



CONTACT

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 06
APRIL 2012

Watching where we walk

Simple ways to reduce your
carbon footprint

What can I do when a student has a crush on me?

Reject your admirer
firmly but gently

Drink up!

Hydrate yourself with style

**YOU CAN BE A
GREEN
HERO!**

**TEACHERS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN
SAVING THE PLANET, SAY LEADING SCHOOLS
IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION.**



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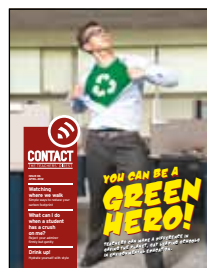
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You can be a green hero!

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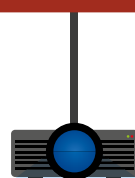
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Editor's note

The world is under the threat of massive environmental problems resulting from pollution, climate change, depletion of natural resources, industrial activity or agriculture practice, to name the commonly known ones. When I come across articles on environmental disasters, I am taken aback by the extent of damage wrought on the natural environment by callous and careless human activity and by the severity of climate change. I feel overwhelmed and wonder if I can do anything to help with the conservation efforts. The truth is if everyone were a little more conscious of our impact on the environment and made the effort, however small, to save the earth, the effects would add up.

In our cover story “You can be a green hero!” schools tell us how teachers can be involved in this important battle to save our planet. Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching, Director of Curriculum Planning and Development, also shares with us in “Teaching from ‘head to heart’” how the “green” curriculum in schools will engage teachers and students in in-depth discussions on environmental issues, better equipping students with the knowledge and heart to care for the environment they live in.

In the infographic spread “Watching where we walk”, learn some tips to reduce the size of the carbon footprint we leave behind as we go about our routine tasks and activities.



Editor-in-chief

Also, in “Building from scratch”, Mr Frederick Yeo discusses how it feels to helm the first specialised school for normal technical students and two teachers present their views on the topic “Should students have a longer recess?”

Even as we make the effort to conserve precious resources like water, don't forget to “Drink up!” We hope the chic and user-friendly bottles featured in Lifestyle will motivate you to fulfil your required daily water intake.

But if you receive one of these bottles as a gift from a student who you suspect is sweet on you, do turn him or her down gently. Learn, along with other tips, how to deal with the affections of an infatuated student in “What can I do when a student has a crush on me?”

Happy reading!

Readers' comments



Once again, *Contact* has proven to be an enjoyable read. A big thank you to the team for keeping us updated and connected on what MOE does in such a refreshing and current manner.

Tham Lilian
Academy Executive, Corporate Services,
Academy of Singapore Teachers

I would like to thank the *Contact* team for the article “Daily Occupational Hazards” in the January issue. The article is relevant for everyone, not just teachers. Thank you for the valuable tips!

Ms Saima Hanif
CHIJ Primary (Toa Payoh)

Would just like to drop a note of recognition on a job well done. I'd like to encourage the creative team in particular for coming up with a fresh and lovely design. It's really nice to see how much effort goes into producing a product that looks as good, if not better, than the content it carries. The typography, texture and weight of the paper, colours, photos, effects and layout communicate a lot to the reader. The fact that the entire team has taken so much care with the look and feel – an important aspect often overlooked – is evident that *Contact* is coming of age.

Raynard Heah
National Junior College

What do you think of *Contact*? Share it with us at contact_online@moe.edu.sg

Erratum

Contact would like to make the following corrections to the story “New discoveries” published in the Jan 2012 issue:

- The Office of Human Resources (not the Centre for Educational Development) has an online avenue for staff to report misconduct of colleagues.
- At Republic Polytechnic, staff can submit leave applications/medical certificates to their reporting officers (not principal) online.



Behind every superhero is a mission. For Zhangde Primary, Chong Boon Secondary and Marsiling Secondary, schools known for their passion in Environmental Education (EE), the mission is clear – to instil in individuals a heart for conservation.

And the first step to achieving that – “Bring nature back to the schools,” says Mrs Ganeswary Ganesanathan, HOD of Science at Zhangde Primary.

Working with landscape vendors and consulting the National Parks Board, the school grew gardens of ferns, cactuses, flowering plants, fruit trees and orchids, giving pupils the opportunity to learn

about a wide variety of plants. Pupils also learn sustainable gardening methods like vermicomposting – they feed worms with used paper and collect the waste produced to use as plant fertilisers.

SEEING THE NEED

Schools are confident that such efforts and programmes (see sidebox) can help to nurture “green champions” among teachers and students.

But they acknowledge that convincing a Singaporean, adult or child, on the need to “go green” is no easy battle since serious environmental problems are rare here.

Also, most of our streets are clean, thanks to conscientious sweepers. Because Singaporeans do not have to clean the streets, they may take the cleanliness for granted, says Mr Yeo Keng Yong, Chong Boon Secondary's HOD of Science.

He cites an example – the Japanese, who while out of home and with no nearby bins, keep rubbish in their pockets and dispose of it at home. Japanese shop owners also spend a lot of time sweeping the streets outside their shops, he says.

To build a similar sense of ownership of the environment, cleaning staff at Chong Boon are told not to clean the classrooms

and corridors so that students will have to do the cleaning themselves.

Efforts like this may seem small, but they urge students to take responsibility for their environment, says Mr Yeo, who also gets his children to clean at home. To reduce waste, he has also stopped using tissue paper while out. He uses a handkerchief instead and his children have followed suit.

RALLYING TEACHERS

For successful EE to take place, teachers first need to be convinced that conserving the environment is a worthy cause.

For Mr Yeo, the main obstacle in convincing teachers can be summarised in one word – inconvenience. Case in point: when teachers buy packed food, the most convenient way is to use polystyrene (Styrofoam) containers. But because these contain harmful chemicals that pollute the air and produce toxic wastes in combustion, teachers at Chong Boon are urged to bring their own containers to school instead. They found that inconvenient at first, but the practice soon became part of their lifestyle.

