, we experienced different levels of joy and fulfilment depending on how big our catch was. Some of us

gave up after a few futile attempts, while others, having been thrilled by the first catch, went on to bring in another fish, another, and yet another fish... When it comes to what we do as teachers, our success is undoubtedly determined by how many pupils we have reached out to and helped, and what we have achieved for the areas of work we are involved in. Sheer hard work and good intention, without the catch, can never qualify one as fisherman. More importantly, our satisfaction and joy can only be fueled by seeing the catch in our pail. A "fishless fisherman" is an oxymoron.

Pupils are indeed the centre of our job as educators. But the different thing from the other jobs is that our centre is human. In that sense, as educators, we cannot just deal with them by just trying to teach in the classroom. As the pupils are not machines but "human", we must take into consideration their needs, interests, moods, social backgrounds because with the lack of knowledge about the child, we cannot have the right condition to impart life to them; much less talk about our catch.

Teachers are like gardeners who want to grow flowers so we have the knowledge about the flowers such as which place they like, how much water they need, when and how they bloom. Teaching is like setting out





for a catch, and our fulfilment is tied closely to the size of our catch, and the extent of impact and influence we have made at the end of the day.

Here is wishing all of you a fulfilling year ahead as we set out as a team of gardeners and fishermen (and fisher-ladies) to nurture our young and bring in a big harvest in 2010.

