

Life lessons take centre stage at Bukit View Sec

The school's signature Arts X Values Learning for Life programme uses drama to help students learn about positive values and how to navigate social issues. DILLON LOH finds out from them how they do it.

When tasked to put on a skit for a drama class, Sec 2 Bukit View Secondary School student Saaliha Nazneen and her groupmates turned to their own experiences.

"Talking to my groupmates, we realised that many of us have a sibling with special needs or had financial difficulties back home," the 14-year-old said.

"We wanted to write a story to raise awareness about these issues, and show that every family is different."

Saaliha and her group's skit about a single mother working to support her son with special needs was one of the skits themed around various social issues that Bukit View Secondary's students rehearsed, put on and watched as part of the school's signature Arts X Values Learning for Life programme (LLP).

Launched in 2015, the programme aims to help students acquire sound values and build social-emotional competencies through drama lessons.

Muhammad Fadly Asmawi, Bukit View Sec's subject head for literature and drama, said: "Drama is uniquely suited for experiential learning."

"By stepping into a character's shoes, students practise genuine empathy and perspective-taking."

It's also deeply collaborative – students script skits, negotiate ideas, and work together on stage. That shared process naturally instils respect, responsibility, and strong teamwork.

Lessons for the LLP programme, which take place weekly and last for about an hour, are integrated into the school's curriculum and are conducted in the first half of the year for all Sec 1 students and in the second half of the year for all Sec 2s.

GUIDED EXPLORATION

In their Sec 1 year, students write and rehearse skits related to a selected text, culminating in a series of performances during an assembly programme for other students at the end of Term 2.

This year, their skits were based on *Wonder*, a book about a boy with facial differences who enters a mainstream school. The story was chosen because of its themes on empathy and inclusion.



Secondary 1 students performing skits based on the book *Wonder* at the culmination of their Arts X Values Learning for Life programme. ST PHOTOS SABAH LEE

“To write the dialogue and create these stories, you have to be open-minded. It has helped me understand people who may be going through these things in real life more and made me more empathetic.”

Shazana Humaira, 14, on how the programme led her to reflect on the social issues spotlighted by the skits



The programme changes for the Sec 2 students. In this phase of the programme, students put on skits related to social issues of their choosing.

It requires them to research their topics before drafting their stories – a process that can take one to two weeks.

Taking inspiration from the local play *Don't Know, Don't Care* – which is about a family dealing with terminal illness in the household – Sec 2 student Rouven Loo, 14, and his group selected the themes of verbal abuse and familial neglect for their LLP skit.

Reuven said: "We read news articles, incorporated our own experiences, and even watched the play live as part of writing our first draft (of our skit)."

While each group's short skit is only five to 10 minutes long, LLP lessons also include applied drama workshops, which often require improvisation and the participation of other students spectating from the audience.

Fadly said: "The Sec 2s progress to applied drama, where students use theatre as a tool to investigate real social issues – examining causes, consequences, and solutions."



Secondary 2 students rehearsing the skits they developed in their school's black box performing space. ST PHOTOS AZBATHIN



"Beyond performing, Sec 2 students actually facilitate mini-workshops for their peers, using drama conventions to lead discussions and deepen critical thinking."

One such applied drama technique is called forum theatre. In it, the audience is invited to step in to replace actors in order to change the outcome of the skit.

Doing so requires both actors and spectators to know the themes, character and social issues of each skit well.

Sec 2 student Christian Justyce Ramirez Azman said: "(Forum theatre) is not so stressful because I connected deeply with my character. I know my character well so I'm able to act it out despite the improvisation."

You just need to trust that the audience to be

able to explore the story in another direction or outcome."

WALKING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES

Students IN spoke to said that LLP lessons were something that they and their classmates looked forward to.

Reuven said: "It's something that we all look forward to. The collaborative aspect has encouraged us to speak to people we usually don't get to speak to and get to know our classmates better."

Saaliha, who is also part of the school's drama club, added that the LLP classes were a good avenue for students to express themselves.

She said: "(LLP) is more student-initiated than drama – we do all the planning and performance by ourselves. It's an outlet for us to be creative and



English language and drama teacher John Praveen Raj teaches the students applied drama techniques such as forum theatre, conscience alley and hot seating. Such techniques require the actors to interact with the audience.

release some stress."

For Sec 2 student Shazana Humaira, LLP lessons have led her to reflect on the social issues spotlighted by the skits that she and her classmates have put on.

The 14-year-old said: "To write the dialogue and create these stories, you have to be open-minded. It has helped me understand people who may be going through these things in real life more and made me more empathetic."

Beyond values education, Shazana added that LLP has made her more confident and developed her public speaking skills.

"I'd say I'm usually more on the quieter side. By giving me a topic, LLP has helped me get out of my comfort zone and express myself a little more," she said.

Other students also said that LLP deepened their interest in creative arts. Christian said: "I did some drama back in primary school, but stopped in Primary 3 when my CCA closed."

"Through this LLP programme in Sec 1 and 2, I feel like it's helped me rediscover my passion again."

Fadly said: "Even without a background in drama, students gain essential life skills. Devising skits together builds strong class rapport and unit bonding."

"Over time, quieter students gain public speaking confidence, learn to articulate their ideas, and collaborate effectively in teams."

"Ultimately, the hope is for students to walk away with strong social-emotional competencies – specifically empathy, perspective-taking, and a sense of responsibility – alongside a lasting appreciation for the arts, no matter their starting point."

In October, selected Sec 2 students will put on their skits and apply drama techniques they have learnt in their schools' black box performing space in a series of performances that will be attended by the student's parents.

When asked what she hopes audiences will take away from her skit, Saaliha said: "I hope that people will learn not to judge others too harshly and jump to conclusions about others. You never know what is happening in other people's homes."

"Even if one person takes away that message, that's enough for me."