They also set the air conditioners in staff rooms at 25 degrees Celsius. Some have found the temperature too warm at first

but they have adapted to it, says Mr Yeo.

For its high level of “green” consciousness, Chong Boon has garnered accolades such as last year's Green Audit – Sustained Lotus Award given by the Singapore Environment Council.

Similarly, at Marsiling Secondary, “teachers bring their own mugs to meetings instead of using disposable cups,” says Mdm Koh Saw Eng, HOD of Science.

Besides encouraging such simple and practical habits among staff, the school, which has also won the Green Audit – Sustained Achievement Award in 2008,



ZHANGDE PRIMARY

- In a collaboration with the Restroom Association of Singapore, the school transformed school toilets into learning restrooms.
- Students participate in community outreach programmes to recycle items like tetra-paks, ring tabs and used cooking oil.

“I like to collect used cooking oil at the neighbourhood market, because I can communicate with the people there and at the same time, learn more (about caring for the environment).”

– Pupil Kwan Jiahao, 12



From a tray of worms mixed with excretion, pupils remove the worms and collect the waste in separate containers, which will then be used to fertilise the plants.





provides funding for teachers to attend environment-related conferences and seminars, and training in lesson-planning and pedagogy specific to the teaching of environmental issues.

When it comes to initiating EE programmes, Zhangde Primary encourages Science teachers to champion causes close to their hearts.

"Some teachers love plants, some love animals. To engage them, we match their passions to what they want to teach," says Mrs Ganesanathan, who is an avid dog-lover herself.

This is why some EE programmes in the school, initiated by the teachers, change yearly. On Earth Day last year, selected pupils went on learning trails conducted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to observe how the organisation saves and cares for animals. In the previous year, the theme was recycling.

Zhangde Primary has won several awards for its EE efforts, including the Gold Awards (2010 & 2011) in 3R (reduce, reuse and recycle) given by the National Environment Agency.

SAVE THE EARTH (AND MONEY)

Realising that not every teacher will be passionate about the "green" cause despite the schools' best efforts to engage them, schools emphasise a more tangible benefit of saving the environment.

"Cost savings is a strong motivation to 'go green'," says Mr Yeo. For example, during special occasions, Chong Boon used to spend about \$750 on stage decoration to engage a vendor to do the job. Now, the school uses recycled items like compact discs for decoration and spend only about \$150 on a banner.

Using cost savings as a motivation can also bring an environmental problem happening elsewhere closer to home. "For example, the recent floods in Thailand

CHONG BOON SECONDARY

- Various subjects are "infused" with "green" values – during Art lessons, students use recyclable materials to make art pieces.
- Visits are made to schools in Chiangmai and Kuantan to learn about their environmental efforts.

"I like to learn new things, such as elephant conservation in Kuantan (on a learning trip) and paper recycling through the Green Club CCA. All these have made me more passionate about saving the earth."
– Student Isabelle Lee, 15

Mr Yeo and Isabelle stand in front of the school's vertical garden, which is watered three times a day with the help of solar energy.



MARSILING SECONDARY

▲ Mdm Koh and Seralyn explore Marsiling Secondary's Environment Education Hub, a treasure trove of informative and interactive features to educate visitors on issues like waste generation, water conservation and alternative energy sources.

- The school adopts an inquiry and problem-based approach to EE, such as getting students to investigate the air quality of different areas in school.
- Students are sent on learning trips to help others, like trips to install water filtration facilities in Indonesia and solar panel systems in China.

"I get to host adults and students from other schools during their visits to the Hub. As a result, I have become confident in public speaking though I used to be afraid of it."
– Student Seralyn Chua, 16

▲ A solar energy-powered car created by student participants during the yearly Alternative Energy Car Challenge.

may result in rice shortages and price increases here. This can help people see the impact of something happening in another country on their own lives," says Mdm Koh.

The drive to save money can transform into a desire to save the environment, says Mr Yeo, who admits: "When I was younger, I cut down on electricity usage solely to save money. But now, my motivation has gone beyond cost savings to wanting to protect the environment (by reducing the carbon footprint as a result of electricity usage)."

BEYOND THE SCHOOL

Teachers committed to the "green" cause can influence students to do the same. Case in point: At Zhangde

Primary, teachers started the newspaper collection and vermicomposting activities. Now, pupils are taking charge with the support of teachers.

Another multiplier effect – pupils will bring "green" behaviours they learn in school back home and to the community. While collecting used cooking oil from the nearby market to make biofuel, pupils educate the public on how they can contribute to recycling and other earth-friendly practices. In this way, Mrs Ganesanathan believes that schools can facilitate a culture of practising the 3Rs within the community.

But first, a paradigm shift needs to happen. "Some educators may have this mindset: even if I practise 'green' behaviour, it's just a small effort on my part and it would not

help much in the larger scheme of things," says Mdm Koh, "but in any important cause, what the individual does matters."

We can take a leaf out of the book of environmentalist hero Julia Butterfly Hill, who protested against the destruction of redwood trees in northern California.

"I wake up in the morning asking myself what can I do today, how can I help the world today. I believe in what I do beyond a shadow of a doubt." ☺

What green programmes or features do you have in your school? Tell us at My Forum at <http://myforum.moe.gov.sg>



Natural cleanser

Assumption Pathway School (APS) plunges into conservation efforts with its rain garden, an "Active, Beautiful and Clean Waters" project funded by the Public Utilities Board (PUB).

At first glance, the garden at the split-level outdoor viewing deck looks like an ordinary lawn giving students a rustic setting in which to conduct projects while appreciating the beauty of flora and fauna. The scenic environment is also a regu-

lar venue for the Aesthetics Department's outdoor still life drawing sessions.

