

# AMID THE PANDEMIC, AN EVENING WITH A DEDICATED EDUCATOR

The MCO lockdown highlights the key role played by our nation's teachers

Writing from home, the worsening Coronavirus pandemic has affected educational systems around the world, leading to the near to total closures of schools, universities and colleges.

I have found myself taking on a new role as "teacher" to make sure my kids are coping well with the "stay-at-home" teaching model. Some parents like me are used to relying on school teachers and private tutoring, and now we have to do it all ourselves at home.

Well, it is "going back to school" for me and the experience so far has been more challenging than I had thought.

I realised it is easier navigating the volatile markets which are currently bouncing from the previous lows. How bad is the recession? Is the worst over for the stock markets? What about the US dollar? Is oil breaking lower? A flight to safety for gold? Going long US Treasuries?

However, I am not going to talk about the global economy and markets in this missive. I am going to do something that is completely different.

Hoping to catch some crumbs of wisdom, I managed to catch up with Jenny Sim, the CEO of INCS and Kindie World, in a long tele-conversation recently. INCS (Integrated National Curriculum School) is a private national school that offers the Primary and Secondary national curriculum.

Kindie World is a kindergarten for children aged three to six years old.

Jenny's passion has always been working with a capable team to create a well-rounded school programme that allows children to discover themselves, master important life skills, develop character building and gain knowledge, turning them into better adults and leaders of tomorrow. Interestingly, her family has been in the education industry for over 30 years.

I really enjoyed the tele-conversation with the cheerful Jenny. It was so refreshing for a "financial nerd" like me who spends too much time behind a computer tracking price action and writing inflammatory analyses for investors, to talk to someone from the education business.

The whole conversation was both educational and inspirational, and should encourage us. You cannot make this story up. I do not get to chat at length with a teacher who deals with children at work every day very often, so I thought I would give you a "not-so-full-blast" in this limited space. Here you go!



Jenny Sim

**YH: How did you prepare your schools to cope with the pandemic?**

**Jenny Sim:** In late February this year, our management team started to discuss about putting together a “Coronavirus plan”. Before the MCO/ lockdown, we put together a 36-page “Internal Guideline for Preventive Measures and Action in Managing Covid-19”. This was so that our teachers and staff would have a clear SOP (standard operating procedure) to cope with any potential scenarios.

The document contains instructions such as “what to do if there is a confirmed case of Covid-19? ”, “How to disinfect the school?”, “Students and continuity of lessons”, “HR guideline of responding to Covid-19”, etc.

**How do your teachers keep children learning effectively during lockdown?**

Our teachers conduct “Interactive Face-to-Face” classes. At the end of each day, teachers will spend time with them online, do self-revision and homework. For younger children, the classes will be for two hours per day with short breaks in between.

We feel that stretching the interactive face-to-face online lessons to say three hours may be counter-effective due to the young children’s shorter attention span. We supplement with some homework activities, suggested revision plans and worksheets that parents can do with their children at home.

Our teachers spent hours preparing lesson plans for online teaching, even going through mock-teaching sessions to practice classroom management online. Regular time-tables were re-adjusted to suit the new teaching environment. Swapping the whiteboard for a webcam, our teachers are the frontline fighters to keep our children sharp and disciplined using e-learning.



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**How do you manage your teachers during lockdown?**

A positive attitude and a flexible mindset are key to making the online transition as smooth as possible. I actively check-in with teachers to maintain personalised communication and take the pulse on how to best provide support and motivation during this period of social distancing.

Weekly video conferencing sessions are held with the teachers to review lessons delivered and address any issues they may face during the week.

**How do you stay creative as a business in the current environment?**

We converted our School Open Days to “Virtual Open Days” whereby parents can enquire about our school programme via online web conferencing channels such as Google Meet, Whatsapp Video and Zoom. Trial

class of our interactive online learning can be arranged for new students interested in our curriculum.

**How do you help students with special needs?**

Our schools do not cater to special needs children as of this moment. We do have some students who are more active or find it hard to focus for long periods of time in front of the webcam. Parents have requested us to email the slides and worksheets that teachers use during class, so that they can do revision with their children at home.

**How do you mitigate psychological effects of lockdown?**

It is difficult for students that they are now at home 24/7, and many of them commented that they miss school and their friends. Online learning can feel isolating and lacks the warmth of a busy classroom.

Our teachers are doing their part to maintain personal connections with their students. Our teachers will call students who may need additional support in their learning and provide personalised, targeted instruction over the phone or through web conferencing.

**What is your advice to parents who are struggling to “manage” their children’s school work during lockdown?**

The lockdown also affects the parents psychologically. Parents should get regular updates from teachers and yes, online learning is just as credible and engaging as classroom learning.

**Is e-learning using technology a substitute for the real thing?**

Covid-19 has changed the way we know about education. The sudden shift to e-learning will undoubtedly pose a challenge for most people, but there is also an upside. Some teachers may be surprised to discover new approaches, resources and tools to enhance their teaching practice.

As for the younger students, there will be a need for parents to be more involved in the learning process. In my opinion, both e-learning and classroom learning have their own merits. One can never substitute for the other, but rather the combination of both and that will be the way forward.

**What support should the local authorities such as the Education Ministry give to schools?**

They can provide guidelines on how to deliver the lessons more effectively, and convert some of the teaching and learning resources and materials into online format. The Education Ministry could provide teachers with resources such as engaging powerpoint templates for different levels, online educational tools, e-library and training



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to upgrade their skills in using the latest e-learning technology.

**Thank you for sharing your insights with me. Thank you also for dedicating so much of your time to the education of our children regardless of the challenges.**

You are welcome. Thanks for your time too.

**Helping students to innovate and solve problems**

Sharp as a needle, Jenny knows her stuff very well. She shows us once more what we already know – that the world is full of learning opportunities regardless of the challenging environment.

As we parted company, Jenny left me on an upbeat note. To be successful in the future, children require self-confidence, leadership

skills and creativity to solve real world problems. Regurgitating information and studying just to pass exams is no longer an effective way to learn.

Today, information is abundant – you can use the internet to search for answers anytime, anywhere. Instead, we coach our students on how to use the right information to create, innovate and solve problems.

I really admire her work and longevity in a tough business.



*YH Wong has over two decades of experience in the financial services industry. He is currently principle of Noble Hills Partners Ltd and is also senior partner of a licensed offshore investment platform. His clients include high networth investors and boutique institutions such as family offices and investment partnerships. He can be reached at yhwong@noblehillspartners.com*