

The transmission of local community heritage – The Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail Experience

"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand."

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Introduction

Our local communities are filled with opportunities for teachers to carry out teaching and learning. The provision of learning opportunities for children outside of the classroom and within the local community serves many useful purposes. Firstly, it gives an immediate extension to the possibility for curriculum development in a myriad of areas without expending too many resources which may be in short supply. Secondly, the use of the community as a classroom provides social intimacy for the students as they can connect with their local community and immediately get down to the learning process without a need to adapt to new surroundings. It is therefore an excellent platform to use for the development of student performance. Thirdly, from a national education perspective the use of the local community as the platform for learning builds emotive bonds between the students and the community and this develops rootedness. Heritage projects like the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail lend themselves well to such objectives stated above.

Background to the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail

Jalan Kayu is located in the northern-eastern part of Singapore and is known historically to be the civilian area closest to the former Royal Air Force (RAF) camp and airbase at Seletar. Jalan Kayu got its name from the chief RAF engineer, Mr CE Woods, who was responsible for the construction of the Seletar airbase back in 1928. Jalan Kayu effectively became “Woods Road” or Jalan Kayu. Jalan Kayu was the civilian area immediately beyond the Seletar camp gate which was the area’s commercial hub between the 1940s to the 1970s before British forces officially left Singapore in 1971.

The Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail was mooted to uncover the rich history of the Jalan Kayu, Yio Chu Kang and Seletar West given its military, social and economic history. The objective was to piece together the history of the area, document it and then turn it into a guided walking trail for visitors. Community partners in the area namely the Jalan Kayu CCC, Sengkang West CCC and Central CDC partnered Pei Hwa Secondary School on this project. The Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail saw the uncovering of the area’s history and heritage with regards to a) The military history of Seletar camp and airbase and the social history of the RAF personnel and locals who used to live in and around the military outpost b) The past and present of Kampong Lorong Buangkok, Singapore’s last surviving mainland Kampong c) The history of Pei Hwa Public School and education in the Jalan Kayu/Yio Chua Kang area. d) The life and times of the locals who lived at Jalan Kayu and its surrounding area.

The challenge facing local heritage preservation and transmission in Singapore

Most Singaporeans live in fairly transient communities which evolve constantly in terms of their composition over the years and the Jalan Kayu area is no different. This fracturing of local community populations comes about primarily because of the change which Singapore's economy and residential landscape have undergone since independence and continuously undergo today. For Jalan Kayu, the arrival of the British military in the Seletar area was the initial phase of transformation which saw a largely uninhabited swampy become a major military outpost with accompanying infrastructure such as paved roads, street lighting and modern housing within the Seletar base confines for military personnel. After the Second World War, the continued presence of the British forces saw rapid economic growth in the late 1940s till the 1970s with the creation of Jalan Kayu town and its rows of iconic shop-houses that served the needs of the military base personnel. With the departure of the British in the early 1970s, this continuity in the area's history was broken as the British departure also saw an end of local worker employment at the base and a major slowdown in the economic vibrancy of the area. Although the presence of the Singapore Armed Forces which took over the military base provided some economic

reprieve to the area, many of the original businesses never survived nor did many of the original residents remain. The new HDB estates that are springing up around the Seletar and Jalan Kayu area today have brought life back to the Jalan Kayu area but the residents who now live around the area have little or no connection with Jalan Kayu and less still any knowledge of what and how Jalan Kayu was like in the past. Many of the original Kampongs have gone and thus the oral history of the area has not been preserved in the locale. With no attempts to recover and systematically document the history and heritage of Jalan Kayu of the area, it was to be potentially lost by the next generation. In summary, the changes to the area had fractured the ability of the community to transmit its heritage as few of the original residents and businesses survive today. Our mission was thus to locate some of original people who stayed in the area, document their history of the area and then re-embed it into the existing community once again.