But this is no ordinary garden at APS. More than a pretty backdrop, it is a rain garden: a planted depression that retains

and treats 12% of the rain runoff from different areas of the school. This helps to prevent erosion, water pollution (as rainwater that is soaked up by the rain garden cannot flow into surrounding water bodies) and flooding.

In early 2009, APS, in consultation with PUB, initiated the concept of the outdoor viewing deck, designed with vegetated swales running in between two tiers of viewing platforms. The project was implemented by the school and inspected by PUB upon completion in June 2010. 📍

DID YOU KNOW?

- Schools are built with facades and windows facing west to reduce the impact of direct sunlight, thus reducing energy consumption to keep schools cool.
- Paints with low amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOC) are used for the interiors of schools. VOCs readily vaporise into the air, producing ozone which results in air pollution and health problems such as headaches, nausea and breathing difficulties.
- By the end of 2012, MOE Headquarters' 10-year-old central air-conditioning system will be retrofitted with a more efficient chiller plant, enabling the ministry to save 1.68 million kWh of electricity and \$300,000 in electricity bills per year.
- Used paper in the HQ is sent for recycling and paper collection bins are placed within arm's reach in the offices. The amount of paper sent for recycling rose from 22,000kg in 2004 to 97,000kg (that's about the weight of 18 adult elephants!) in 2010.

Rain gardens help to prevent erosion, water pollution (as rainwater that is soaked up by the rain garden cannot flow into surrounding water bodies) and flooding.

Visit <http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/env> for more information and tips on going "green".



Should students have a longer recess?



YES!

Jeffrey Yoong
HOD/ Student Development
Swiss Cottage Secondary School

Yes, I am all for the idea of extending the recess time for our students, especially if they have a long school day. I think they deserve a good break in between lessons since they have to stay seated for long hours in the classroom.

There are several advantages of giving them a longer break. Firstly, it gives them an opportunity to move around and exercise such as playing a quick game of basketball or soccer. Secondly, they can use the extended time to catch up with their friends or just "chill".

They will also have time to savour their food, especially when the queues are long and precious recess minutes are spent waiting in line for food. A longer recess allows students some autonomy in making responsible decisions in the way they use recess time. I feel that this is socio-emotional learning in action as they learn to decide what they should do with the extra time. To me, a 40-minute recess break would strike the right balance. It should not be too short such that they have insufficient time to eat. Neither should it be too long to the point that they squander the added free time. I am glad that in Swiss Cottage Secondary, we manage to strike this balance for our students in giving them a slightly longer break.

NO!

Rajasingam K.
Teacher
Boon Lay Garden Primary School

I believe that students should have a break after a few hours of lessons but the break should not be too long. Students usually interact with their friends, go to the loo or have a meal during the break. Anything more than half an hour may lead to students getting into unnecessary scrapes with their schoolmates or becoming too idle. When they have too long a break, getting them to focus when they return to class will be that much harder for the teachers. Teachers may end up with additional disciplinary issues to handle.

My suggestion is to provide students with another short break. Teachers will benefit too as they can use the extra time to rest or catch up on administrative work. Another option is to allow short "bio" breaks, of, say, 10 minutes each, when students can stretch their legs or rest their eyes.



Teaching from “head to heart”

New Director, Curriculum Planning & Development Division (CPDD)
Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching tells A Makwana how syllabus and teaching changes will up the ante when it comes to going “green” in schools.

Environmental education – covering issues like water scarcity, food shortage and conservation – has for years been part of subjects as diverse as Social Studies, Science and Geography.

But what is new, and news, is that while students have always been taught the “what” of environmental issues such as causes of global warming, students now are encouraged to think more critically, such as “why” such issues are important to the public.

The thinking behind addressing the “why” is so students will take a more in-depth look at environmental issues, like managing food shortages or curbing the spread of malaria. These topics will be discussed using real-world examples, with case studies drawn from both developed and developing countries.

“Generally there are three levels of thinking. First is ‘I know’, which refers to the ‘what’ of any issue. Second is ‘I know and I understand’ (the ‘why’) and the third level is ‘I know, I understand and I believe’, which leads to action,” says Mrs Chua-Lim.

The veteran educator herself, with more than 25 years of teaching and administration experience, is doing her bit for the earth. She tries to reduce the use of paper – when she needs to, she uses both sides. In her free time, she makes small crafts with recycled materials. At home, Mrs Chua-Lim avoids using the

air-conditioner and if she needs to, she adjusts it to 25 degrees Celsius. When she is on family trips, she gets her family to observe the hotels’ green partnership programme.

Strengthening of the environmental education curriculum in Primary Three Social Studies and Science subjects will kick in from 2013 and 2014 respectively. Modifications to the secondary level syllabus will be implemented next year.

Mrs Chua-Lim is no stranger to policy changes. In 1998 as Deputy Director of the Sciences Branch in CPDD, she spearheaded the review and development of several subjects – Mathematics, Science, Technical Education and Home Economics, to name a few – from Primary to Pre-University levels.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

But the big question remains. Is it really possible to teach “green” behaviour?

Mrs Chua-Lim believes that the most effective way to encourage “green” behaviour is to move teaching from “the head to the heart”.

Environmental concepts can be taught in four parts. First, there’s knowledge acquisition, followed by teaching the consequences of lax behaviour on the environment. Then students will be taught to appreciate the earth and finally (and hopefully), be stirred to take action in conservation.

Students will acquire knowledge by engaging in in-depth discussions with their teachers and classmates on environmental issues with the aim of cultivating positive attitudes. “Children who are not just talking about it but are taking action,” is what Mrs Chua-Lim hopes to see.

