

The Teachers We Remember



contact

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 10 • APRIL 2013

How to work with parents

Tips on how to be partners with parents in education

Kindergarten Curriculum Framework

What the refreshed guide means to you

Learn to ask, ask to learn

Words of wisdom from a Master Teacher



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On the cover
Mdm Ang Choon Keow and Ms Valane
Tnee's story was featured in MOE's
recruitment and branding campaign.

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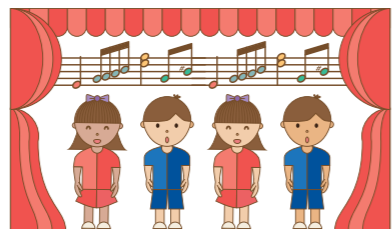
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Hi there!

We're just shy of mid-year and things are in full swing. For starters, MOE's latest teacher recruitment and branding commercials, 'Mdm Ang' and 'Mr Kumar', have been aired on TV and posted on MOE's Facebook page. In our cover story, we go behind the scenes of the recruitment campaign and hear how the teachers have made an impact on the lives of their young students.

Going forward from this issue, MOE's newly set up Strategic Communications and Engagement Division (SCED) takes over *Contact* from the Corporate Communications Division (CCD). Our division was set up to help MOE HQ better engage and support our teachers so as to enhance internal communication. We thank CCD for running a tight ship, and will do our best to continue making *Contact* a fun and useful read for you.

We'd like to hear from more of you, so we have two new sections: *My 2 Cents* invites you to send in your wackiest ideas to a question posed, with a chance for the most creative answers to win prizes; and, in *Heart to Heart*, experienced educators share their take on a topic or know-how. This issue, Master Teacher Mdm Low Leng shares lessons learnt from her days starting out as a teacher.



L-R: Sharon Chee, Chia Mei Liang, Michelle Willman, Chua Minyi, Yong Tsuey Ling

The *In Focus* section is back with tips from fellow teachers on how to work well with the parents of our students. And as mid-year exams loom, de-stress with our *Tongue-in-Cheek* section on report card writing – with what you can and cannot say.

Enjoy!

The Contact Team

Readers' comments



I retired many years ago and upon my return as a relief teacher this January, I chanced across a back copy of *Contact*. I found the articles so interesting, inspiring and relevant that I immediately asked my principal how I could place orders for future issues. Well done, *Contact*, keep up the excellent work. It certainly made my day when my principal told me that I would get future issues free from the school. I also share *Contact* with the five brothers I live with.

Brother Dominic Chong, FSC
St Joseph's Institution Junior

Contact has improved tremendously in terms of design. I think you've outdone yourselves once again with the latest issue. The typography and infographics were splendid. I think that's what visual design should be doing, attract yet communicate in ways more efficient, or perhaps more than what words alone can.

Raynard Heah
National Junior College

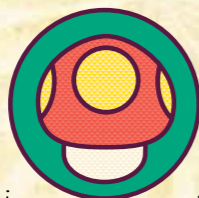
What do you think of *Contact*? Share your thoughts at contact_online@moe.edu.sg

What superpowers would you choose to help you in your work?



I wish to be like Mary Poppins. I wish I could awe my pupils with my magic simply with a snap of my fingers. My markers will fly to print the most beautiful handwriting on the whiteboard. My STELLAR worksheets will float in the classroom to rest neatly on the pupils' desks. I could conduct my lessons by singing the most melodious tune without ending up with a hoarse voice. Lastly, if I could only feed my pupils with a spoonful of sugar before each lesson such that they find my lesson so palatable.

Mrs Annabelle Yip
Teacher
Zhonghua Primary School



I would like to have shape shifter powers, with the ability to change my appearance and assume the form of other humans at will. The class can interview Einstein on Monday, interrogate Hitler on Tuesday, discuss pop art with Andy Warhol on Wednesday and study film literacy with Quentin Tarantino on Thursday before I consolidate all that they have learnt on Friday. :)

Mr Mohamed Firdaus
Teacher
Tanjong Katong Girls' School



I would choose to have telepathic powers to control my students' movements in class. I would love to have them sit and stand, speak and keep quiet, and hold a pen and write, whenever I want them to.

Miss Parvin Bibi Marican
Teacher
Macpherson Secondary School



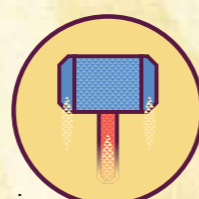
I would be Forge, [a Marvel Universe character] with an innate superhuman talent for invention! I could invent anything that helps in teaching, from a machine efficient in marking tonnes of children's work... to one that generates lesson plans and resources based on pupils' needs and profiles! And the list goes on...

Mrs Caris Seow
Subject Head (Mathematics)
CHIJ St Nicholas Girls' Primary School



I would like to be able to manipulate time: to slow it down, or bring it to a complete stop, then speed it up again. If I could slow it down, it would certainly help me finish my marking, lesson planning and strategising, or spend more time with my family and students, juggling work and life. To be able to speed time up would be hilariously useful as I could just go through tedious meetings in the blink of an eye!

Mr Harrick Tu Iskandar
Teacher
Tanglin Secondary School



I would choose teleportation! To be able to travel to work and back home at a moment's notice would be fantastic, as there would be no extra expending of energy. I could use my time efficiently and not get stuck in traffic with my laptop when I have an important event to cover!

Miss Wu Xiaohan
New Media Executive
Corporate Communications Division

NEXT...

'How would you interest students who aren't keen to learn their mother tongue language?'

Share your ideas at contact_online@moe.edu.sg
The best entry wins prizes worth up to **\$30!**
All entries should be sent by **27 May 2013**.
Please include your name, designation, school, and contact number.