Our model for heritage preservation after recovery is through the participation of the existing local community itself. In this case, the students who attend the local community school perform this role. While some local communities in Singapore have decided to use location markers to preserve local history and heritage, such physical structures hold only emotive meaning for those who have lived there originally and do not mean much for new residents. We believe it is better to involve the young who currently live in the area because in the piecing together of the history of the local community, they become active transmitters of this heritage through authentic engagement. This approach offers

emotional and cognitive involvement of the members of the current community to recover and rejuvenate interest in local community heritage and this provides educational opportunities for our young as it gives them ownership of their local heritage. We believe this model is educationally sound and sustainable. The back-bone of our approach to local community heritage preservation is thus an experiential-social learning framework which we believe can be applied even at the national level. We call this model the “Heritage Crucible Cascading Transmission” model. (HCCT)

The “Heritage crucible cascading transmission” model (HCCT model) and its underlying educational principles

The HCCT model[Annex A], is based on the idea that “lost” community heritage is best recovered and re-embedded in the current community by cognitively and emotively involving those who live there. In this instance, the heritage is embedded in young individuals who will serve as Heritage Crucibles(HC) or guardians of the heritage. They will serve as wellsprings for the community’s history and they will transmit this history to others be it on an informal or formal basis. An Informal context for this heritage transfer would include causal contact with neighbours , during a family dinner and with friends and peers while a formal context would be through guided heritage trails. Overtime, the recovered heritage is spread throughout the community once more, as new heritage crucibles who become interested in the heritage will cascade this information to even more people living in the community. This viral spread of oral history can be further accelerated with the use of technology such as the

internet. The ultimate aim is to excite and interest enough people in the community to become heritage crucibles themselves and this will automate the cascading effect of the model as the process becomes self-renewing.

The HCCT model is built on the psychological theory of social learning. (Bandura,1986) In the context of the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail, the younger students at Pei Hwa model themselves behavior after the trained trail guides in terms of their positive attitudes towards heritage preservation and their ability to re-tell Jalan Kayu's rich history. In the HCCT Model, there are the original Heritage Crucibles called "keepers" who are most learned in the heritage of the local community as they are the one's who received the information first hand either as a researcher or as a trained guide. The application of observational theory occurs when the trained guide brings peers and younger students on the trail. This allows for observational learning by these students in learning the information communicated and the way it is communicated with interest and enthusiasm. For the HCCT model to work, the students selected as trail guides must therefore have the personality to communicate and retell the community's history in a captivating manner. A combination of careful selection and training ensures that good "keepers" are picked. The Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail used a careful interview process after asking for volunteers from amongst a preselected group of students which we knew had keen interest in local history. Thus, Interest, aptitude and volunteerism were the cornerstones used for selection to be a

potential “Keeper” and “Heritage Crucible”. A more detailed explanation of the entire Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail process is covered below.

Use of the experiential learning-cum-guided discovery model in research phase in two phases

Phase I - The Research Phase

The initial research done to uncover the details of the trail was an application of both experiential and guided discovery learning theory. The best learning takes place for the students when they are personally involved and take responsibility for their own learning, in this instance it was for the creation of new knowledge and in the eventual transference of such knowledge through sharing. Teacher mentors acted as guides to students as they brainstormed how best to go about collecting information. Students worked in teams to brainstorm for ideas on how to track down information before presenting these recommendations to their teacher mentors who then asked questions to force their students to re-discuss solutions where necessary. Certainly teacher mentors may have already had a blue-print of what they wanted to do or the way forward but the concept was to help facilitate the process of reaching a possible solution but never giving them the answer outright. The process was long-drawn and this was on the account that not all student researchers were cognitively prepared for the rigor of the project or to cognitively handle a problem-based exercise of this magnitude. Unlike the trail guides grouping, the researchers were completely volunteers and no pre-selection was done. This has both pros and cons depending on what view is being taken. From an educational perspective, we wanted to provide all students who desired to be part of the project an opportunity to learn more about