Still, challenges remain. “There are many schools with different priorities and needs. Everyone is at a different level (of environmental consciousness) so there is a variation in the degree of implementation,” says Mrs Chua-Lim. “For teachers who wish to conduct additional



enrichment programmes with their students, they can approach us and we will provide the contacts for them to get professional input or additional resources (see sidebar).”

She cites that the curriculum is supported by instructional materials like textbooks, workbooks and the resources. Environmental education is introduced from the primary level because by teaching pupils when they are young, educators can touch them early and build on that. “We would like the children to know that they can do their part (in protecting the earth) however young they are.”

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Teachers also get to acquire knowledge and skills through both pre- and in-service training courses, helping them to integrate aspects of environmental education in their teaching. They will also have to walk the talk, like switching off the lights and fans when leaving a classroom.

When teachers are able to effectively influence their students to be “green”, children will take home what they have learnt, spreading the “green” message.

“For example, students will be taught simple things like ‘when I buy a particular home appliance, do I get one with the green label?’ Or ‘when I turn on the air-conditioning at home, should I set it at 25 degrees Celsius?’”

Educators will not be the only ones shoring up “green” consciousness among children – many schools are already working with partners to achieve that. For instance, there are programmes like the Seashore Life Programme by the National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, and the Adopt-A-Park Scheme by the National Parks Board (NParks).

Mrs Chua-Lim believes that these programmes, together with the revised curriculum, will help students to make a difference to the environment.

“Ultimately whatever we do in school has to be for work and life. So the skills and competencies we develop will help students manage responsibilities and... move from self to family to community.”

GREEN AGENCIES SCHOOLS CAN PARTNER WITH

NEA

• PROGRAMMES

Students may participate in environment-themed community involvement programmes in and out of school, to take personal responsibility to minimise waste and practise recycling.

• EDUCATION RESOURCES

Teachers can tap on various resources covering environmental issues such as waste minimisation and recycling, energy conservation, and weather and climate change.

NPARKS

• LEARNING JOURNEYS

Students can learn the importance of conserving our natural heritage and enhance their knowledge of flora and fauna by going on learning journeys at various parks, park connectors and nature reserves.

• EDUCATION RESOURCES

Teachers can tap on relevant worksheets developed.

PUBLIC UTILITIES BOARD

• NEWATER SCIENTIST PROGRAMME

Students can learn how Singapore manages its water resources, discover the science behind NEWater and understand the importance of using water wisely.

• EDUCATION RESOURCES

Teachers can use the NEWater kit, which provides information on the Singapore water story, and worksheets on ways of conserving water and keeping our reservoirs and waterways clean.

SCIENCE CENTRE

• YOUNG SCIENTIST CARD SCHEME

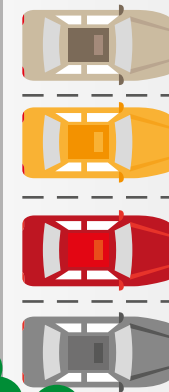
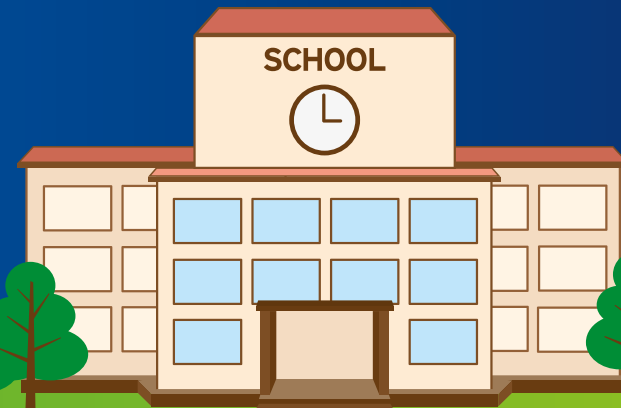
Students can engage in environment-related activities stated on the “Young Botanist” and/or “Young Environmentalist” cards.

Watching where we walk

A carbon footprint* measures the impact of our activities on the environment. Here are six often overlooked areas to help us cut down on unwanted greenhouse gases. By Marc Nair

1 Driving alone to school

A whole lot of energy is used to get just one person to school – offer rides or drive only when you're really late.

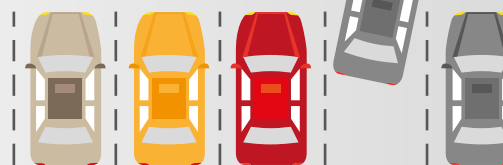


Energy expenditure:

Taking the car: 347kg CO₂ (based on a non-hybrid car between 1001-1600cc, traveling less than 10km)

Taking the bus (fare of between 1.21-1.41km): 101kg CO₂

Taking the train (1-7 stops): 8.3 kg CO₂

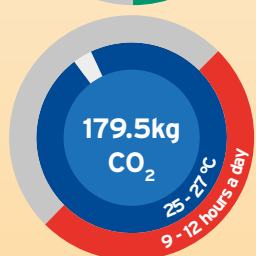


Solutions:

- Cycle to school. You can exercise while leaving a zero carbon footprint!
- If you must drive, make better driving choices by stepping lightly on the gas and brake pedals and avoid hard accelerations.

2 Leaving lights and air conditioning switched on when few teachers are left in the staff room

Energy expenditure:



It's a fact of life (although it shouldn't be): teachers, like most Singaporeans, work long hours. Often though, there are more lights and air conditioners on than there are colleagues in the room. And is that the sound of all three air-conditioners running at once?

Solutions:

- Replace low output (60 to 100 watt) incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs (They last 10 times longer and use 50 to 80 per cent less energy).
- Don't let the air conditioning operate below 24 degrees Celsius.
- Procure a few standing fans so that the air conditioning can be turned off completely if only a few people are around.

3 Leaving projector on in the classroom

Easy to forget, but the energy expended is hard to miss on the electricity bill.

