

CONTACT

The Teachers' Digest

A CAREER TO COUNT ON

Two Allied Educators (Teaching and Learning) talk about their career change

GROWING STUDENTS; MOVING MOMENTS

Award-winning teachers share how they inspire their students in and out of the classroom

DEAR STUDENTS

School Principals' heartfelt letters to their students



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Can you solve this?

Show us how well you read *Contact* and you may be a winner!

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EDITOR’S NOTE

THIS ISSUE...

What is the joy of learning and what can educators do to help our children achieve it? In this issue’s cover story, we pose this question to the Director of Curriculum Policy Office, Mr Ong Kong Hong, NIE professor Ng Pak Tee and other senior educators. Find out what they have to say about the joy of learning, and why it is important in and beyond school.

In our feature story, three recipients of the 2016 President’s Award for Teachers talk about what motivates them in their work and how they keep their students engaged by connecting their lessons to the real world.

As for the online world, if you’re looking for advice on how to talk to your students about cyber wellness, Dr Shirleen Chee, Divisional Director of Educational Technology shares a few pointers on how to encourage good online behaviour.

Finally, we have some tips too on how you can make a splash with your new classes in the new year. Just be warned – try these ideas at your own risk! ;)

Happy reading!

The *Contact* Team



Readers’ comments

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Uncovering the JOY in LEARNING

What is the joy of learning? When does the fun start for our kids? We speak with senior educators to find out.

As a kid in school, Mr Ong Kong Hong loved catching tadpoles, frogs, guppies and butterflies to figure them out. His form teacher at Mountbatten Primary School noticed his natural curiosity and put it to good use by tasking him to make insect specimens for the science room.

"Mrs Ng taught me how to press the insects, dry them and pin them on the boards," he recalls fondly.

This was the 1980s, before the birth of the Internet. So, Mr Ong scoured books to research the different species of butterflies for cataloguing. "It just became part of the way I learned," he says.

Almost two decades later, the memory of those unscheduled and unstructured lessons still brings a smile to Mr Ong's face. In fact, they fuelled his aspiration to be a science teacher, leading him to study Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge.

Mr Ong is now the Director of the Curriculum Policy Office at the Ministry of Education where he is part of a team to study how to boost the joy of learning in the classroom.

MAKING LEARNING FUN

How do you find the joy in learning? Acting Minister for Education (Schools) Mr Ng Chee Meng has mentioned it in several speeches. In one such speech, at the official opening ceremony for Spectra Secondary School, he said it was important to "nurture an intrinsic motivation towards learning in every student" and that learning should be "a lifelong journey of exploration and discovery."

It goes beyond just trying to make lessons fun, says Associate Professor Ng Pak Tee, who lectures at the National Institute of Education. It is about learning that is meaningful and engaging. He links it to our education system's effort in shifting its focus from quantity to quality. "The quality we are looking at now is for teachers to reflect on the why, the what and the how of teaching and learning — and for students to become engaged learners," he says.

Mr Ong shares the same sentiment. He feels that these conversations that are going on should be used to help the education fraternity reflect on what learning should be about.

"It's building on what we have been talking about — the narrative of engaged learning. But now we need to transcend that and look at the larger environment. What really helps our students in a classroom to learn, knowing that it is not about marks or the timetable? What do we believe about learning?" (see sidebar "Students' Success on a Global Scale")

STUDENTS' SUCCESS ON A GLOBAL SCALE – AND WHAT IT MEANS

Mr Ong Kong Hong thinks the right strides are being made in our education system. In the 2015 PISA education survey – often considered a benchmark of a country's scholastic programme – Singaporean students came out tops in all three categories: science, mathematics and reading.

He recalls meeting foreign visitors who were curious about how Singapore students were being prepared for the international tests. He replied that we did not prepare them – not in the sense of covering specific topics that would appear. Instead, he says, our success is the result of our longer-term vision of engaged learning and developing 21st Century Competencies.



"We are now much more intentional about making the learning process a joyful one."

LEARNING AND TEACHING MORE EFFECTIVELY

This questioning of our beliefs in learning and attempts to create an environment that brings about this joy of learning are already underway. Mr Ong is quick to point out that the joy of learning is not a new concept. Neither is it "a new policy that is going to be implemented."

As Prof Ng puts it, "It's not that joy is absent. It's just that we are now much more intentional about making the learning process a joyful one."

Mr Ong points out that several initiatives are already at play to work towards this vision — with Teach Less Learn More (TLLM), teachers were trying out various pedagogies to find a more effective way of teaching. With the push for 21st Century Competencies, the focus is now on effective communication, teaching students to speak up and share ideas and express their opinions, and on group work and project-based learning to develop collaboration.



“We are beginning to realise that [learning] is not complete if we do not engage the heart.”



There is also a greater focus on applied learning which helps students see the connection between what they learn in the classroom and how they apply it in the real world. Mr Ong believes that these shifts are what will encourage teachers to reexamine their teaching practices and beliefs.

What is equally important in the process of learning is making the space to allow for mistakes. “The joy comes from having done it themselves. The experience comes from the learning process and also that sense of achievement and the discovery of something new,” shares Mr Ong.

Prof Ng agrees — he talks about elevating a student’s ability from merely being able to sit for an exam to understanding and appreciating a subject. “It’s very different to say ‘I can play the piano’ versus ‘I really appreciate music’,” he explains.

DIFFERENT SYSTEMS; SAME AIM

When it comes to an education system that Singapore has learned from, Mr Ong mentions Finland as one example.

But in fact, the country’s National Board of Education has recently changed its

curriculum to include more time for art and crafts to instill creativity and to push core competencies like multi-literacy, digital skills and entrepreneurship. Like Singapore, they say that at the heart of their new curriculum is “the joy of learning.”

Mr Ong finds it quite heartening that the other education systems are moving in a similar direction. “Gradually we are beginning to realise that [learning] is not complete if we do not engage the heart — how they feel about the experience, whether [they] enjoy it and remember it. We remember things that we enjoy, don’t we? So that’s how it comes together: I did something, I enjoyed it and I remember it.”

And that is why this former principal of Teck Whye Secondary School still remembers the happy days he spent in the fields catching butterflies and tadpoles.

LOVE OF LEARNING FOR LIFE

The joy of learning is not only something restricted to the classroom. In fact, both Mr Ong and Prof Ng sees that joy of learning is just as crucial, perhaps even more so, in adulthood.

The key to ensuring that the joy of learning stays with someone well after he leaves school is to start young. “If we start young and



WHAT OTHERS SAID

WE ASKED OTHER SENIOR EDUCATORS FOR THEIR VIEWS ABOUT THE JOY OF LEARNING. HERE IS WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY:

“It is important for the students to have the joy of learning because the spirit of learning will be with them even after they leave the formal school system. Unlearning and relearning will become a part of us and we can never say that we have arrived. As educators, the questions we often ask ourselves are, “What do we want our students to be?” and “What skills do we want our students to have so that they can thrive in a future that is yet to be known?”

Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching
Deputy Director-General of Education (Professional Development) and Executive Director, Academy of Singapore Teachers

“The joyful teacher is attentive, mindful and intuitive. In joyful learning, teachers give students time to theorise, problematise, discover and re-develop their understanding. This is built on the belief that our students are inherently capable of demonstrating their intelligence and understanding of the world and their place in it, in many different ways.

Mr William Grosse
Master Teacher, English Language Institute of Singapore

continue to nurture that love for learning it will continue,” explains Prof Ng. “The person grows up always having that right attitude to learning.”

And what happens when the joy of learning is missing?

Mr Ong believes that we are already seeing the impact of that in the behaviours of so-called Ugly Singaporeans, who have been conditioned to only do things for personal benefit. “They are very quick to compare and criticise and put somebody [else] down. It’s conditioning — if you’ve gone through an environment where it is all about competition and who is number one,” he says.

When asked if the joy of learning concept would only be attractive to a certain profile of students, he strongly disagrees. He thinks it will work for everyone, with one caveat: that teachers see each child for who he or she is.

Student centricity is more than a slogan. “Yes, we want our students to achieve, but it doesn’t mean we want them to achieve equally and in the same area.”

SO WHAT COMES NEXT?

Back to the task of introducing joy of learning into the classroom. Mr Ong’s team is currently studying the concept from two directions to get a better grasp of the idea. Firstly, they aim to have a deeper understanding of what the concept is. “We will look at terms like ‘engaged learning’ and ‘learner engagement’ and then try to pull out elements to understand this construct more deeply.”

“In this 21st century, I believe that our students need to be bolder and become better by going beyond the basics. There should be opportunities to develop free thinking, creativity and self-confidence; to engage them in meaningful and enjoyable activities, so as to give them room to grow socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically.

Mrs Li Yen See
Master Teacher (Music), Singapore Teachers’ Academy for the Arts

In addition, they will also survey the various initiatives already in place, like 21st Century Competencies, and study what happens behind the scenes by asking questions such as: What is the teacher doing that is allowing joy of learning to happen? What is the structure in the school that allows that?

Mr Ong and his team want to examine these elements more closely and have a better idea of the key ingredients that can be replicated across all schools.

He says the system is well on the way, but that some structural constraints would need to be removed. “What we do too well sometimes can become a weakness. We are very good at planning and organising things for our schools and students, but too much of it will mean that there’s very little room for experimentation and exploration,” he says.

Another challenge is convincing and winning over parents so that they can see and appreciate the need to shift to a different style of teaching. He believes that it is about “showing them and letting them see for themselves how much the students enjoy learning and in time to come, let them see the results.” He says, “I’m very sure the results will be positive.”

Ultimately, a concept as large and important as the joy of learning will require a concerted effort and trust from all stakeholders — whether it is the parents, teachers or even future employers. To them, Mr Ong has this to say: “Trust that we know where we are going. We will give [our students] the right competencies to do well in the workplace and in life.”

“Let’s remember to factor in the five elements of “ENJOY”, namely, Emotion, Novelty, Journey, Ownership and Yearning in our lessons to ignite the joy of learning!

Dr Charles Chew
Principal Master Teacher, Academy of Singapore Teachers



Do you have any anecdotes from your own lessons and experiences that illuminate the meaning of joy of learning to you? Share them with us and tell us why you think joy of learning is important and how it may be achieved in your own school and classes by emailing us at contact_online@moe.edu.sg



Dear students

At last year's Work Plan Seminar, we asked 12 school principals and teachers to share their hopes and dreams for our students. Here are excerpts of what some said.

Watch the principals read out their own letters to students on Facebook:
<http://bit.ly/ALettertoOurStudents>

MR AARON LOH

Principal, Commonwealth Secondary School

Being a Principal is a lot like being a parent. Just like a parent, I think constantly about the every-day things, like providing you with have a safe, clean, conducive environment to work and play. I worry about those of you who are sad, upset or unwell, and try to find ways to help you overcome these difficulties.

And just like any parent who thinks the world of their children, I have high hopes and aspirations for you, to grow up to be young men and women of character, and to live a successful and fruitful life.

I hope that you will be young men and women with ideals, who strive to make the world a better place.

I hope that when you grow up, you will not use money, fame or prestige to determine your life's

work. Instead, I hope you look for your true calling, and pursue that with all your heart.

But of course, at the end of the day, being a Principal and being a parent are two very different things. For one, I don't have a lifetime to spend nurturing and taking care of you. I only have four, or at most five years. But in this short time, your teachers and I will do everything we can to lay a firm foundation for you, so you can have a life well lived.

MS TEO SIEW KUANG

Teacher, Spectra Secondary School

This is my third year in Spectra and I am still learning from all of you. I learnt that it takes time to get to know my students but once we have established our relationships, our connections last for a long time.

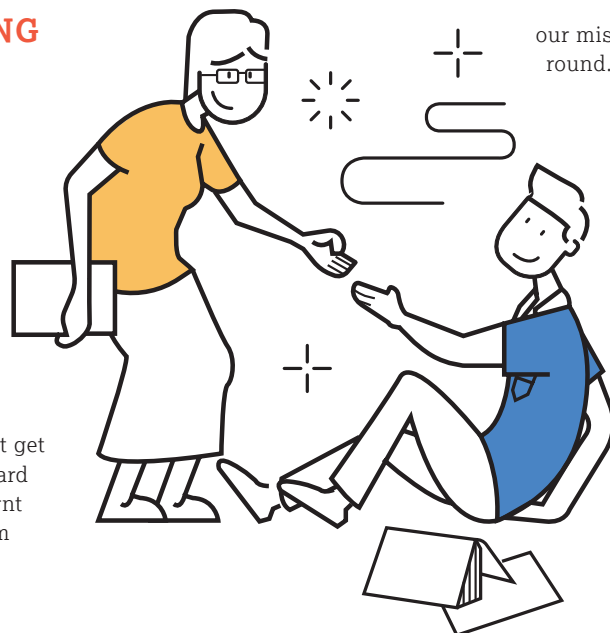
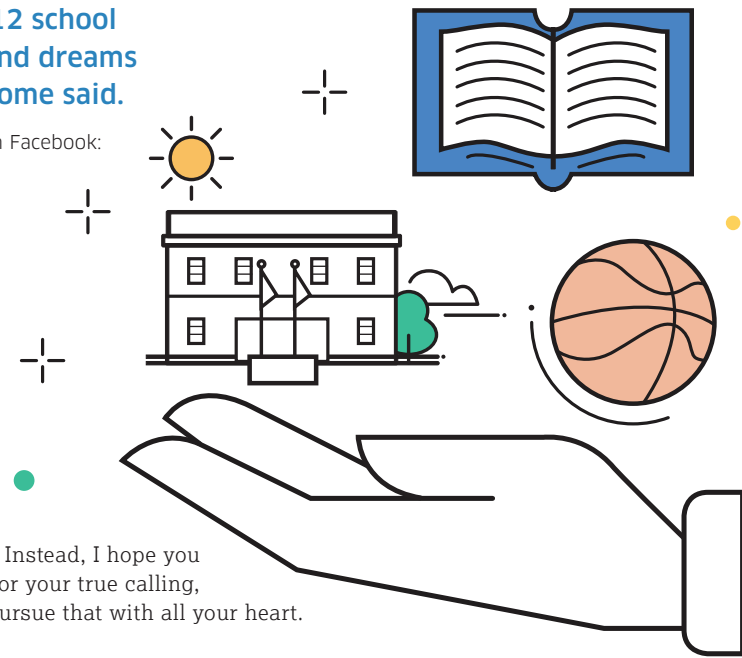
There were times I thought I was a failure as a teacher. My lessons were boring or I couldn't get through to you no matter how hard I tried. However, I have also learnt that it is ok to fail. We learn from

our mistakes and we do it better the next time round. The important thing is to be resilient and not to give up.