their heritage. Hence, the productivity levels of different research teams differed markedly. Nonetheless, teacher-mentors were briefed to always ask relevant questions to their students instead of giving them outright solutions. For instance, teacher mentors would ask, “What would be the best way to get in touch with former residents?”; “How could you generate enough interest in the heritage of Jalan Kayu amongst local residents?” The process of guided self-discovery using such constructivist style questioning (Tan OS, 2001) was a fundamental cornerstone of the research phase which was to guide students along the way and to give some autonomy and decision-making responsibilities. The maxim for the research phase was thus to use the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail as a vehicle for the development of higher-order thinking amongst our students irrespective of their ability level. (Henson, 1996)

Phase II - The Trail Guide training phase

Our trail guides underwent an intensive training session to acquire the knowledge gained by the student researchers. This include going out on the actual trail with the teacher mentors guiding them, and a comprehensive study of the Jalan Kayu region using the resources compiled by the student researchers. Teacher mentors will bring the students on the Jalan Kayu Trail to every stop within the Trail. The mentor will share with the students various stories about the region collected through research by our student researchers and how to make the trail engaging for visitors. Also, during this segment of the training, students are encouraged to note certain positive qualities that the teacher has as a trail guide and think about how they could exhibit these traits when they conduct the

trail themselves. After experiencing the trail, the guides will read up further on the Jalan Kayu region from the Jalan Kayu website's and blog's repository of primary sources. This will allow the students to gain further expertise on the area's heritage.

Second, the guides will undergo many experiential sessions before their formal appointment as Student Trail Guides. This includes mock trail and simulated training before they conduct trails for their peers or for the public. After their acquisition of knowledge in the first stage, the guides will undergo various practice sessions whereby they will guide the teacher mentors through the Jalan Kayu Trail. In this segment of training, the teacher mentors and guides will undergo many discursive and reflective sessions to enhance the learning of our trail guides. Through these sessions, they can learn about the mistakes they had committed and learn from them. The crux is not to tell the guides of their mistakes from a top-down approach but to continually encourage them to realize their own mistakes through self-discovery. When the guides gain further proficiency, they will conduct mock trails inclusive of various activities for the trail participants. Finally, when they do bring their peers out on an actual trail, the feedback provided by their peers will serve as yet another point for reflection for the trail guides.

Finally, after our guides are fully trained and considered as having much expertise, we will appoint them as Trail Mentors. This again uses the principle of social learning theory as these trained guides will facilitate the training sessions for the new guides and be mentors for future guides to ensure that heritage

continues to be experientially transmitted. They become role models for new trail guides and they will eventually partake in the organization of further trails so that their expertise goes beyond knowing about their heritage bit now fully owning the process of its transmission.

We believe in two principles that are the fundamentals of our training philosophy to mentor our trail guides to achieve their very best as they become passionate about transmitting the heritage they had learnt. First, the need for teacher mentors to gauge the ability and personality of our guides to effectively change the minds of our guides about the importance of heritage and their innate ability to be engaging trail guides. This means also the application of leadership frameworks like Situational Leadership as we mentor and develop our guides. Second, the importance of reflective thinking that enhances students' growth and development as young adults.

Throughout the training of our guides, teacher mentors must observe correctly the competence and willingness of the trail guides in learning the skills and knowledge necessary to make them as effective. Depending on their level of competency and willingness, the teachers will then decide on the appropriate training strategies to make the guides motivated in doing more as they become more confident (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2008). For instance, during the initial training of our trail guides, we adopted largely supervisory roles making the students learn the way we wanted them to. Subsequently, as they gain in proficiency and a passion towards their role, we begin to adopt supportive roles when they plan on how best they can engage their audience during the trail,

including the design of their very own worksheets for use during the trail. Indeed, understanding the type of audience that a teacher mentor has is important in facilitating learning and a change of students' mindsets: from one that exhibits a willingness to try when the guides first to one that shows initiative and a willingness to do well (Gardner, 2006). When learning about trail guiding initially, expertise cannot be assumed and it is essential to use simple methods like storytelling and modeling to train the student guides. As they gain knowledge and expertise, it is important to engage their minds with respect and allow avenues for counterarguments in making the trail better to facilitate their learning and fuel their passion.