Energy expenditure:

Standby mode
53kg CO₂ estimated 8560 hours per year

In Use
30kg CO₂ estimated 200 hours per year

Solutions:

- Turn the power off completely; it's not enough to press the 'off' button on the control panel of the projector.



4 Not turning off the computer when you go home or are out for lunch

It only takes a minute to restart the computer. You won't miss out on any emails.

Energy expenditure:

103kg CO₂

22kg CO₂

Laptop, disabled sleep mode, not turned off at day's end, usage of 20-40 hrs a week

Laptop, enabled sleep mode, turned off at day's end, usage of 20-40 hrs a week



5 Using non-recycled paper when printing notes for students

Nobody wants to see the fragile forests of Indonesia disappear. Shifting to recycled paper is an important step in that fight. Students need to wear themselves off the security of reams of paper and learn to access files and presentations online.

Energy expenditure:

estimated printing of more than 80 pages a day

520kg CO₂ non-recycled paper

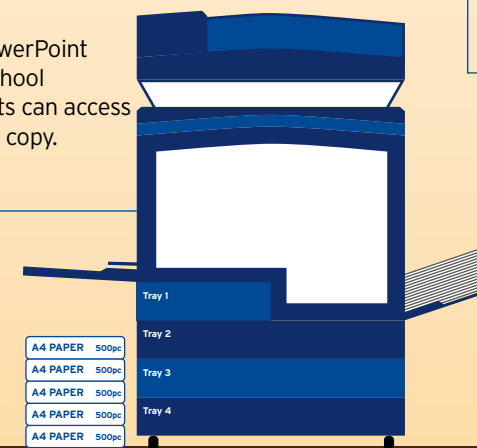
398kg CO₂ recycled paper

Solutions:

- Print on recycled paper or use both sides.
- Narrowing margins on documents helps to conserve paper.
- Use visualisers in the classroom instead of printing a copy for each student.
- Upload notes and PowerPoint presentations to a school repository so students can access and work off the soft copy.

Solutions:

- Turn your computer off when you leave at the end of the day.
- Set your computer to go to sleep automatically during shorter breaks.



6 Printing out e-mails

Energy expenditure:

Snail mail has gone the way of the dinosaur, yet emails tend to be printed out en masse.

120kg CO₂ Laser, less than 10 pages a day

156kg CO₂ Laser, 10-40 pages a day

Solutions:

- Print out only emails that you need hard copies of.
- Treat emails as you would regular letters, digitally 'crush' them by deleting them when you've read and replied to them, or sort them into relevant folders online if you need to keep them.



Building from scratch

The setting up of a new school for Normal Technical students is a journey of firsts for Principal Frederick Yeo. By Alythea Ho

Running a little late for the interview, "Sorry, I was in a meeting," are the first words he apologetically utters. The man sounds surprisingly energetic for someone who has just ended a day of back-to-back meetings.

The man is Mr Frederick Yeo, principal of Singapore's first Specialised School for Normal Technical students (SSNT). Located at Jurong East, the new school will officially begin taking in students in early 2013.

Till the first students walk through the school's gates, there is plenty of work to be done for Mr Yeo and his team that currently includes a VP, five HoDs and two administrative staff. A typical 12-hour work day sees them covering everything from curriculum development and interpersonal professional skills, to meetings with architects to ensure the new building is progressing nicely.

"We have no systems to inherit, so everything starts from ground zero," says Mr Yeo. "Even details like furniture colours are important. It's my first time setting up a new school, and a specialised one too, so it's a refreshing experience."

A SPECIAL FOCUS

The school is not the first specialised school in Singapore. The School Of The Arts and the Singapore Sports School specialise in developing arts and sports talent respectively. Schools like North Light School and Assumption Pathway School provide a whole-school approach to students who have failed PSLE, and are known for their emphasis on vocational education.

What makes SSNT (West) different is its dedication to enhancing the learning experience of N(T) students.

"Managing subject requirements for three different streams effectively can be a stretch for a mainstream school,"

says Mr Yeo. "By setting up a specialised school, we can cater to the specific learning needs of N(T) students who may not be so strong in the academic area, but excel in and benefit from a customised programme that goes beyond what the N(T) course in another school can offer."

Aside from having a high teacher to student ratio (20 students per class, half the size of a typical mainstream classroom), the N(T)-specific programme will centre on three areas: a customised curriculum, hands-on learning experiences, and simulations that meld academia with the vocational.

For instance, instead of "learning grammar for grammar's sake", students at SSNT

For Mr Yeo, starting a new school from ground zero is a refreshing challenge.

Secondary School, the 40-year-old learnt that building communication at all interpersonal levels is important, if not more so, than simply providing the right academia tools. "I make an effort to know my students by name, that 'Hey! The principal is also interested in who you are as a person'," says Mr Yeo.

Since the announcement of specialised NT schools in the 2010 National Day Rally Speech, questions have been raised against the segregation of N(T) students. Such schools, critics have argued, only encourage the isolation of N(T) students from the rest of their mainstream cohort.

When asked, Mr Yeo agrees that such concerns are understandable. However, he explains that there will be significant opportunities for students to interact with other schools, in particular at the cluster level.

"We are a specialised school, not an exclusive school. We will ensure programmes allow for substantial interaction with students from other schools in the cluster and beyond, such

as community service partnerships, CCAs and grassroots activities involving young people," says Mr Yeo.

LEADING THE WAY

For trailblazers like Mr Yeo, the journey ahead will not be easy. For starters, finding the right people who have a genuine interest in helping students who struggle with academia and self-confidence, plus a certain "gung-ho" spirit, will be the first hurdle. On the upside, he foresees specialised schools for N(T) students to grow in importance as more parents and students come to appreciate the holistic approach taken. A second specialised school located in Woodlands is slated to open in 2014.