Learn to ask, ask to learn

By Mdm Low Leng
Master Teacher (Mathematics)
Academy of Singapore Teachers

Dear Beginning Teacher,

I have fond memories of starting out as a teacher 26 years ago. I diligently prepared my lessons and on my first day in school, went into the class to face my students. I began writing on the chalkboard and what followed surprised me. Crushed papers thrown at the chalkboard! When I turned around, every student was 'busy' writing. My aspiration of making a difference to the lives of the students was shaken by this episode.

But all was not lost. I reflected on this incident and decided to build rapport with the students. An opportunity to do just that arose when I noticed that one of the students had a bruised arm. I asked her how she had hurt herself. She looked me in the eye and said she had been involved in a fight the day

before. Through this conversation, she warmed up to me, confiding about her dysfunctional family and her attempts to establish an identity by being part of a group in class. She had a huge influence as a leader in the classroom. I worked to build rapport with her and taught groups of students from this class after school hours. My effort resulted in the class cooperating with me for the rest of the year. I realised that students would want to learn when they feel that the teacher is genuinely interested in them.

Fast forward 10 years. I remember vividly teaching my first Normal Technical class. All the students failed the first test, with many scoring only single-digit marks! That set me reflecting on my practice – I could not use the strategies I had used with students from other streams. So I changed my pedagogical practices to engage my

N(T) class through hands-on activities and build one-on-one relationships. The time invested paid off when the students became more interested to learn.

If I had to start all over again, what would I do differently? One is to ask when in doubt. To a new teacher the school environment can be daunting as it is fast-moving and dynamic. All that's needed is to ask and there will be many who will offer their assistance and time. Secondly, we are part of a community of practice with much to share. I believe in working together as this 'abundance' mentality has brought about trust and openness amongst colleagues and for many of us, close and lasting friendships. Last, but not least, every teacher is a leader and I have learnt not to ask what the school can do for me but what I can do for the school. In all that I do, I do it to the best of my ability. This, to me, is excellence in the profession.

As I walk down memory lane, I am reminded of the teachers' Vision encapsulated in three beautiful words – Lead, Care, Inspire – which has aptly described my journey as a teacher. ✨



*To a new teacher
the school environment can be daunting
AS IT IS FAST MOVING & DYNAMIC.
All that's needed is to ask,
and there will be many who will
OFFER THEIR ASSISTANCE & TIME.*

The Teachers We Remember

A great teacher leaves a positive impact on students that lasts a lifetime. We go behind the scenes of MOE's latest recruitment and branding commercials and get the inside scoop on the teacher/student pairs.

By Lisa Twang



In 2011, the real-life story of Mrs Lyvenne Chong, a teacher who went the extra mile to help her wayward student Edwin, was aired on national television. Mrs Chong's story, selected from 400 entries sent in to www.iremembermyteacher.com, brought tears to viewers, touching the hearts of many. A second commercial, telling the story of Mrs Serene Cordeiro, was also launched the same year.

Following the success of the previous recruitment and branding campaign, MOE launched two brand-new commercials in February 2013. Directed and produced by acclaimed film director Eric Khoo, the commercials feature Mdm Ang Choon Keow and her student Valane Tnee, also a teacher; and Mr Govinda Nair Vijayakumar (Mr Kumar) and his student Glenn Lim, a motivational speaker and youth ambassador.

The 'Mdm Ang' commercial, narrated by Valane herself, shows how Mdm Ang had encouraged a shy young Valane to pursue an interest in theatre, with Valane in turn helping her own students find their passion. The 'Mr Kumar' commercial re-enacts Glenn's troubled youth, portraying moments such as when Mr Kumar counsels Glenn to take responsibility for his actions.

The new campaign tagline is 'Shaping the Nation, One Student at a Time', says Ms Gladys Chew, Assistant Director of Recruitment Marketing and Research at MOE. The tagline describes the impact teachers have in making a difference at the national level and across generations, and elevates the original campaign theme of 'Making a Difference' to an aspirational level.

MOE's recruitment and branding campaign aims to highlight the positive influence of the teaching profession and attract candidates of a desired profile to

join teaching. More importantly, it seeks to honour the role that our teachers play in nurturing students, and to enhance the prestige of the profession.

"As with all powerful advertising, the truth is the most impactful," says Ms Chew. "Teaching is about having the heart for education and helping students, and these true stories reinforce the fact that there are many teachers like Mdm Ang and Mr Kumar who are committed to teaching and inspiring students."

She was just one of many students I taught, yet after more than 10 years, she still remembers me as her mentor who nurtured her in the arts. I feel very thankful for that.
- Mdm Ang

Returning to one's roots: Mdm Ang and Valane

Mdm Ang, 59, remembers Valane as a timid student who was nonetheless enthusiastic about theatre. Her pride in her former student is evident, having seen her transform from a shy schoolgirl to a confident teacher and colleague.

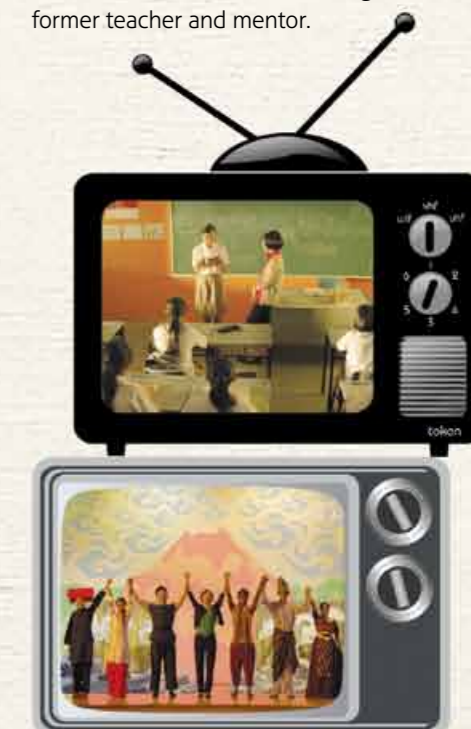
"I treat her like my daughter, often asking about her shoulder that aches frequently," says Mdm Ang, who has been teaching

for almost 37 years. "She was just one of many students I taught, yet after more than 10 years, she still remembers me as her mentor who nurtured her in the arts. I feel very thankful for that."