The next principle that the teacher mentors adopt is the need to regularly engage the students in reflective thinking to ensure learning. Reflective thinking is the "interaction of critical and creative thinking in the act of knowing, learning, problem solving and decision making" (Chen, 2002). By encouraging students to practice reflective thinking after each training sessions, they would be able to think of solutions for some of the real life problems they would face during their roles as trail guides either with the training of their peers as mentors or the facilitation of the trail itself as guides.

Using technology and the web to preserve heritage in virtual museums

There has been an increase in online publishing regarding local history and heritage in the last few years and the Jalan Kayu Trail Blog www.jalankayutrailblogspot.com would certainly have been one of the earlier

blogs in Singapore which focused completely on documenting the heritage of a particular locale in Singapore. The idea of using a blog was originally for it to act as a virtual archive and storage facility where publishing of the students' findings would be done in the interim between the beginning of the project to its actual launch. Keeping the students efforts under "lock and key" for 9 months was not a good idea because the ability to publish one's work serves to motivate the students to raise the quality and the Internet provided a means to have their work critiqued by a real online audience be it a stranger, their peers or their teachers. This is a form of social facilitation (Forsyth, 1990) that will raise performance levels of the student researchers because the provision of an audience, real or imaginary.

Furthermore, the Jalan Kayu Trail Blog received widespread publicity amongst local and foreign history buffs who had special interest in local heritage of the Jalan Kayu and Seletar areas. An informal network of publicity takes place online and like any free market, only the best and most interesting blogs and websites will thrive and earn mention. To date, the Jalan Kayu Trail Blog has received over 20,000 visitors since its launch in April 2007 and has also received mention in no fewer than 30 local and foreign websites.

Other pedagogical uses of Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail

While the benefits of the Jalan Kayu Trail for Humanities and national education and students' development had been discussed in earlier sections, we would like to extend this topic to briefly share with you our future developments of

the Jalan Kayu Trail. Thus far, besides the obvious benefits of organising such a Trail in your own school for Humanities education, other departments can also utilise the trail. For instance, the trail has been used by the Humanities Department to conduct for our students as training in learning inference skills and life in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. Our Science department has also brought the Secondary 1 Express students on the Jalan Kayu trail to develop their investigative skills using scientific inquiry. One group of students decided to ask the question of why many of the bungalows in Seletar Camp are painted white. The Craft and Technology Department has also brought the Secondary 2 Express students out on the Jalan Kayu Trail to discover the history of the region and prepare a dish that represents the area in fulfillment of their Home Economics project.

Currently, we are looking into the creation of a Geography trail as Jalan Kayu still house a small plot of pristine rainforest that can be used to teach forests to our students. We will also be integrating the various components of the trail to create a comprehensive integrated curriculum package for interdisciplinary project work. Thus, with these, we hope that the resource created by the efforts of our Pei Hwa pioneers can continue to benefit our present and future population.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we had presented the rationale of the Jalan Kayu Trail, its theoretical underpinnings, its educational value, the process of its development and its future direction. It is our hope that the education community can gain