Everything that I have learnt to do, I learnt because I care and because I believe in you. I believe that you can do anything that you want to do, if you set your heart on it.

On this journey in Spectra with all of you, I grew and I became a better person and teacher.

May all of you have the courage, wisdom, and strength to overcome all obstacles in your life and help others. Together we can make this world a better place.



“Today, while I was watching you, I saw tomorrow come.”

MRS CHAILLAN MUI TUAN

Principal, ACS (Junior)

Today, I watched you in the classroom and I saw you excited, learning about energy forms in your Science lesson and wanting to share your knowledge with your friends.



I watched you in the field and I saw the determination in your eyes and I saw the indomitable team spirit displayed by you and your teammates.

Every day, I watch you. I watch you learn, I watch you play, I watch you fall and pick yourself up, I watch you argue with your friends then make amends again, I watch you try and fail, I watch you try again and succeed, I watch you make mistakes and then learn from them, I simply watch you grow.

Today, while I was watching you, I saw tomorrow come. I saw you changing the world and achieving your dreams. I saw you as a trustworthy gentleman who could overcome problems. I also saw you take action to make Singapore a kinder place.

MRS MELISSA CHAN

Teacher, Punggol Cove Primary School

As I pen down this letter to all of you, it leads me to think of the sweet voices that greet me each working day. Those simple words of greeting not only kick start the lesson for the day but on a deeper level affirm why I teach. Not for the sake of hearing the greetings but more of how through those words, I am reaching out and touching the different individuals behind those voices.

As you run the race in life, do not let anyone tell you what you cannot do. You cannot control the way people make choices but you can choose how you respond. Dare to dream big. Life is way too short to hang around people who do not make you a better person. Be the best version of your life.

I promise to be there for you at all times, to help you be a better person and make wiser decisions. The journey you are taking now, many have gone through it, including me. Your learning journey will be a much smoother one, as your parents and I are with you.

To all my beloved students who each left a footprint in my life, it has been a great honour



“As you run the race in life, do not let anyone tell you what you cannot do.”

and privilege to be called your teacher. Every one of you is a piece of a puzzle in my life and you have definitely helped to bring out the best in me. Now, it is your turn to leave a footprint wherever you are, in your life and in the lives of others. Make a difference! CARPE DIEM!

A career to count on

What's next for Allied Educators in Teaching and Learning? We meet two AEDs embracing new opportunities in education. One has switched to Learning and Behavioural Support to help kids with special needs. The other is now a pre-school teacher.

There are currently over 2,000 Allied Educators (AEDs) of which about 60% are AEDs (Teaching and Learning). Over time, as support for students and needs evolve, some AEDs (T&L) have chosen to make the switch to other roles.

From pre-school education to supporting students with special needs, the varied paths available to AEDs offers them refreshed job scopes and build on their hard-won experience from working alongside teachers to nurture and develop every aspect of a child in school.

We catch up with two such AEDs (T&L) to hear how and why they made a switch and their successes so far.

HELPING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

When Mdm Noor Muneera Binte Shaik Ali was an AED in Teaching and Learning (T&L) at Fuchun Secondary, her job was to work with teachers to help academically weaker students keep up with lessons. One such student was a Secondary Three boy was often caught falling asleep in class. He would even space out when Mdm Neera spoke to him. "There was a point where I wondered, 'What is wrong with him?'" she recalls.

Later, she found out the boy had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and the lack of focus was one of the symptoms of his condition.

That prompted her to speak to the AED in the school who supported students with special



learning needs. The experience piqued her interest in helping such students.

"I wanted to help these kids more, beyond... academics," Mdm Neera says. She eventually decided to take a diploma course in special education at NIE to become an AED in Learning and Behavioural Support (LBS).

As with every new job, Mdm Neera had to adapt to the changes that come with it.

Since 2015, she has taken on the role of an AED (LBS) at Geylang Methodist School (Primary), assigned to help lower primary kids. She initially found this challenging as she had been used to working with older students at Fuchun Secondary, but overcame her apprehension by observing and learning how teachers engaged younger children.

Mdm Neera also learnt to be more patient. "As an AED (T&L), I [could] see the child's grades improving after teaching him for a while. But for a student to change his behaviour, it takes time," she says. She now finds satisfaction in seeing her students achieve small successes. For example, she cites a Primary Three boy with dyslexia, whom she has been working with for a year. He

can now confidently take on full sentences instead of just reading individual words.

At the end of the day, Mdm Neera's goal is to help the kids learn to be independent. This means, for instance, being able to follow simple instructions in class without additional prompting by the teachers or learning to interact with friends instead of sitting alone during recess.

SEIZING EVERY TEACHING MOMENT

Ms Thesigambigai d/o Sinniah's time as an AED (T&L) in a primary school led her to pursue her interest in working with children. She eventually chose to become a teacher at an MOE Kindergarten.

"It's always been my passion to teach kids. But I wasn't sure that I was ready to take it on initially," Ms Thesiga says. "With the experiences I gained as an AED (T&L), I felt confident to take on the role of a pre-school teacher."

When Ms Thesiga received an email in April 2015 highlighting the recruitment of pre-school educators, she decided to give it a go.

To prepare for the new role, Ms Thesiga went for a six-month diploma course in early childhood education at the Professional and Adult Continuing Education (PACE) Academy at Singapore Polytechnic. The course covered a broad range of topics from classroom management to partnering families, and allowed her to better understand the pre-school learning environment she was entering.

"I was able to take on the role of a pre-school educator almost immediately during my practicum," Ms Thesiga says. "I felt equipped with the knowledge gained from the course."

However, she needed to come up with creative ways to engage pre-schoolers and keep their attention. She sought the advice of her mentors

at the kindergarten, and remodelled her previous teaching methods to suit even younger children.


For instance, she not only taught her class about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, but also showed the kids how to make a fruit salad.

Ms Thesiga also uses moments outside the classroom to impart lessons to the kids. For example, she always makes it a point to listen when the children tell her what they did over the weekend. "When you show them that you are interested and care [about what they say], it builds up their self-esteem," she says. "They also learn that they should listen when someone speaks."