Valane is now the Subject Head of Literature at Clementi Town Secondary, where Mdm Ang is the Head of the Chinese Language (CL) Department. Values from Mdm Ang's CL lessons played a huge role in Valane's decision to give back to her alma mater.

"I will never forget the Chinese idiom 'yin shui si yuan' (饮水思源)," says Valane. The idiom means to always remember and appreciate where you come from.

Valane knew of the Mrs Chong commercial from 2011, and once joked with an ex-student that Mdm Ang had been her 'Mrs Chong'. Little did she expect that she would star in a commercial alongside her former teacher and mentor.



Top: This scene was shot at night. A huge portable film light, with its generator mounted on a 5-tonne truck, was used to turn night into day.

Bottom: Many of the students featured in the commercial are actual students of Valane.



A RESEARCH SURVEY showed that the 2011 campaign improved the perception and regard for the teaching profession. The 'Mrs Chong' commercial also won the Top Prize in MediaCorp's Viewers' Choice Award 2011 (Local Category) and the Best Television Campaign 2011 at the Singapore Advertising Hall of Fame Awards by the Institute of Advertising, Singapore.

Mr Kumar's calm persona and words of encouragement made a deep impression on Glenn (below, inset).

When you take an interest in students as individuals, rather than regard them as a class, somehow you connect better.
- Mr Kumar



"I was really happy that my story was selected, because people would get to hear of my amazing teacher," says Valane. Mdm Ang's efforts back in 1997 influenced Valane to major in Theatre Studies in university and return to her alma mater to set up the Drama Club.

"It's amazing to watch my students find their place on stage and shine. When they thank me, they should really thank Mdm Ang instead, because she was the one who made me the Ms Tnee that I am today."

For her fellow teachers, Mdm Ang shares: "Your students might forget your name 30 years later, but they would not forget the invaluable teachings you imparted to them 30 years earlier. The reward is priceless."

Indeed, it is the lessons that stick that made another student turn his life around.

A genuine connection: Mr Kumar and Glenn

When Glenn was a student at Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary, he would often skip school for days at a stretch. This made his teacher, Mr Kumar, concerned for him.

"[Glenn's] absenteeism was causing him to miss out on his education during graduation year," says Mr Kumar. "I got the feeling that he was running away from issues and not confronting them or taking responsibility for them, and tried to counsel him."

Glenn's rebelliousness soon led to trouble with the law and he struggled to turn his life around. During his darkest

moments, faced with the prospect of life imprisonment, Glenn remembered Mr Kumar's encouragement and unwavering belief in him.

Only a few people would cross one's mind during a crisis or 'wake-up call', recalls Glenn. Besides his father, Mr Kumar was the other. "He was a man of few words. Every piece of advice was like a precious gem, rare and profound. His transformative statement, 'Only you have the power to change your life', made a deep impression on me."

The story was filmed in reverse – you can tell its progression by the younger lead actor's hair length, as his hair was really shaved off.



A PUBLIC CALL for stories of teachers who have made a difference in their students' lives was made in January 2012. From over 300 entries submitted by members of the public, 250 are published on www.iremembermyteacher.com. These stories not only motivate teachers in service, but also serve as inspiration to aspiring teachers.



Behind the scenes

Top and middle: Director Eric Khoo on the set of MOE's Mr Kumar commercial. The production team closed off Circular Road in Boat Quay to film certain segments.

Bottom: The Mdm Ang commercial was filmed at Clementi Town Secondary, Clementi Primary and a holding school site.

At age 60, and still teaching English Language after 34 years, Mr Kumar continues to help students realise their potential.

"When dealing with problematic students, I don't get ruffled easily, and that helps in getting them to drop their defences. Instead of being judgmental and humiliating them, I get them to offer me solutions to the problem at hand. When you take an interest in them as individuals, rather than regard them as a class, somehow you connect better."

"The personal touch helps very much in getting a student to believe in himself or herself," says Mr Kumar. "Assurances that they can make it in a certain area, and walking them through the process of getting there, can work wonders."

Teachers' responses to the campaign

While both commercials are new, feedback on them has been encouraging. Teachers in service have praised them for being inspiring and dramatic, with a strong message of a teacher's influence and an apt tagline.

"I like Mdm Ang's video as it tells a story of a teacher inspiring her student to realise her passion and dreams – something any teacher can identify with," says Mr Jacob Tan, a teacher at Commonwealth Secondary. "I, too, am looking forward to such moments in the future as I continue to invest in the lives of the students under my charge now."

Ms Dixie Tan, who teaches at Kheng Cheng School, also finds the videos uplifting: "Like Valane in Mdm Ang's story, I was influenced by my teacher, and hence became one. The videos allow us to recall the teachers that really impacted our lives and to appreciate their efforts in shaping us to be who we are now."

Mr Kuang Kim Chun, a teacher at Catholic Junior College, feels the videos are moving, but may set an unrealistic expectation on teachers and those interested in joining the profession. "I personally feel up to the task of reaching out to my students beyond just academic results, but there is a realistic boundary between being professional and overly emotional or engaged at a personal level," he says.