"Our aspirational goal is to become a choice school and leader in N(T) pedagogy," says Mr Yeo. "At the end of the day we want to give students a meaningful and relevant schooling experience and to prepare them for post-secondary education or work, in the 21st century. This will allow them to participate fully in our economy and society, which will be the true measure of inclusion."

"By setting up a specialised school, we can cater to the specific learning needs of N(T) students who may not be so strong in the academic area, but excel in and benefit from a customised programme that goes beyond what the N(T) course in another school can offer."

(West) will learn how to use proper English in a retail operation simulation where they take turns addressing 'customer' queries.

"Our courses are based on discussions with our ITE counterparts and on industry needs," says Mr Yeo. "We anticipate that many students may not have a strong self-concept, and want to help them experience a more engaging experience to help them grow in competencies."

SPECIALISED, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE

Like many with a passion for nurturing the next generation, Mr Yeo believes in providing the right environment for students to become all-rounders academically, emotionally and socially. During his tenure as principal at Bowen





Guiding lights

In teaching, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a force to be reckoned with. ICT mentors train and guide colleagues on how to incorporate ICT tools into their lessons. May the force be with them. By Ming Lee

Teachers always look for innovative ways to deliver lessons so that their students are better engaged. It is an approach that Mdm Cheng Hwai Jen, who has been teaching for over 31 years, applies relentlessly in her job. And becoming an ICT Mentor has allowed her to effectively enhance pupils' learning experience.

In March 2010, she and three colleagues attended a three-and-half-day training under the ICT Mentor Programme, which covered issues such as ICT-facilitated learning, effective ICT integration as well as subject-based pedagogies and tools. This was followed by a two-day ICT Mentor Programme (Coaching) in July the same year, which focused on effective communication via active listening and clarifying and asking probing questions.

This led her to explore various ICT tools during her lessons. "From May 2010 to November 2011, I created an online repository (in the form of a blog) of Physics lesson notes and assignments with links to online resources from different parts of the world, useful Java Applets and YouTube video clips. My objective was to enhance students' understanding of Physics concepts," says Mdm Cheng.

Students had to submit Google documents, YouTube reviews and electronic forms embedded in the blog. As the online repository is linked to every student's

blog, they could reflect on the concepts and their experiences while learning the former. Also, a comments facility enabled students to post queries and seek clarifications from teachers and classmates. This, she says, allowed them to become more active and independent learners.

It is a goal she wanted to help her mentees achieve too. Now she is coaching two younger teachers, Mr Jimmy Ong (Physics and Mathematics) and Mr Alex Chan (Mathematics and Computer Practical Applications) on integrating the use of blogs into their lessons. Mdm Cheng believes it

Mdm Cheng believes it should be a breeze for them as both are digital natives. "What's more important is their positive attitude towards learning," she shares.

should be a breeze for them as both are digital natives. "What's more important is their positive attitude towards learning," she shares.

Last June, she was also invited to share her experience in leveraging on blogs with fellow ICT mentors during an ICT Mentors' Homecoming event.

In mentoring others, Mdm Cheng says she has also been enriched: "Learning has

► "Learning has never been more fun."

– Mdm Cheng Hwai Jen, Physics and Mathematics teacher, Queensway Secondary School

never been more fun. Since purchasing my iPad2, I've been thinking of ways to integrate it into my lessons. It is not only a great organiser, but also a video recorder for transferring experiments into QuickTime movies. I can also go through test items in iBook or Dropbox and tap on talks from iTunes universities like Harvard, Yale and Oxford."

At Eunos Primary School, Mrs Rosvinder Sidhu, a teacher at the school for five years, is envisioning a future "where most children would have learnt to count, read and spell with the aid of technology before they even start school!"

As such, she is an ardent advocate of incorporating ICT into lessons to ignite a sense of curiosity and enthusiasm among young learners. Based on her observations, they often "learn how to use these tools

Mrs Rosvinder Sidhu is envisioning a future "where most children would have learnt to count, read and spell with the aid of technology before they even start school!"

more quickly than adults".

Now, as an ICT (English) mentor, Mrs Sidhu helps to develop competency in the use of ICT among her colleagues. She also provides mentees with knowledge on planning and delivering relevant experiences and enables the sharing of good resources and practices.

"We went for courses that equipped us with mentoring skills as well as online tools that facilitated collaborative and self-directed learning. Our training continues as we learn how to facilitate lessons and incorporate the learning by mentoring two teachers every year," says Mrs Sidhu, who is one of four ICT mentors at the school.

► "Technology has revolutionised our education system."

– Mrs Rosvinder Sidhu, English Language teacher, Eunos Primary School

Although she teaches English, she accepted the challenge of mentoring Ms Elaine Lau, who teaches Primary One Mathematics. During a lesson on remembering the positions of ordinal numbers, both teachers wanted a session of differentiated instruction to cater to pupils with mixed abilities. What they had to overcome, however, was that the pupils were young and had limited ICT abilities.

Together, Mrs Sidhu and Ms Lau created three different activities for three groups of pupils. Before the lesson began, high-progress pupils filmed themselves holding up cards with ordinal numbers (1st to 10th). When called upon, they jumped up in the air. During the lesson, they watched the video again and designed questions for their high-progress peers, such as "Who was first in line?" In the process, pupils also learnt to spell each other's names.

Even though the pupils needed help in spelling, "they could play a video, pause it and rewind it easily. It showed our pupils' IT knowledge today has surpassed their basic spelling skills," says Mrs Sidhu.

The mid-progress pupils, meanwhile, watched a YouTube video and drew objects in order of instruction ("Draw a star in the 5th box."). The low-progress pupils played flash games to help them remember the positions of ordinal numbers.