PREPARE YOURSELF AND CONTINUE TO LEARN

For AEDs (T&L) who are considering taking up new roles, Mdm Neera's advice would be to find out about the job scope first. At Fuchun Secondary, Mdm Neera approached her colleague, an AED (LBS) to understand what she does. With her principal's permission, Mdm Neera also shadowed this colleague to observe how she interacted with the students.

Mdm Neera says her understanding of teaching pedagogies and familiarity with how a school operates has enabled her to better work with and advise teachers. At the end of the day, she says that the strategy when joining any school or environment, is to "adapt to it and learn from it. Use your experience to blend into the culture."

Similarly, Ms Thesiga's tip for those who are interested to join the pre-school sector is to "do your research and speak to people." This continued even after taking on her new role. Now, she is pursuing a degree in early childhood at UniSIM to expand her knowledge in this field, and is constantly looking for new ways to make lessons engaging for the kids. 



“When you show them that you are interested and care [about what they say], it builds up their self-esteem.”

PULL OUT THIS SPREAD TO PIN UP ON YOUR WALL!

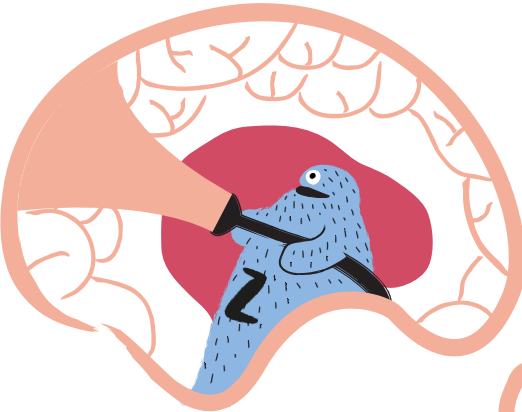
GRAPHIC

Embrace the Z MONSTER

Are your students sometimes nodding off in class or “zoning out” during lessons? This pull-out infographic lays out the benefits of having adequate sleep. Pin it up in the classroom to remind your students to get their Zs at home, to be at their very best in class!

CLEANING IN PROGRESS

At night, the Z Monster flushes away toxins related to degenerative brain diseases. The longer you sleep, the cleaner and healthier your brain!



STRONGER BODIES

During deep sleep, the Z Monster releases growth hormone which allows you to grow tall and maintain your muscles.



2°C YOUR BODY TEMPERATURE DROPS UP TO THIS MUCH WHILE YOU SLEEP. THIS ALLOWS YOU TO CONSERVE ENERGY AND BUILD IT UP AGAIN, LIKE RECHARGING A BATTERY

10PM THE IDEAL TIME TO SLEEP, TO BE AT YOUR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL BEST IN SCHOOL



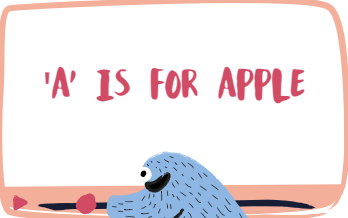
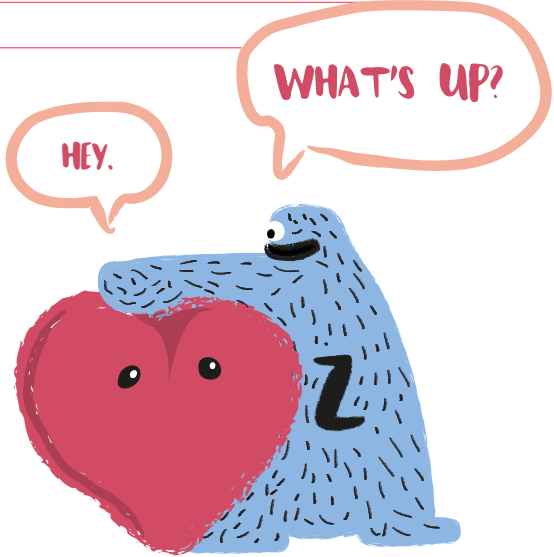
PUT ON A SMILE

Keep good sleeping habits, and you're likely to keep a good mood too. Even when faced with stress, you'll be able to react more positively.



HEALTHY HEART

When you sleep, your blood pressure drops. Spend enough time with the Z Monster every night, and you'll have a lower chance of developing heart disease later in life.

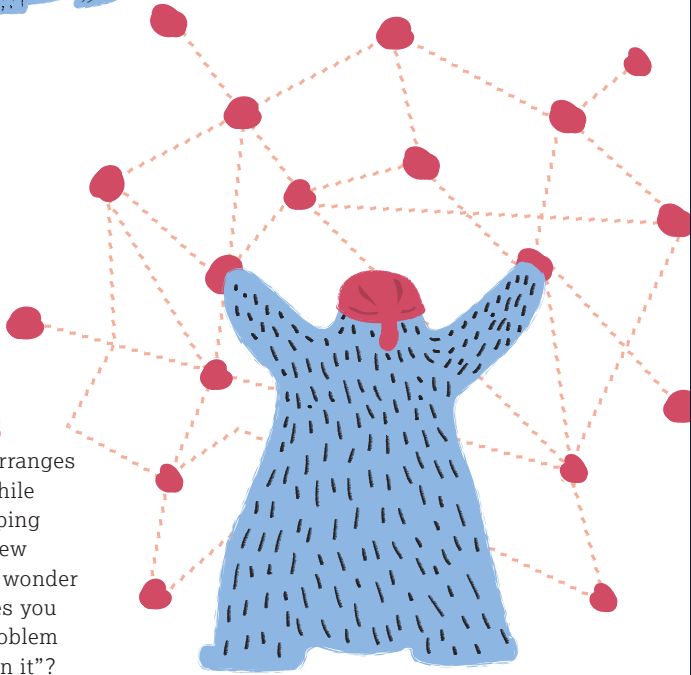


THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

The Z Monster also recaps the things you learned and experienced during the day, transferring them into long-term storage. That's how you remember stuff!

CONNECT THE DOTS

Good ol' Z rearranges information while you sleep, helping you to make new insights. Ever wonder why sometimes you can solve a problem by “sleeping on it”? Thanks, Z!

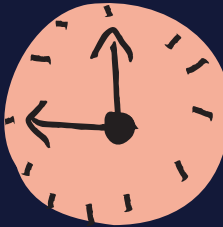


45 + 75 SLEEP-DEPRIVED TEENAGERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO GET SIMPLE SUMS LIKE THIS RIGHT, COMPARED TO THOSE WHO SLEEP 9 HOURS EACH NIGHT!

Illustrations by Tan Zi Qian

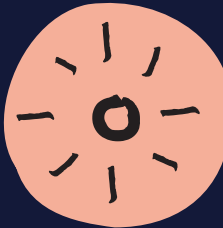
HELP THE Z MONSTER

How to get the most out of your sleep



CONNECT THE DOTS

Between 13 to 18 years old? Sleep 8 hours every night. That's how long Z needs to get you ready for the next day.



DIM IT

Z doesn't like bright lights. Turn them down a while before bedtime so Z can come out and do its work.



POWER DOWN

Turn off your phone and computer. You'll have a harder time falling asleep if you stare at them just before going to bed.