Recognising that the videos may place lofty expectations on beginning teachers, Ms Chew says: "Some young teachers may worry that they are expected to be like Mrs Chong, Mdm Ang and Mr Kumar after graduating from NIE. However, beginning teachers should note that they may not be able to provide similar guidance immediately, and seek advice from experienced colleagues in such instances."

After all, making a difference isn't accomplished in a day, but built over a lifetime of dedication and care. ✨

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Log on to www.iremembermyteacher.com to submit your personal account of a teacher who made a difference. Your story could just be selected for the next MOE commercial!

Bravo!

MOE has received several accolades for its recruitment and branding efforts:

Winner of 'Best Recruitment Strategies' in HRM Awards 2013, and Finalist for 'Best Leadership Development'.

Awarded 'Choice Employer' for three consecutive years in the Public Sector category of Singapore's 100 Leading Graduate Employer Awards, from 2010-2012.

MOE was also a Finalist in HRM Awards 2011 for categories 'Best Employer Branding' and 'Innovation in Recruitment'.

Starting things new at HQ

Ever wondered how a new subject or a new programme came about? We hear from two principals who had the chance to build education programmes from the ground up at HQ. By Siti Maziah Masramli

LEARNING AT ALL LEVELS

**MR JEFFREY LOW, Principal
Bedok View Secondary School**
Curriculum Planning and Development
Division (CPDD)

Not many can say they had a hand in creating a brand-new subject, but Mr Jeffrey Low can.

As part of the 2006 A Level curriculum review, the new Knowledge and Inquiry (KI) subject was developed by MOE to help students examine knowledge through critical thinking and pick up good argumentation and communication skills.

"KI is a unique subject," says Mr Low. "We wanted our bright A Level students to not just consume knowledge, but critically analyse knowledge and be able to communicate this analysis convincingly."

Mr Low led a team of five with diverse backgrounds: a historian, a geographer, a physics graduate and two English graduates. None had any experience in designing a new subject, so they read voraciously and consulted specialists from Cambridge International Examinations as well as experts on subjects like philosophy and communication studies.

With input from the various experts, Mr Low's team had to work out how KI would be relevant to students and the curriculum, especially as the subject deals with abstract ideas – the difference between science and the arts, for example – rather than specific content.

The team found a "critical friend" in their Assistant Director, who kept the focus on how KI would fit into the curriculum framework, and ensured that the required resources were available. The team also worked closely with the teachers who would teach KI, many of whom were concerned about the preparation and competencies required.

Before his posting in 2000, Mr Low had taught A Level General Paper and Literature. Joining the CPDD English Unit before moving to the Process Skills Unit as a Senior Specialist, he reviewed the English Language (EL), Literature and General Paper syllabuses, developed assessment modes and pedagogical approaches, and conducted workshops.

Students' learning is our core business. Whatever we do in MOE, we must always keep our focus on this.

Mr Low also contributed to teaching and learning approaches for the primary and secondary school levels. Despite not having taught at the primary level, he had to conduct EL workshops for experienced primary school teachers.

"I learnt to step out of my comfort zone," says Mr Low. "But all these teachers were really kind and made the experience pleasant and enriching."

As a principal, his first-hand experience at HQ and as a Specialist track officer means he can better manage his teachers' career tracks and link teachers with the relevant MOE HQ officers for further career advice. And when he implements policies, programmes, or curriculum changes in school, he knows just how they impact the development of students as individuals.

"Students' learning is our core business. Whatever we do in MOE, we must always keep our focus on this."



TO THE FUTURESCHOOL AND BEYOND

**MRS TAN CHEN KEE, Principal
Crescent Girls' School**
Educational Technology Division (ETD)

As an Assistant Director in ETD, Mrs Tan Chen Kee was involved in the FutureSchools@Singapore initiative, which harnesses info-communications technology (ICT) for teaching and learning.

Mrs Tan worked with the FutureSchools to design the innovative curriculum and pedagogies supporting ICT-use in the classroom. Her team visited schools to understand teachers' concerns, conducted workshops and provided useful literature for teachers.

Mrs Tan's nine years of teaching helped her be a more discerning HQ officer. With

In the process, Mrs Tan worked with other HQ divisions, corporations, and organisations like the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore. Coordinating communication across these different stakeholders was key to ensuring that resources were used well.

Says Mrs Tan: "It was refreshing to see the bigger picture perspectives, the considerations put in when crafting policies and programmes... and the potential impact of what we do at HQ on the schools."

To stay current with tech innovations, the team had regular show-and-tell sessions: each member brought a new technology or application for the team to discuss how it could be useful to a teacher in school.

"Once, somebody talked about a certain application in which you could share updates on your life in 140 characters, which eventually turned out to be Twitter," recalls Mrs Tan, who was at ETD from 2007 to 2008. "It was good to know that at HQ we wanted to stay in touch and be relevant to the schools."

the schools' perspective – understanding how the school calendar is like, the psyche and mindsets of teachers – she was better equipped to design programmes that did not overload the schools.

As the FutureSchools also worked with other ETD officers on technological issues, Mrs Tan's team streamlined communication processes such that the schools received holistic support, rather than from separate parts of the division.

During her HQ attachment, Mrs Tan facilitated programmes at Crescent Girls' School (CGS), and became familiar with the FutureSchool initiatives underway there. So, when she joined CGS as a principal in 2011, she could quickly drive the school's endeavours in educational technology and beyond: CGS now plays a leading role in ICT-use for transforming teaching and learning in the 21st century. ♦

It was good to know that at HQ we wanted to stay in touch and be relevant to the schools.

Refreshed Kindergarten Curriculum

The refreshed **Kindergarten Curriculum Framework (KCF)** guides pre-school educators to design a curriculum suitable for the development of 4 - 6 year-old children. Parents and primary school teachers can also get a clearer idea of what children should know by the end of Kindergarten 2.

