



FEATURED ON THE STRAITS TIMES

Grateful for the recognition!



Empowering voices.
Inspiring confidence.



Ace Your
DSA Choir Audition



Personalised
Coaching



Train Smarter.
Unlock Your Voice

NARELLE ONG VOCAL STUDIO

Sing the right way



Celyn's voice coach, Ms Narelle Ong at Narelle Ong Vocal Studio, taught her better voice control and more accurate pitching in one such workshop in July 2024. She helped Celyn in choosing a song in Tagalog, uncommon in Singapore, for her DSA audition, which showcased the girl's lower register.

Celyn's interview coach helped her to organise and refine her ideas over two sessions. Preparing for the anticipated question of why she wanted to apply to River Valley High School, for instance, her first choice.



CHANNELLING NERVOUS ENERGY

Some students take preparatory courses, which can cost upwards of \$300, to train for their DSA application.

Celyn's voice coach, Ms Narelle Ong at Narelle Ong Vocal Studio, taught her better voice control and more accurate pitching in one such workshop in July 2024. She helped Celyn in choosing a song in Tagalog, uncommon in Singapore, for her DSA audition, which showcased the girl's lower register.

Celyn's interview coach helped her to organise and refine her ideas over two sessions. Preparing for the anticipated question of why she wanted to apply to River Valley High School, for instance, her first

ISSUES
The art of a stress-free family holiday | C2



VET TALK
Support your pet's golden years | C3

life



'EMBARRASSING AGE'
Actor Elvin Ng, 45, neither boyish nor fatherly | C8

Direct school admission

Research, practise for DSA

Pupils can delve into how they can contribute to the school they are aiming for and showcase their talent and soft skills



Vanessa Lee
Senior Correspondent

When Celyn Yap, 14, was applying for the direct school admission (DSA) exercise during her Primary 6 year, her parents engaged the help of a vocal coach and an interview trainer. At that time, Celyn wanted to get into the choir at River Valley High School via DSA. An enthusiastic girl, she was in the choir at Lakeview Primary School for three years. Her blood singing and music show she was young, and after I took her to my CCA (co-curricular activity) in Primary 5, my interest in performance grew," she says.

"I took the DSA route as I hoped to secure a spot in my preferred secondary school, in case my P.S.E. didn't go that well". The DSA exercise allows pupils to apply to a maximum of three schools based on an area of talent - which includes sports, visual or performing arts, or a specific academic area - before taking the Primary School Leaving Examination. The DSA application period usually starts in early May and ends about a month later.

Different schools have different talent areas, criteria and selection processes. Shortlisted pupils have to attend interviews, auditions or trials conducted by the schools. Those who receive and accept offers from their chosen school must participate in the talent area during their time there.

Some parents see DSA as another way for their child to get into a preferred secondary school, apart from entry through Achievement Level (AL) scores at P.S.E.

CHANNELLING NERVOUS ENERGY
Some students take preparatory courses, which can cost upwards of \$300, to train for their DSA application.

Celyn's voice coach, Ms Narelle Ong at Narelle Ong Vocal Studio, taught her better voice control and more accurate pitching in one such workshop in July 2024. She helped Celyn in choosing a song in Tagalog, uncommon in Singapore, for her DSA audition, which showcased the girl's lower register.

Celyn's interview coach helped her to organise and refine her ideas over two sessions. Preparing for the anticipated question of why she wanted to apply to River Valley High School, for instance, her first



Celyn Yap, 14, received vocal and interview coaching, and was successful in her DSA application to River Valley High School. ST PHOTO: KELLIAN CHENG



Ms Candice Wang, co-founder of Coding Lab, says group competitions and interviews are common for pupils trying to apply for DSA through STEM. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TO



Ms Grace Tan, principal of Learning Journey Education Centre, advises parents and pupils to apply for schools where cut-off scores are low. ST PHOTO: JESSICA CHAN

going. The adolescent stopped pushing her hair back behind her ear. Instead, she channelled the energy from the nervous tic into expressive hand gestures to amplify her speech.

Today, Celyn is enjoying her choir CCA and thriving as a Year 2 student in the integrated programme at River Valley High School. Taking part in DSA training workshops helped her mentally prepare for the exercise. "My communication skills and confidence also improved," she says.

Having a long-standing commitment to her craft made Celyn highly suited for the DSA exercise, but it is not for everyone. Ms Tan, the principal and founder of Learning Journey Education Centre, which offers English tuition and customised DSA preparation courses, says selecting the right school and DSA domain is crucial. She says "The child must love the talent area that he or she has identified, and find joy in the activity."

"I know there are many anxious parents who really want their child to enter a specific school. But ask yourself: 'Will my child be happy doing this for the next four years' in secondary school?"

Lighting parents to be sensible to their offspring's emotional well-being and the risk of burnout, she advises regular check-ins and frank discussions with the child.

She also encourages parents and children to check out schools' DSA open houses - many of which are held in April and May - to find out more about a potential fit between the school's culture and the child's aspirations.

Lighting parents to be sensible to their offspring's emotional well-being and the risk of burnout, she advises regular check-ins and frank discussions with the child.

Lighting parents to be sensible to their offspring's emotional well-being and the risk of burnout, she advises regular check-ins and frank discussions with the child.

have potential, genuine passion and are open to exploring new ways of doing things. "Parents should support and encourage their child over 2 years, and document his or her growth journey."

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview in a DSA application could make or break an applicant, observers say.

Ms Tan says: "DSA interview preparation is like practising for the real one. You need time to coach and prep. Many children are not able to articulate what their achievement and strengths are - even if they have done well in performance and competitions - which can result in someone else of similar aptitude getting the DSA, instead, she says.

"Our job is to help students find their voice. They create responses, and we polish them."

Memorisation, model answers, AI-generated scripts are out. The prepared remarks are not natural and easily exposed if the student stumbles and forgets his or her speech on the day, says Ms Tan. She prepares her DSA applicants for questions relating to their pre- and post-school, and the child's personal achievements and soft skills.

Common interview questions include why the child chose that particular school, and how a child might contribute to a school through this talent, she says Ms Tan.

DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS

Ms Candice Wang is co-founder of Coding Lab, an enrichment centre that offers courses in coding, artificial intelligence, as well as DSA prep courses. She says programming can be used in various DSA domains such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Her students have built their own websites, and she encourages children to notice technology in their backyard, such as smart fridges at a light festival, so as to contribute talking about tech to its applications.

Group competitions and group interviews are common in STEM, she says. "It's not only about how you do in your coding, but also what kind of person you are at the end."

A joint talk may show not only a child's ability, but also how they articulate their thoughts, she feels about their creation, and how effectively they can work with their peers.

Ms Tan adds that regardless whether a DSA application is successful, the experience is meaningful. "Many of these are life skills."

She urges parents not to put undue pressure on their children. "It's not about how much you love for them, doesn't mean they will or not they get into DSA."

For more information, go to vanessal@tel.com.sg or vanessa@tel.com.sg

For more information, go to vanessa@tel.com.sg or vanessa@tel.com.sg