SOURCE: National Institutes of Health, USA | Brainfacts.org | Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience, Singapore | Sleepfoundation.org

Real values in the virtual world



The technological world is ever-changing. But the values we teach remain the same, says Dr Shirleen Chee Yan Hoon, Divisional Director of Educational Technology. Contact finds out how teachers can help their students when it comes to cyber wellness.

Q Why is it important for students to understand Cyber Wellness? The ease and frequency at which our students access information online makes it almost impossible for teachers and parents to keep track of the kind of information our students are accessing. So it is important that every child has the ability to evaluate information gathered online, and be responsible when re-posting something that they have come across which could be false. As educators, we need to help our students develop a moral compass to help them navigate the virtual world. We need to equip our students to be discerning and respectful of self and others.

Q What are some ways teachers can encourage students to behave respectfully and responsibly online? Teachers can teach and remind students to check and verify information gathered. It is really a habit of mind. My personal principle is I will not forward information that I am unsure is true because you cannot control where it goes. It is very much like releasing a bunch of feathers from the top of a building. Once you let them go, the feathers will fly in different directions and you will not be able to retrieve them. It is the same with spreading information that is not true — the damage and harm it can cause is beyond our control.

Q How can students be taught to counter cyber bullying? Students can be advocates for positive online behaviour. For example, if I see a good deed being done, I could share it. Such peer sharing is very powerful, and it travels. It is really all about supporting and standing up for one another to engender a culture of good practices. There is always the fear and possibility that the online community might react negatively. In such an instance, students can turn to a trusted and responsible adult such as their teachers to seek advice.

Q Should teachers be expected to monitor students' activities online? Where appropriate, teachers will use technology to deepen students' learning in school but they cannot be monitoring 24 hours a day to make sure our students do not abuse the use of technology. Our teachers have their own home and families too. Having said that, teachers are often the trusted adults our students turn to. Teachers may want to let students know that they can turn to them should they need help. Students are more likely to approach teachers if they know teachers remain current with what is happening in the cyber world. It is ok not to know everything — we just need to keep an open mind. I think we would have succeeded if we can establish ourselves as trusted and responsible adults our students can turn to.

Q How can schools work with parents to promote Cyber Wellness? It has to be a partnership between our teachers and parents. The role of parents is critical and we need to work with them to better understand the opportunities and risks in the digital world. We could invite parents to workshops and talks organised by the school.

For parents who cannot attend such sessions because they are busy, schools can forward to parents MOE resources on Cyber Wellness. These are also available online on the ICT Connection portal (<http://ictconnection.moe.edu.sg/>).

Q Any last word? Our students' tomorrow will be fraught with even more disruptive technology. As teachers, we must prepare our students to face and manage a future that is dynamic and fast-moving. What we can be confident of and stand steadfast in will be our core values, such as respect, integrity and resilience. If we can transmit these same core values to our students, they will stand a good chance navigating a future very much driven and shaped by technology. ■

Growing students moving moments

Read about three winners of the President's Award for Teachers 2016 who made a difference to their students by bringing the real-world into their lessons.



Garden of Possibilities

While her students are excitedly nurturing vegetables on the school's rooftop garden, Phoon Lyvenne is more excited about nurturing these young minds through gardening.

"My intention is not just to get the kids to grow vegetables. My goal is to get more students involved in experiential hands-on learning activities," says Lyvenne about her Garden-Based Service Learning (GBSL) programme. "The plants along my HDB corridor are dying. Why? Because I don't see the need to farm in my corridor. But here, I see a lot of reason and purpose."

For Lyvenne, this purpose is to engage, motivate and cultivate values in her students. She knows

too well that some of her students learn better through hands-on activities.

The garden teaches many lessons: Students learn about composting and the environment (Science); they harvest rain water and talk about the need for water conservation in Singapore (Social Studies); they discuss their day's experience and write down their reflections using the right terminology (literacy and communication skills); they learn resilience as they persevere through the vagaries of nature and teamwork as groups of students are put in charge of different plots of land.

And that's not all. As Lyvenne says, "This is not so much a garden as a social endeavour." The harvest is sold at the school's Farmers' Markets with the proceeds going to support students who are on financial assistance. So, here's another big lesson



Mdm Phoon Lyvenne, 58

School Staff Developer, Citizenship and Character Education, Information Communication Technology Skills

Spectra Secondary School

Once she gets an idea, she pursues it wholeheartedly, roping in the right people to make her project a success.

Lyvenne brought that enthusiasm and doggedness to the garden, even tapping on farmers at Lim Chu Kang and Kranji for their expertise. They not only gave advice, but visited her rooftop garden to offer solutions.

“I’m very happy to be doing this,” she says. “My passion is making a difference to their lives. The more I learn, the more I want to do. The more I do, the more I see the fruits of success. The more satisfied I am. This is so beautiful.”

the garden brings: empowering students to care for the community.

“Saturdays are happy days,” she adds. Parents will come in as volunteers to help out in various ways. “It really brings out the vision of it taking a whole village to raise a child.”

NO GIVING UP

Lyvenne came from a troubled family and overcame her challenges to become a successful entrepreneur and then a much-loved and respected teacher after the age of 37.

She shares her stories with her students to make them “sit up and reflect on their own behaviour”. Lyvenne asks her students to never give up, and she doesn’t give up on them either. She kept track of a particular student, who dropped out of school after being arrested, for over 10 years, helping him re-start his education, calling him and encouraging him repeatedly over the years. It was a happy day for Lyvenne when this ex-student, now successful, took her out for dinner and said, “You believed in me. Every time I start my sales training, I start with ‘Believe in Yourself’ because there’s this teacher who believed in me and that’s why I’m successful.”

ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

With her business background, Lyvenne brings a whole lot of enterprising ideas to the classroom.

Out of the Classroom and Into the World

Juliana Bte Johari loves the Malay language. Her students love technology. Their decision to share their interests is breathing new life into the teaching of Malay and creating experiences that are spilling out of the classroom.

Her Malay classes are action-packed as Juliana is determined to do what it takes to make her students understand that Malay is a living, breathing language whose power extends far beyond the classroom.

An idea that was a great hit with her students was her decision to invite radio presenters from Mediacorp to teach students communication skills as part of the school’s Mother Tongue Language (MTL) Fortnight Week. The students experienced what it was like to be a DJ and learnt to provide commentary in Malay.

“They saw that the language had a life outside of the classroom and it could be used as part of a profession,” Juliana says. “And with a celebrity present, they saw the language as more hip, more fun.”

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Juliana is always looking for ways to engage her students, and she realised that technology may hold the key. She says, “I want my students to learn well and also enjoy the class, and it’s obvious that technology and gadgets have a way with them. They’re digital natives.”

So, on any given day, her students could be on an *e-Jejak* (e-trail) around the campus quizzing canteen stallholders, in Malay of course, on why they don’t use coconut milk in the food and communicating with their teachers through laptops and mobile phones. *e-Jejak* was developed by a team of teachers, led by Juliana, to infuse technology into Malay lessons.