A smooth transition from K2 to P1

The newly-defined learning goals in the refreshed KCF reflect widely-held expectations about what children should know and be able to do at the end of Kindergarten 2 (K2) to adjust smoothly to Primary 1 (P1).

- Some children will exceed the expectations at the end of K2.
- Children who need more time for their development will continue to receive support in primary schools.

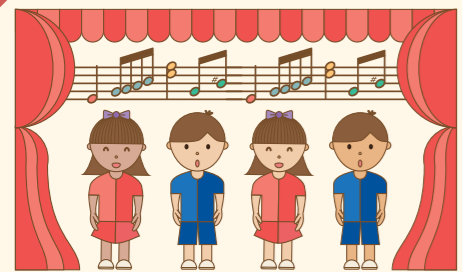
The KCF guides pre-school educators to review and plan their curriculum to meet children's interests, needs and abilities.

For primary schools, the KCF serves as a point of reference to plan the P1 curriculum and lessons so that every child is an engaged learner.

WHAT'S NEW?

1. The refreshed KCF now establishes learning goals across six Learning Areas.

AESTHETICS & CREATIVE EXPRESSION



- Enjoy art and music and movement activities
- Express ideas and feelings through art and music and movement
- Create art and music and movement using experimentation and imagination
- Share ideas and feelings about art and music and movement

DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD



- Show an interest in the world they live in
- Find out why things happen and how things work through simple investigations
- Develop a positive attitude towards the world around them

LANGUAGE & LITERACY



- Listen for information and enjoyment
- Speak to convey meaning and communicate with others
- Read with understanding and for enjoyment
- Use drawing, mark making, symbols and writing with invented and conventional spelling to communicate ideas and information

2. Continuing the emphasis on children's holistic development, the refreshed KCF elaborates on key teaching and learning principles to ensure that each child has a strong foundation by learning:

- Through integrated experiences
- With support from teachers
- Through purposeful play and quality interactions

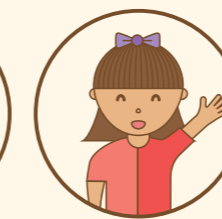


3. Each learning goal is translated into sets of knowledge, skills and dispositions, with examples of observable behaviours that teachers could use to plan learning activities.

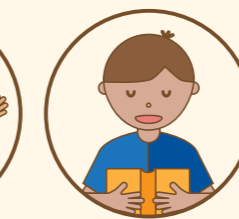
EXAMPLES OF OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS



Look at teachers/peers when speaking with them



Offer help to people in need



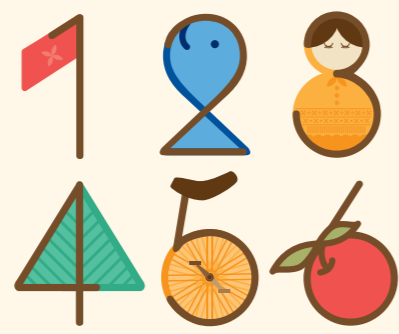
Show interest in books

MOTOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



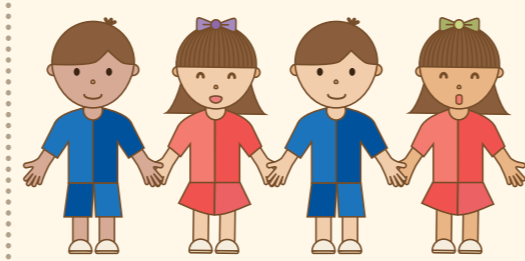
- Enjoy through participation in a variety of physical activities
- Demonstrate control, coordination and balance in gross motor tasks
- Demonstrate control and coordination in fine motor tasks
- Develop healthy habits and safety awareness at home, in school and at public places

NUMERACY



- Recognise and use simple relationships and patterns
- Use numbers in daily experiences
- Recognise and use basic shapes and simple spatial concepts in daily experiences

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



- Develop an awareness of personal identity
- Manage their own emotions and behaviours
- Show respect for diversity
- Communicate, interact and build relationships with others
- Take responsibility for their actions

WHAT CAN P1 TEACHERS DO?

- Read the refreshed KCF at www.moe.gov.sg/education/preschool
- Review your Scheme of Work alongside the KCF and check that lessons are pitched at an appropriate level.
- Adopt approaches used by pre-school centres (outlined in the KCF) in the early part of P1 to help pupils adjust to the primary school system.

HOW TO HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE KCF

Parents might:

- See the learning goals as a checklist to complete by K2, otherwise their child might fail in P1.
- Be anxious if their child is unable to fulfil all of the learning goals.

Assure parents that:

- For children unable to complete all the learning goals by the end of K2, primary schools have sufficient support programmes to bring them to the required level.
- The learning goals will not be used to sort the P1 cohort into High Ability, Middle Ability, or Low Ability groups.

Refer parents to the KCF Parents' Guide at parents-in-education.moe.gov.sg so that they understand the learning experiences teachers can plan for children to achieve the learning goals.



How to work with parents

Parents are key partners in a child's education but how do you work with them to ensure that everyone is on the same team? Here are tips on getting the best out of your students' parents and how to avoid pitfalls along the way.