When not exploring new ways to impart knowledge through ICT tools, Mrs Sidhu and other ICT Mentors conduct internal training and sharing sessions for the staff. She is also helping the English Language-ICT Collaborative Project, which allows pupils in Eunos Primary, St Hilda's Primary, Pasir Ris Primary and Kong Hwa School to assess one another's oral skills using ICT. ➤



10 ways to bust your wallet and feel good (for a while)

1. Buy bottled natural Italian spring water even though the school has water coolers and tap water is safe to drink.

2. Spend a bomb on that pair of sky-high Jimmy Choo heels, knowing that you'll never survive standing in them past assembly.

3. Borrow a stack of library books of your favourite genre and hoard them for eight months. The overdue fine is a small price to pay as long as you get your literary fix.

6. Buy overpriced bags to carry laptops, books and worksheets.

8. Buy a fancy water bottle. Lose it (accidentally) somewhere in school so you get to buy a different design, then lose it... (Turn the page for a variety of choices.)

4. Buy all sorts of stickers and ink stamps, knowing that you can never really use them all!

5. Charge all purchases to your credit card in the name of retail therapy and worry about the bill later.

7. Buy one box of handmade chocolates for each stack of exam papers that needs to be marked.

9. Deck yourself in designer togs though the only people who'll get to see them are your students.

10. Purchase expensive whiteboard markers instead of using the perfectly serviceable ones provided by the school.

Editor: In case you don't know already, we're just kidding! So keep tabs on your spending habits or pay for the consequences, literally.



Drink up!

Quench your thirst for water, convenience and style with these handy and chic bottles. By Yip Min-ting



BOBBLE WATER BOTTLE

From \$17.80 for a 13oz (385ml) bottle

For: Travellers

You don't get drinkable tap water everywhere. The Bobble's filter removes chlorine and organic contaminants so you can keep yourself hydrated along with peace of mind when overseas. A creation of renowned industrial designer, Karim Rashid, the BPA-free, recyclable plastic bottle is kind to the environment as well.
Where to buy: Leading department stores, hypermarkets and supermarkets.

SIGG

From \$47 for a 600ml bottle

For: The style-conscious

This is more fun than drinking your Perrier, because the SIGG is a bottle with personality. With a dizzyingly wide range of funky designs to choose from, you can pick a bottle to match your mood. With an elastic inner coating that doesn't crack when the outside is dented, the unbreakable bottle is also suited for sports, and being 100% recyclable, it's also trendily eco-friendly.

Where to buy: Leading department stores and flagship store The Big Country, 238 Thomson Road, #02-49/50 Novena Square

CAMELBAK PODIUM CHILL

From \$25 for a 21oz (610ml) bottle

For: Cyclists

The lightweight, easy-squeeze bottle is a godsend after a long ride as your ice Milo and isotonic drinks are kept chilled with the insulated double-wall ChillJacket feature. The JetValve feature for the bottle cap seals shut automatically after drinking, while the leak-proof sealing lock-out on the cap adds another layer of spill prevention.

Where to buy: At selected bike stores, such as Hin Leong Cycle (Blk 71 Lorong 4 Toa Payoh #01-37), L&T Cycle Pte Ltd (Blk 482 Tampines St 43 #01-230), Life Cycle (986 Upper Serangoon Road)

KOR ONE HYDRATION VESSELS

\$29.90 for a 500ml bottle

For: The H2O guzzlers

If water is your three-course meal, the ergonomic handle makes for easy-carrying between classes, so you can keep hydrated throughout the day. The hinged cap opens with a touch of a button, and the rubber base mutes noisy knocks.

Where to buy: www.gatomall.com

VAPUR WATER BOTTLE

\$39.90 for a twin pack of 400ml bottles and \$26.90 for 500ml bottle

For: Runners and people with smallish handbags

Forget toting around a clunky bottle; you can roll up and stash your Vapur bottle in your pocket or handbag after draining them. It's made of ultra-durable BPA-free plastic and holds both hot and cold beverages.

Where to buy: Selected Royal Sporting House outlets, travel stores (The Planet Travellers, X-Boundaries), shopping centres (Takashimaya, BHG at Bugis Junction) and schools (Nanyang Polytechnic, National University of Singapore).

THE SAFE SPORTER

\$29.90 for 16oz (473ml) bottle

For: Parents looking for a useful gift for children

Thoughtful details make this a winner with little ones. The non-slip rubber bottom helps minimise spills, while the band of insulating rubber gives little hands an easy grip and protection from icy or hot drinks. The screw-on top with a convenient pull-out top spout makes drinking mess-free.

Where to buy: www.Pupsikstudio.com



What can I do when a student has a crush on me?

School counsellors Jenny Tan (Pasir Ris Secondary) and Steven Wu (Jurong Junior College) advise how you can wisely deflect your student's arrows of affection.

By Chen Jingting

1. Draw your boundaries clearly

For starters, no one-on-one outings outside school and avoid close physical contact when taking photographs together. One can never be too careful – even seemingly harmless gestures like an encouraging pat on the shoulders may reinforce the infatuated student's misinterpretation that you are interested in her too, warns Mr Wu. Also, gently turn down the student's gifts if you suspect that she is interested in you. But you do not have to deliberately avoid the student in school, as she may be hurt or "resort to negative behaviour" to get your attention, says Ms Tan.

2. Reflect – have you unintentionally sent out the wrong signals?

Identifying and understanding the circumstances that lead to the onset of the crush may enable you to modify your responses to the student in the future. "For example, if the teacher realises that the student could have taken a liking to him because he often praised her for being smart and called on her to answer his questions in class, he could then give similar responses to other students to dispel the notion," says Ms Tan.

3. Involve another teacher

Approach the student with another teacher who knows her well to clarify any misunderstanding the student has and help the student understand what could have led to the infatuation. Besides ensuring that a one-on-one situation is avoided, the other teacher can also help to facilitate the discussion if it becomes awkward for the student and you to honestly share your feelings.