On another occasion, they could be blogging about controversial issues, such as the negative effects of the Internet and mobile devices on children. More comfortable with using English than Malay in such situations, her students would initially struggle to type, says Juliana, but their desire to get their point across would win the day and they become increasingly vocal, finding out the Malay terms that they want to use.

Podcasting is also used to help students in the foundation class improve their oral skills. Juliana gets students to record commentaries of school events and conversations with each other, hence harnessing technology to encourage students to speak Malay, hone their pronunciation and boost self-confidence. She even uses WhatsApp to check her students’ readiness for exams. “Sometimes I get them to record their reading for oral and send it to me.”

Not surprisingly, students’ confidence levels rose, and so did their oral marks.

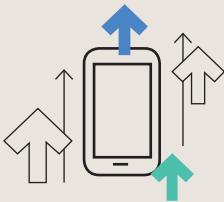
THE DESIRE TO HELP

Confidence is key and when her students face difficult circumstances, Juliana encourages them by sharing

her life experience. “I come from a poor family. Sometimes, our electricity would get cut off and I would have to do my homework in the corridor late into the night, so that my neighbours wouldn’t notice... because I felt embarrassed.”

She tries to change the mindset of students who feel they can’t excel because she, too, has gone through the experience of being told that she was “poor, not smart and couldn’t succeed”. “I want them to see that they can change their lives. This hardship will help to build their character.”

Juliana had always wanted a career that enabled her to help others. Though she seems so comfortable in the realm of education, her initial dream had been to join the Prison Service, be a paramedic or a police officer. But by the time she was called for her second interview with the Prison Service, she was already in love with being a teacher. “I felt that there was a role for me to play here. I didn’t have to be in a uniformed group to help others.”



“I want my students to learn well and enjoy the class. Technology and gadgets have a way with them.”



Mdm Juliana Bte Johari, 40

Subject Head (Malay Language / Tamil Language)

Qihua Primary School



“My passion is making a difference to their lives. The more I learn, the more I want to do.”

Going by the number of ex-students who visit her, sometimes bringing tokens of appreciation like a heart-shaped *epok epok* (curry puff), the big impact she has made in their lives is obvious.

Arts for the Heart

Dance turned his life around and now Tharmendra Jeyaraman is bringing the gift of the arts – from gamelan to hip hop to U2 – to win over his students with heartwarming results.

He's a trained classical Indian dancer who takes hip hop and jazz lessons. He tuned the gamelan instruments in school so that modern pop songs could be played on it. He peppers his Social Studies lessons with pop culture references.

If it might work for his students, Tharmen is ready to try it. After 17 years at Siglap Secondary, he continues to look for new ways to reach out to students to “hook them and get them excited”, whether it's in the arts or Social Studies.

Tharmen credits the arts – specifically his passion for dance – for turning around his life. “The arts and the stage brought me out of my shell. My self-esteem is a gift of the arts,” he says. And he is keen to share this gift with his students.

In fact, the idea of nurturing students' self-esteem is one that is very close to his heart. Whether it's in the arts or in his Social Studies class, he's always looking for opportunities to make his students feel good about themselves by allowing them to taste some kind of success.

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE ORCHESTRA

When Tharmen first became involved in the Nusantara Orchestra as a new teacher, it consisted only of the angklung, an instrument made of bamboo tubes. In collaboration with the music director, Tharmen expanded the Orchestra to include the kulintang (made up predominantly of bronze percussion instruments) and then, the gamelan (an ensemble of percussion instruments).


Slowly, Western instruments were added. “We started to catch a lot of attention, in SYF, in public concerts, in showcases... we received so many invitations to perform locally and overseas. But the best thing was what it did for the students. It gave them a taste of success, boosted their self-esteem and improved their commitment and performance in school.”

Tharmen has experienced first-hand the power of the arts to change lives. He believed this shouldn't benefit only a few and worked with the school to put in place the Potpourri programme – a modular performing arts programme that involves dance, drama and music modules for everyone.

MAKING LESSONS RELEVANT

In an effort to engage and draw in students on Social Studies topics they feel they have little in common with, Tharmen uses resources that would resonate with them. It could be a song by U2, or even a Tamil movie on civil war.

In another effort to help his students learn and succeed, Tharmen customised the curriculum for them, simplifying content, using graphic organisers and bite-sized assessments.

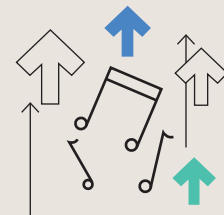
What makes him feel great is seeing one of his ex-students – all grown up and a responsible father – waving to him. Tharmen says, “I ask: How do you even recognise me? I look quite different now. He says: Of course I remember you because you're one of the few teachers who believed I could do it.” And that is what keeps Tharmen going. 



Mr Tharmendra Jeyaraman*

Year Head
(Secondary 4)

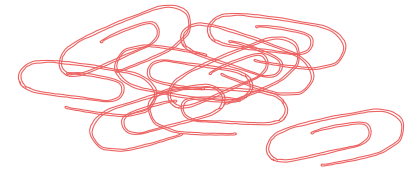
Siglap
Secondary School



“The arts and the stage brought me out of my shell. My self-esteem is a gift of the arts.”

*Since this interview, Tharmen has taken up the role of Subject Head (Aesthetics) at Meridian Secondary School

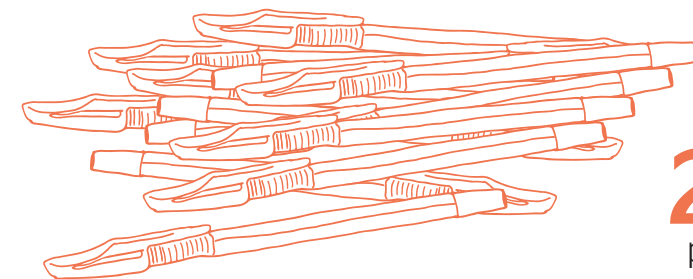
To our
34,000
Teachers,
in the year to come,
you will be needing...



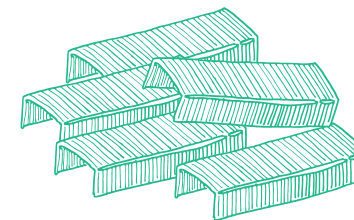
364
paper clips



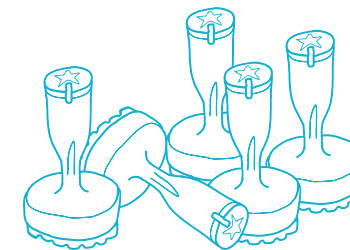
260
cups of coffee



24
pens



2,600
staples



5 rubber
stamps

...to make that
lasting impact on



1
student!

A real art to art talk

Three generations of art teachers get together and tell us why their lessons aren't just about technique—they're really about solving problems.

In early 2014, Erman Abu Bakar had an audacious idea. He wanted to create a huge clay structure that appeared to float in mid-air, even though he wasn't sure how it could be done. His solution? To ask his former student and resident risk-taker, Tan Kuay Yong. Erman remembered her eager experimentation in his art classes a few years earlier, and figured that she could come up with something. At the time, Kuay Yong was pursuing a diploma at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), but readily agreed to help. She consulted her NAFA lecturers and course mates on materials, then knuckled down with Erman and his students at Swiss Cottage Secondary to assemble the sculpture.