By He Yining

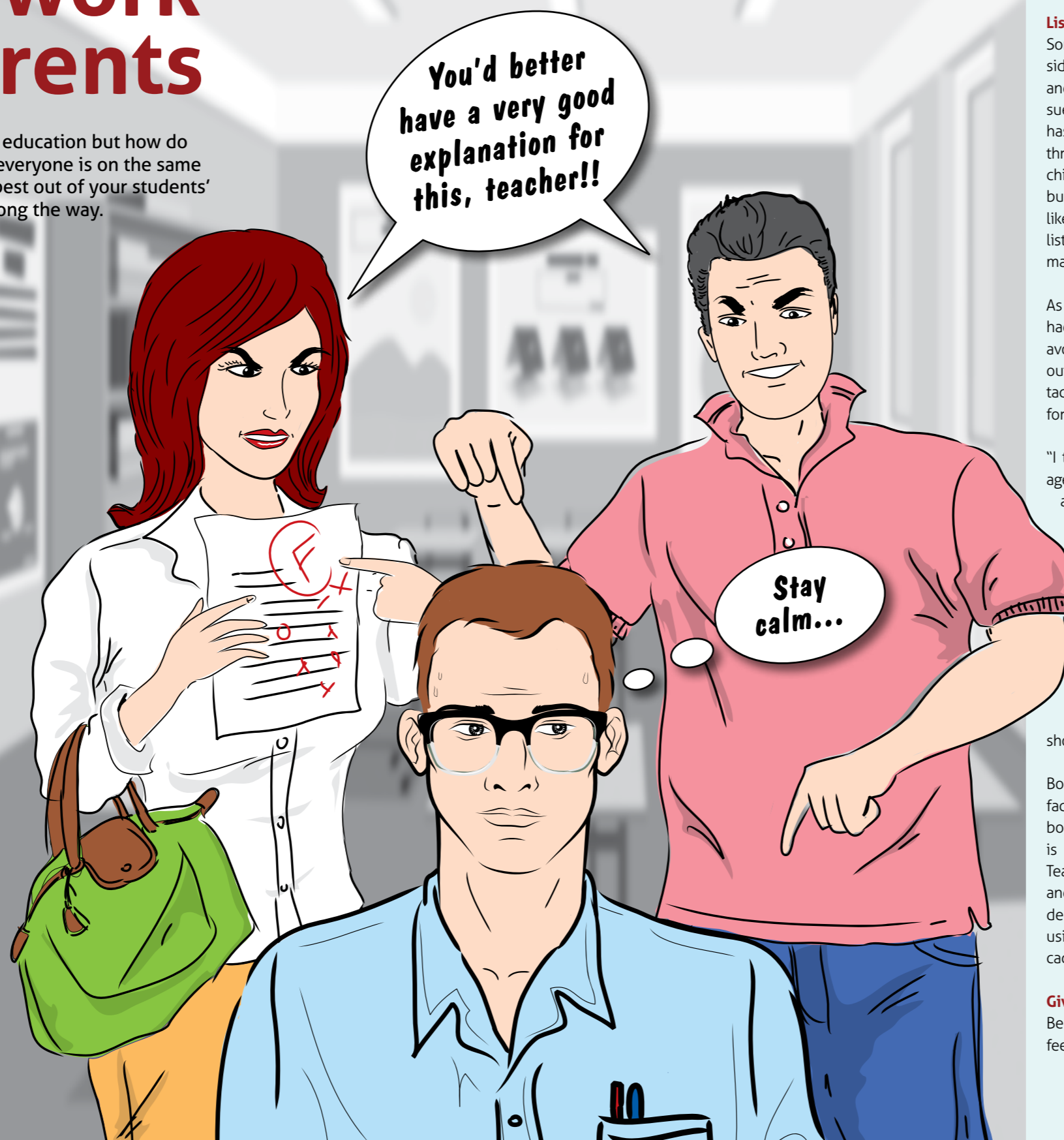
Reach out to parents early

Take the initiative to reach out to parents in the first few weeks of their child's schooling. Establishing familiarity with parents helps defuse difficult situations and increases the parents' trust in you.

It is important to set expectations early, says Mdm Lalita Devi Singh, English Level Head at Montfort Junior School. Use this opportunity to find out from parents if their children have any special needs or behaviour traits.

Forming a relationship with parents early in the year will help when problems arise. Parents tend to bypass teachers and instead report problems to the school principal or MOE, even on petty issues such as students squabbling or spotting minor injuries, shares Mdm Lalita. The issue will eventually be directed back to the teacher-in-charge, so the problem takes more time to be resolved. Reaching out to parents early to build trust and rapport will mitigate such inefficiency.

Mrs Susila Neelakandan, a Senior Teacher at Tampines Primary School, adds: "Building up trust, building a bond and nurturing the teacher-parent relationship would make it easier for the parent to be receptive to less positive feedback later about their children, if any."



Listen and respond calmly

Some parents only listen to their child's side of the story, insist the child is right, and "create a big fuss, threatening to sue the school", says Mdm Lalita. She has encountered a set of parents who threatened to call the police after their child, a Primary 3 student, said that school bullies had broken his spectacles. In cases like this, Mdm Lalita advises teachers to listen to parents' concerns and investigate matters objectively.

As it turned out, the Primary 3 student had lied about breaking his spectacles to avoid punishment. When the truth came out, Mdm Lalita was professional and tactful to avoid embarrassing the parents for their initial outburst.

"I told [the parents] that children at that age tend to fabricate stories when they are afraid. I advised them not to punish their child further but to counsel him patiently on the need to be truthful," she says.

In an example shared by Mrs Neelakandan, when faced with a particularly aggressive and verbally abusive mother, it was important to speak "calmly and in measured tones, taking care not to show emotions".

Body language also matters. "In face-to-face meetings, we must be aware of our body language as 50% of communication is non-verbal," says Mrs Neelakandan. Teachers can convey a positive attitude and willingness to listen through a calm demeanour, frequent eye contact, and using an appropriate tone, volume and cadence when speaking.

Give constructive feedback

Be careful how you communicate feedback. Mrs Neelakandan suggests that

instead of saying 'Tom is doing badly in spelling', you could say 'We need to help Tom in spelling'. This, along with sharing strategies, lets the parents know that you are a partner in helping their child.