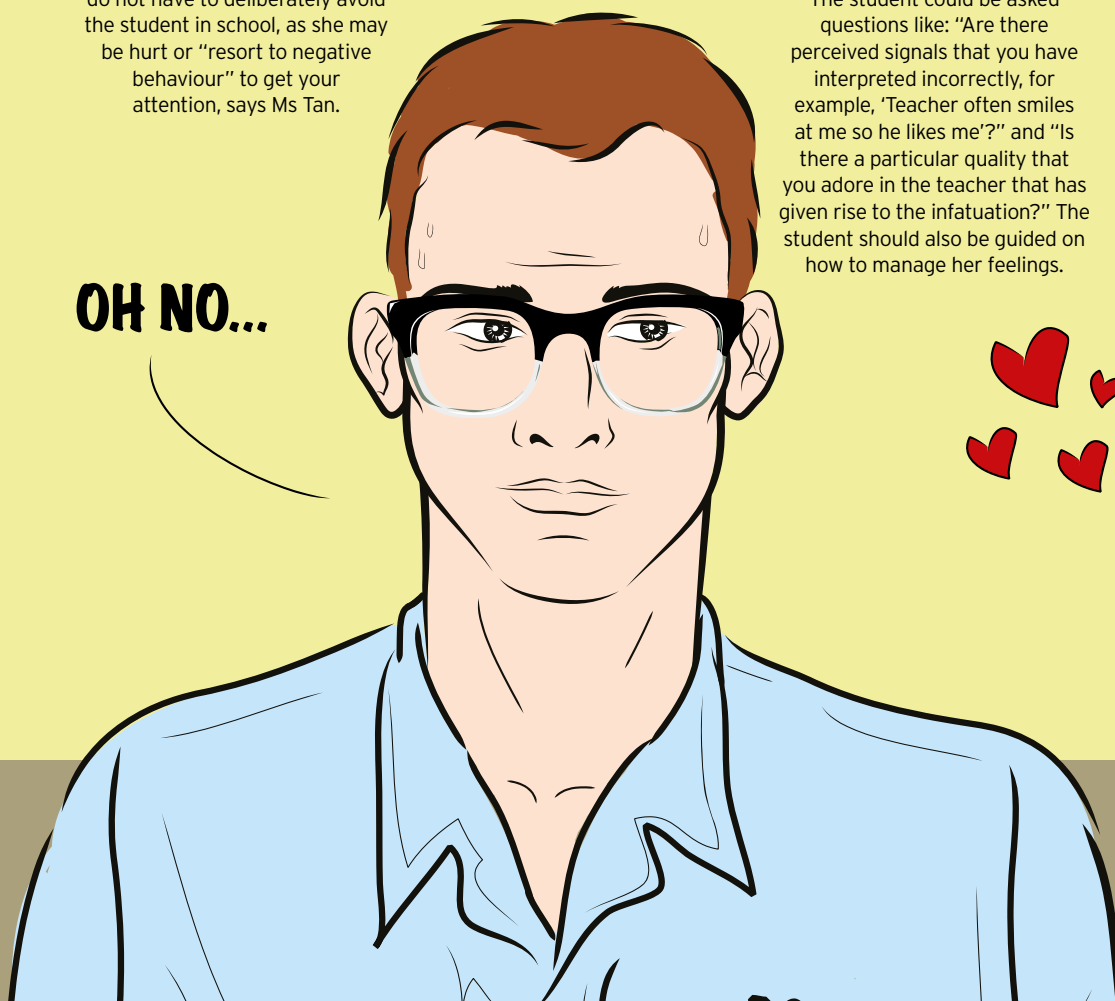
The student could be asked questions like: "Are there perceived signals that you have interpreted incorrectly, for example, 'Teacher often smiles at me so he likes me?'" and "Is there a particular quality that you adore in the teacher that has given rise to the infatuation?" The student should also be guided on how to manage her feelings.

4. Ask for more help

If the infatuation persists even after clarification, refer the student to professional help, such as the school counsellors. You can also account to your Reporting Officer (RO) or school leaders. If you still feel uncomfortable teaching the student in class, try to work out work arrangements with your mentors or RO.



OH NO...



CAPTURE MOMENTS WITH CONTACT

WINNING ENTRIES FOR JANUARY

Thank you for sending us photos of quirky work stations! Winners get to enjoy \$30 worth of shopping vouchers each.



Say Cheese!

Contributor:
Mdm Julie Chin
Teacher,
Keming Primary School

Armarjeet's garden paradise in Keming.



Contributor:
Ms Lee Boon Gek
Computer Graphics Designer,
Educational Technology Division

My work station showcases my illustrations and graphics in Edumall.



Contributor:
Mr Arivalagan
SH Character Education,
Greenridge Primary School

Ms Haslinda's picturesque plush pad!



INSTRUCTIONS

1. The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
2. The photo should be in JPEG format, A4 in size and have a resolution of at least 300 dpi.
3. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
4. Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, e-mail and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
5. Each participant is allowed only one entry.
6. Attach a caption (max 25 words), explaining how the photo reflects the theme.
7. The copyright of all entries shall remain with the photographer. However, *Contact* reserves the right to use and modify the selected entry as well as other suitable ones, with full acknowledgement to the copyright owners, for future use and publication.
8. The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity, and originality. The judges' decision is final.
9. Three winners will each receive an attractive prize. *Contact* reserves the right to change or replace the prize with another of equal or greater value should the featured prize become unavailable. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 1st June 2012.

GET FIT TOGETHER



Exercising can be a meaningful and exciting activity, especially when you're doing it with others. So whip out your camera when you're out for some outdoor action, exercise some creativity and show us how you enjoy working out with your colleagues or students! You may be one of three winners to enjoy an attractive prize.