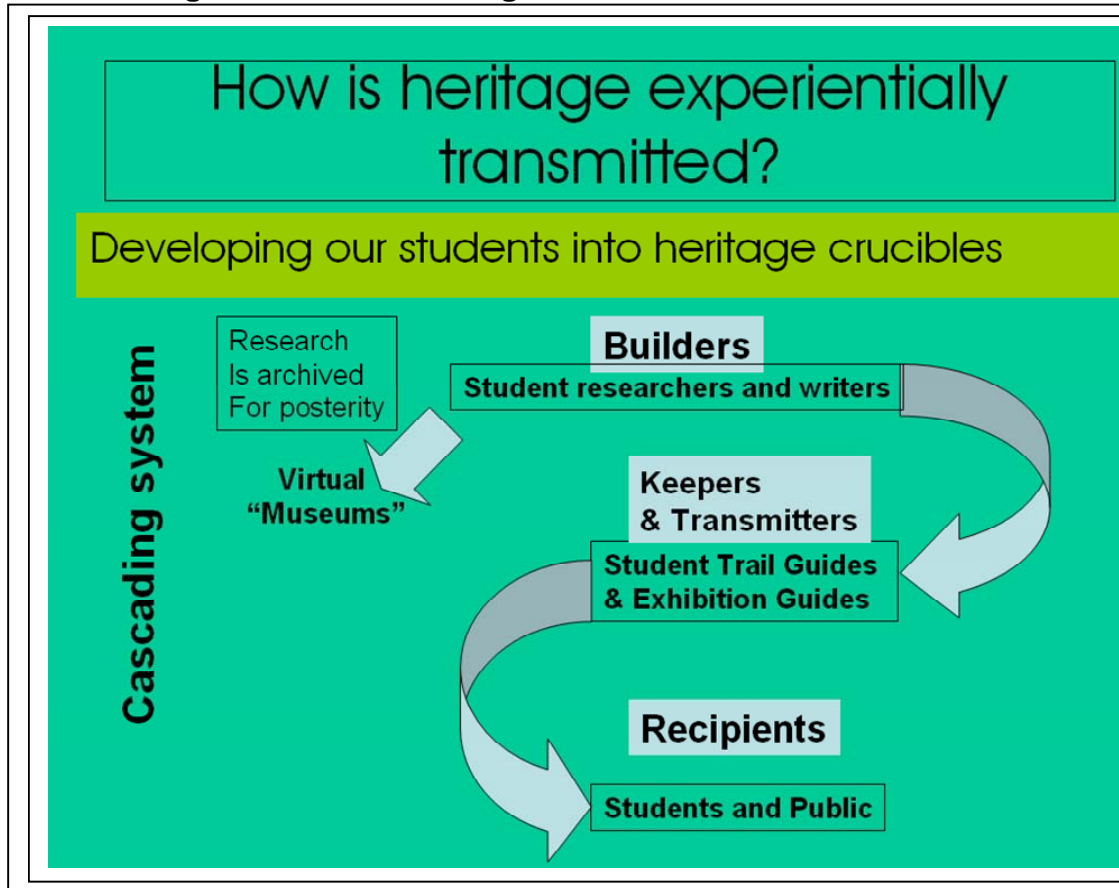
insights from this so that it can benefit them in contributing new areas of research and resources for teaching and learning. We are surrounded by educational opportunities and unless we begin harnessing it, learning can never be perpetually meaningful for our students within the confines of our classrooms.

Finally, with continued modernization, there is a growing need to find better ways to document, embed and disseminate our local heritage before it is all gone. A society without a sense of history will be one which is without a sense of rootedness because there is no past to look back to. One of Pei Hwa's Heritage Crucibles, Toh Ghee Wei, 15, sums up the importance of the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail to local heritage preservation:

When I see the younger students whom I bring on the Trail attain the knowledge that I impart to them, I feel that I have made a connection with my community. There was a 12 year old girl who came up to me at the end of a trail session and told me that it was fun and that she could now go home and tell her mother about why and how Jalan Kayu got its name. At that moment, I realize how important I was in the scheme of things in this community. I was sharing with others what would otherwise be lost with the passage of time or locked away in some archive. Through my efforts, this knowledge now resides in an excited 12-year girl who will now go on to tell more people about what I have just taught her."

Annex A

The Heritage Crucible Cascading Transmission Model



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