"When communicating with parents on the phone, our phrasing, pace, tone and even pitch are important in getting the correct message across," adds Mrs Neelakandan.

Keep parents informed of students' good behaviour and positive accomplishments, so that your interaction with them is not limited to a string of bad news. "Parents are always afraid of phone calls from teachers, so give compliments generously," says Mdm Lalita.

"Show parents that you genuinely care for their child so that they cooperate rather than think you are just picking on their child," adds Mdm Lalita.

Assure parents their child is your priority

Many parents insist on extra lessons or homework despite the workload being sufficient for students. You have to demonstrate to parents that you too wish to help the child succeed.

As Mdm Muneira Daud, Head of English Department at Ngee Ann Secondary School, notes: "Teachers must show parents that we know and value their children as individuals, and that we are aware of their strengths and weaknesses."

"The most important thing is to establish that parents and teachers have a common goal – what is best for the students. Once this is clear, it is usually easier to work towards a common understanding or solution."

LEARNING LANGUAGES

with iMTL

The iMTL portal merges Mother Tongue (MT) with Information Technology (IT) to make learning come alive for IT-savvy students. Get tips from iMTL pilot school teachers on how to get started with the portal for different learning levels.

By Siti Maziah Masramli

Record show-and-tell acts, learn through videos, role-play as newscasters, or imagine themselves as directors to write the ending for videos. Mother Tongue (MT) learners can do all that and more with the iMTL portal. The web-based interactive portal has rich multimedia resources for students to practise their language skills authentically. And with iMTL tools such as students' e-portfolios, teachers can assess the four language areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Going digital together

At Zhonghua Primary School, Malay language (ML) students get 'digital homework': at home, they film a conversation with a family member. The students upload their video clips onto the iMTL portal, and as a class, discuss online how to avoid making the common speech mistakes recorded in the conversations.

Mr Mohamed Saddiq
Zhonghua Primary School

The iMTL portal is a safe environment for students to upload their videos and get constructive feedback from their peers and teachers, says Mr Mohamed Saddiq, an ML teacher. He prompts his students to pinpoint what their peers have done well and give specific suggestions on how to improve further. Through iMTL lessons, teachers can impart cyber wellness values such as respecting others when giving critique.

To avoid increasing the workloads of both teachers and students, Mr Saddiq advises that iMTL lessons should be streamlined with the scheme of work and syllabus. It is also useful to understand the strengths and objectives of using the iMTL portal and find time to learn from the different MT departments.

"Perhaps the Chinese Language (CL) department has interesting ideas that the ML or Tamil Language (TL) departments can adopt, and vice versa," says Mr Saddiq, also a Subject Head of Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

In the future, Mr Saddiq hopes schools can share student-created content. He and his teacher friends from other schools are exploring the idea of having students create short videos on what their school life is like.

"Resources closely related to textbook topics can later be shared at national level, which would be fun! I would love to see how pupils from another school present."

Expressing opinions, sharing experiences

Over at Christ Church Secondary, before attending their first iMTL lesson, students learn in lecture-style lessons how to use a three-step approach to express opinions – state a stand, elaborate with reasons, and give examples.

The students then practise what they have learnt by writing in the iMTL portal how they feel about having such lecture lessons. Since the lectures are a shared experience, students can better assess whether their peers have expressed their opinions adequately using the three-step approach. As opinions posted can be seen immediately by the class or cohort, more views can be discussed per lesson, unlike group work done using pen and paper.

The teachers took measured steps to get familiar with the portal. When the iMTL pilot began last July, the MT department first executed a Lesson Study project: One group of teachers observed while a pilot class teacher conducted an iMTL lesson.

"After the Lesson Study, the teachers had a reflection session to assess what happened in the classroom – what went well and what could have been done better. Teachers gained their teaching experiences from one another's lessons,"

explains Mdm Mandy Choo, an IT Champion in the CL department.

Besides sharing tips to start small and take note of the IT support needed beforehand, Mdm Choo recommends installing a software programme to lock students' screens during iMTL lessons so that students stay focussed.

"We are teaching native users of IT – they tend to learn faster and are already interested (in IT). So, you have won half the battle and will get better results."

Interaction gets interest

Using IT to get students involved is especially useful for students who are already less motivated to learn MT.

"For CL 'B' syllabus students, even an interesting PowerPoint cannot hold their attention for very long," says Ms Hoe Mei Hwee, a CL teacher at Anglo-Chinese Junior College (ACJC). So, lessons are made "fun and cool" with group activities such as song performances or poster designing. Students upload photos of their work onto the iMTL portal and comment to evaluate their friends' works. The students enjoy using the portal as they can express themselves by clicking on 'Like', just as on Facebook.

ACJC's TL teachers also engage TL 'B' syllabus students through lively music. Teachers upload song lyrics and sing for the students, before the latter record their own performances. In the process, students get to practise their reading and pronunciation skills.

"They can see their masterpieces and their friends' works, so they become more interested," says Ms Hoe. These self-directed

We are teaching native users of IT – they tend to learn faster and are already interested (in IT). So, you have won half the battle and will get better results.

tasks and peer-evaluation motivates students to pay more attention and do better to give their friends a good impression.

It is not all fun and games. To prepare for the A Level oral exam, the students can video-record their oral presentations to review their pronunciation, eye contact and body language, and get feedback on how to boost their confidence.

Currently, iMTL media resources are mostly designed for secondary schools, so ACJC designs their own content for the JC level. "But it's good to see how teachers design for other students and the objectives they want to achieve, and learn from that as well," says an upbeat Ms Hoe. "It's important to have a positive attitude towards any new portal."