The finished work, Pollixplosion, was an imposing, almost two-metre-tall gold and black bouquet complete with large bomb-carrying bees. It was suspended by a network of fishing lines, and exhibited as part of the 2014 Singapore Youth Festival (SYF).

FIGURING OUT HOW TO SAY IT

Erman, 31, and Kuay Yong, 23, find joy in this kind of problem-solving. Erman recalls a class activity in which he was asked to take a long strip of paper, explore it, fold it into a three-dimensional object, and then draw it. He was struck by how this simple task was able to trigger ideas both in a structured way—in this case, by moving from two to three dimensions and back again—and an open way, by letting students fold whatever they wanted. It's an activity he remembered so fondly, he's been using it with his own students.

The teacher behind the paper strip lesson, 43-year-old Chia Wei Hou, was in turn inspired by his own secondary school teacher, who taught him that art was about finding a way to express what was already inside him. "It takes an artist's heart to make something creative", Wei Hou says. "It starts with having something to say, and deciding how

best to say it. If you are very strong in your technique, but don't have the heart for it, your art will not be meaningful".

(Clockwise from top)
Mr Chia Wei Hou (Raffles Institution),
Ms Tan Kuay Yong (Teacher, Jurongville Secondary School), and Mr Erman Bin Abu Bakar
(Subject Head, Art and Strategic Communications,
Swiss Cottage Secondary School)



WHEN TECHNIQUE WAS KING

Technique, however, is precisely what was emphasised in the art curriculum for decades. Wei Hou and Erman, who have 25 years of experience between them, are quick to point out how the O-Level examination used to consist of a three-hour still life painting as well as the submission of a portfolio, or 'prep book', with no page limit. "I saw my seniors compile pages upon pages of drawings. Their books just kept getting thicker", says Erman. "The thinking used to be, if you want to be good at drawing, just draw more".

That changed in 2000, when exam candidates only had to pick their best material and present them on eight boards, instead of churning out stacks of artwork. "These days it's more about the process", says Wei Hou. "It used to be all about the final product. But you really don't need to make a student sit down for three hours to prove that he can do art."

Kuay Yong agrees. She heard from an older cousin that her art lessons were centred around paper, colour pencils and watercolours. She feels that students today are fortunate to be exposed to more mediums—even digital photography—because they are more likely to find a method that can best express their ideas. This is crucial because "some people really cannot draw. But they are interested in art."

TEACHERS MUST PRACTISE TOO

This shift in philosophy means that, instead of memorising colour wheels, Erman's students learn about complementary colours by painting the same object in different hues, and reflecting on the experience.

But changing teaching methods isn't that easy. Wei Hou believes that art teachers face a unique challenge—they need to keep making art themselves, in order to teach well. It puts them in the shoes of their students, and helps them fine-tune assignments such that they are meaningful. "I am all for the notion of the artist-teacher", he says. "We have to practise so we can create magic in our teaching. We have to aim to inspire, rather than simply cover the syllabus". Finding the time to do so, however, is always a challenge.

This is why he was gratified to see that his ex-student Erman and Erman's own student Kuay

Yong submitted a piece for a?edge 2016, an exhibition organised by the Singapore Teachers Academy for the aRts (STAR). Wei Hou, who happened to be part of the curatorial team, only learned that Kuay Yong was his "grand-student" on opening night. "It made me feel a bit old, but it was very nice to know they are practising", he laughs.

CONSTRUCTION TIME AGAIN

For the a?edge 2016 submission, Erman and Kuay Yong worked with another colleague on an installation involving several translucent plates stacked together, each bearing part of an image of a construction site. Light was shone through these plates, revealing the complete image to the viewer. Once again the vision came from Erman, while Kuay Yong figured out how to execute it: splitting a photograph into layers, mounting each layer on a frame, and fabricating a lightbox to hold and illuminate the frames.

It took a lot of trial and error, but she enjoyed working on the piece because it gave her an opportunity to come up with ideas and try to explain them to a collaborator—something she rarely gets to do as a teacher.

Wei Hou grins as he listens to them recount this process. "I can tell that Erman teaches like an artist, because he thinks like one. The way he gave the problem to Kuay Yong and solved it with her...that's exactly how an artist works."

Erman, visibly touched by the affirmation from his former teacher, does not hesitate to pass down the line. "When I saw how Kuay Yong worked on the SYF and a?edge pieces, I thought wow, Kuay Yong has grown up. No longer do I give her solutions. Now she's the one giving me solutions." ■



"We have to practise so we can create magic in our teaching. We have to aim to inspire, rather than simply cover the syllabus."

Making an awesome impression

In the new school year, *Contact* gives you some ideas on how to leave a great impression with your students.

THE THOUGHTFUL TOUCH

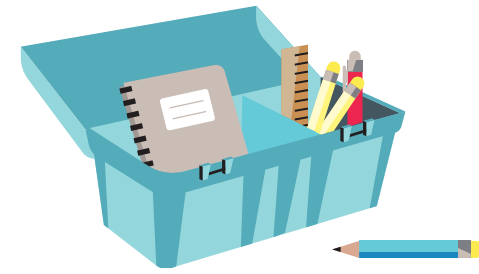
The post-PE class has always been an issue. Sweaty PE attire strewn across backs of chairs or window louvres can create an unpleasant... atmosphere.

Why not install an automatic air freshener spray? Better yet, provide an unlimited supply of wet wipes for students to freshen up.



MEGA MEMORY

Get the name lists and personal particulars of your new classes from your admin staff and memorise them all within a week. Impress the students by flawlessly rattling off their names, addresses, telephone numbers, their CCAs, and maybe even their favourite hobbies. They'll think you are psychic.



TOOL-UP

Still using a plain old pencil case? We say go the whole nine yards and use a multiple-compartment workshop toolbox. It'll definitely help you in "drilling" in your lessons and "hammering" home your points. (See our graphic feature on what to stock up on for the new school year on page 17.)

FASHIONISTA

Help your students remember you by dressing to a theme. Our suggestion? Wear the same black-and-white striped top every day for a month (just be sure to wash the clothes). Sure, they'll think of you as "the Zebra teacher", but you can bet they won't forget you that easily.

ENTRANCE MUSIC

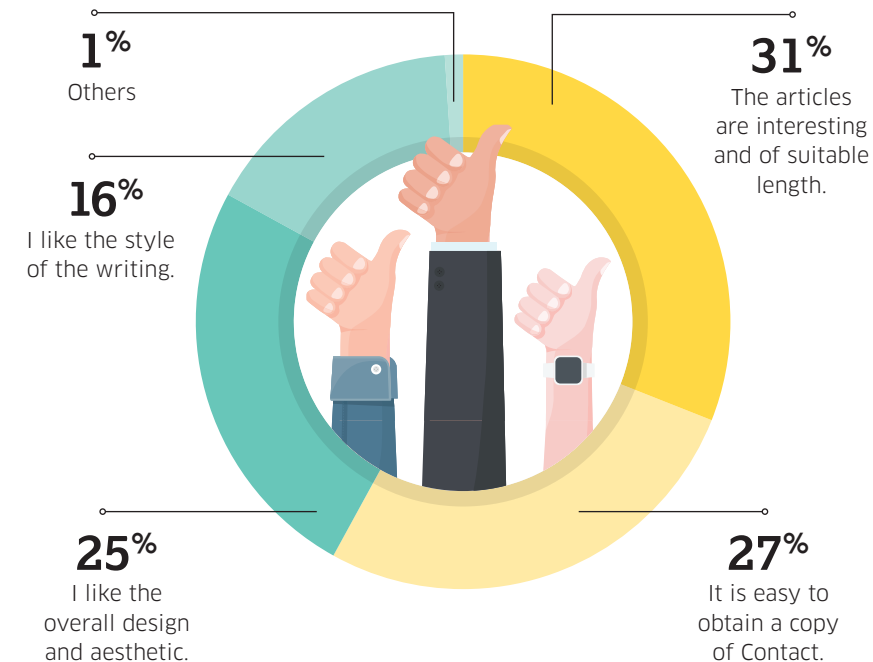
Let them hear you before they see you! Play an epic piece of music on your phone or laptop as you saunter down the corridor to your class. Just avoid "villain" themes like Darth Vader's Imperial March. We don't want them to have the *wrong* impression of your classroom management style.

CONTACT READERSHIP

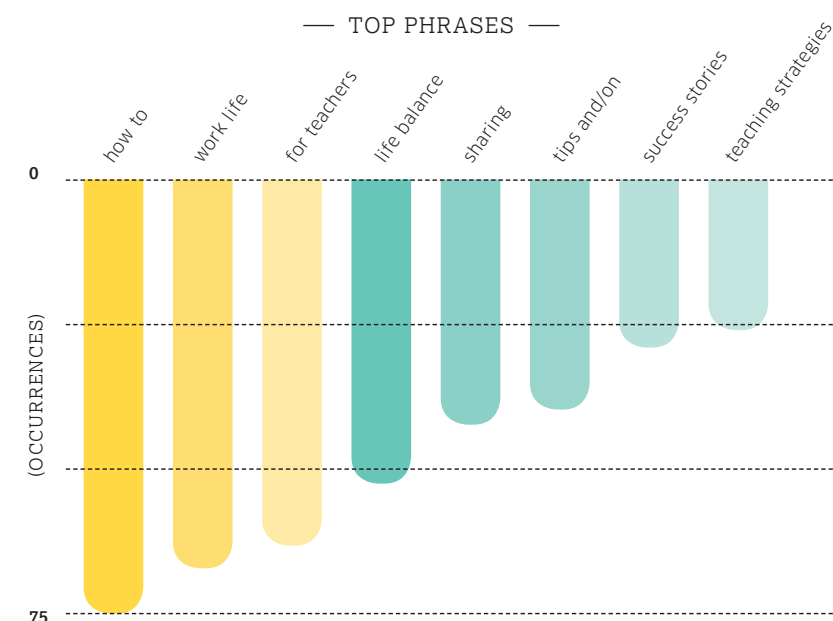
Why you love us

In 2016, we asked you, our readers, to tell us what you thought of *Contact* magazine and how we can make it better for you. We want to thank you for your comments and encouragement.

WHAT YOU LIKED ABOUT CONTACT

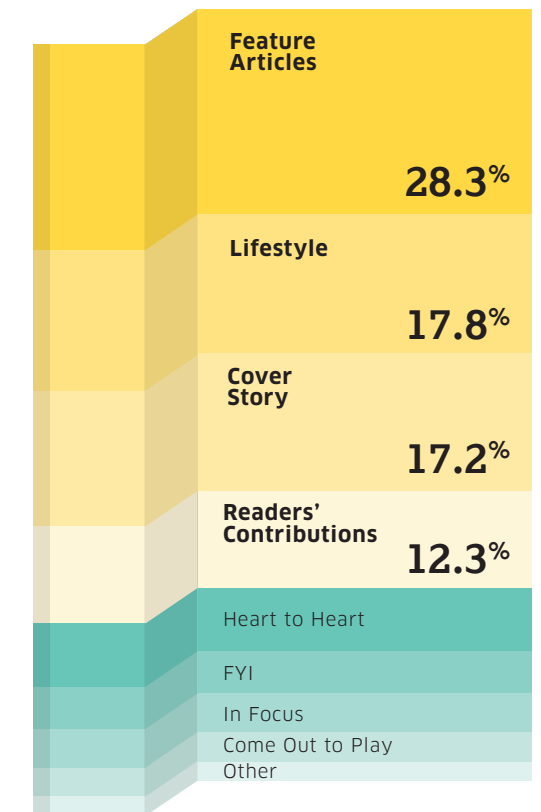


WHAT CONTENT OR TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?



If you have any other suggestions or comments, feel free to let us know by sending them to contact_online@moe.edu.sg

WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE SECTION?



ANY OTHER COMMENTS?



Look out for some changes come April 2017 as the team continues to work hard to make *Contact* the magazine for you.

ANSWER & WIN!

Can you
solve this?

Show us how well you read *Contact* by tackling this puzzle (answers can be found within the magazine). The first three correct entries will receive an attractive prize each!



ACROSS →

4. Mr Chia Wei Hou believes that to create magic in teaching, art teachers should continue to _____.
5. One way to think about the joy of learning is to build upon the narrative of _____ learning.
6. Art teachers Erman and Kuay Yong worked together on this project for the 2014 Singapore Youth Festival.
8. Mdm Phoon Lyvenne introduced a rooftop garden to her students at _____ Secondary School.
10. As you sleep, the Z Monster flushes away _____ from your system.

DOWN ↓

1. When he was in primary school, Mr Ong Kong Hong was taught how to press _____ to preserve them.
2. The same core _____ will help students navigate a dynamic and fast-moving future.
3. Mr Tharmendra tuned the _____ instruments so his students could play modern pop songs with it.
7. For Principal Aaron Loh, he likens himself to being a _____ to his students.
9. Singapore students came out tops in the recent _____ education survey.

Winners from last issue's puzzle



Mdm Tan Fong Kin Rachel
(Mrs Rachel Hue)
Teacher
Compassvale Primary School

Mdm Shirin Mahmud
Teacher
Shuqun Secondary School

Ms Chang Chia Yun
Allied Educator
(Learning & Behavioural Support)
Ang Mo Kio Primary School

Congratulations!

THINK YOU HAVE
THE ANSWERS?

Send a clear photo of your completed entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by **24 Feb 2016**. Please include your full name, institution, designation, NRIC and contact number in your email.

Answers to last issue's puzzle: 1. Loseyourself 2. Mystery 3. Baron 4. Mathematics 5. Instagram 6. Bridge 7. Nursing 8. Counsellors 9. Zondle 10. Thirteen