Ms Hoe Mei Hwee
Anglo-Chinese
Junior College

Mdm Mandy Choo
Christ Church Secondary School

Apps that zap away the zzz

Unless you're an apps junkie, there's bound to be bytes to spare on either your smartphone or tablet. And what better way to use the excess than with creative apps that educate and entertain both in and out of the classroom. Now that's an app that's got real bang! By Tay Qiao Wei



Skitch

Free from both iTunes and Google Play

Skitch is a visual communication tool that allows you to add text or shapes such as arrows to photos, web pages, and maps. To cover class material, for example, teachers can show students how to annotate English comprehension passages step by step, and then share the file with them via email or a public link. Outside the classroom, use Skitch to record memories anywhere: doodle or write notes on photos, sketch out directions on a map, or even create memes on-the-go.



Soundrop

Free from iTunes

Think geometry and music are incompatible? Soundrop will prove you wrong. In this app, players draw lines on the screen any way they like. Then, balls are dropped from a point, creating different sounds depending on the speed and angle at which the balls hit the line. It's a stimulating way to get students in tune with math concepts. What's more, Soundrop lets you create interesting melodies with just your phone, even if you cannot play any musical instrument.



Fragger

\$1.28 from iTunes, Free from Google Play

Teach about projectile motion with Fragger, a physics-based game where players launch grenades at enemy targets. Taking down all the enemies successfully requires not just luck but also physics and maths skills, so students can learn while having fun. Fragger could also inspire creative and engaging problem sums and in-class scenarios. Blowing up the enemies and exercising your reflexes to conquer the addictive levels is a fun way to pass time or take your mind off things.



Plague Inc

\$1.28 from iTunes, Free from Google Play

In this pathogen strategy game, players genetically engineer a plague and attempt to infect the world's seven billion people before a cure is developed. Plague can be injected into biology classes for students to learn about genes and infectious diseases. The gameplay includes news headlines and a world map with data of the different countries, useful for sparking students' interest in geography and general knowledge. With well-crafted graphics and suitably spooky music, this game lets you take your stress out on the human race without any repercussions!



Space Leap

Free from iTunes

Take math and physics lessons out of this world with this slick space puzzle game that covers topics like astronomy and force. The aim of the game is to get your planet, originally in the orbit of one star, to revolve around another target, the Sun. Players must consider the effects of realistic external forces (such as the gravity of surrounding stars) and plan carefully to avoid obstacles such as asteroid belts and enemy planets. After lessons, space out with a well-deserved break with Space Leap's well-designed graphics, soothing ambient music, and challenging levels.



Learn Chinese with Penyo Pal Food Frenzy

Free from both iTunes and Google Play

Make language-learning fun for lower primary students as they follow the adventures of a helpful fox called Penyo Pal. Bite-sized activities are integrated into an interesting storyline narrated in Mandarin. Set in a restaurant, these activities let your students expand their vocabulary as they match the names of food items (presented in 'hanyu pinyin' and Chinese characters) to the correct pictures. The exercises are customised to the player's performance to keep motivation high.

New twists to getting fit

If your workout routine is stale as week-old bread, it's time to consider giving it a shake-up. If it's time to get your bod into shape, out there is a whole lot of interesting options. By Tay Qiao Wei

Move swiftly and efficiently from one point to another across any terrain with parkour, also known as the art of displacement. This is achieved by adapting your movements to overcome walls, railings, or any other obstacles in your way. The key is to combine individual actions, such as running, jumping, climbing and rolling, into one fluid motion.

Good for: Those who would like to be more agile, flexible and coordinated.

Where to try: Parkour Classes at A2 Movements

Where: *Scape Level 4 Hubquarters (venues vary with day of class)

Price: \$25 for a teaser workshop, \$200 for 10 Introductory Sessions (1.5 hours per session)

More information: www.a2movements.com

PARKOUR



Ever wondered how to fend off a knife attack or escape from a chokehold? Krav Maga ('contact combat' in Hebrew) will prepare you for just about anything that life throws your way. Just like there are no rules on the street, anything goes in this Israeli self-defence and combat system developed for real-life scenarios. Feel the adrenaline rush as you learn to take down your 'assailants' with head strikes and groin kicks, all in a safe environment.

Good for: Any one who wants to learn practical self-defence techniques.

Where to try: Beginner Krav Maga classes at Krav Maga Singapore

Where: 39D North Canal Road, #05-00

Price: 10 one-hour sessions per month for \$250, Trial class for \$25

More information: www.kravmaga.com.sg

KRAV MAGA



At first glance, a Bokwa group fitness class might seem designed for the highly coordinated, with participants moving in synchrony to different music. However, look closely and you might spot their secret: The participants are actually drawing alphabets and numbers with their feet in a series of structured steps. Even if you have two left feet, you can do Bokwa as long as you can move, spell and count.

Good for: Those who enjoy grooving to popular music but dislike counting beats or constantly learning new choreography.

Where to try: Bokwa Fitness at Flyte Studio

Where: 69 Tanjong Rhu Road

Price: \$125 for 10 one-hour sessions (\$15 for single drop-in session)

More information: www.flytestudio.com

BOKWA



Work out and party at the same time with Zumba, a Latin-inspired dance fitness programme. The easy-to-follow aerobic and dance moves, set to catchy and rhythmic Latin beats, will get your heart pumping before you even realise it.

Good for: Those who would like to learn some sizzling dance moves, or anyone who enjoys dancing and making friends while doing so.

Where to try: Zumba® Fitness Courses by the People's Association

Where: At Community Clubs (CCs) island wide

Price: \$90/\$100 (PA Members/Non-members) for eight one-hour sessions (prices may vary with location)

More information: Check with your nearest CC for class schedules and prices. Sign up at one.pa.gov.sg

ZUMBA



ZORBING



Rolling downhill in a giant, inflatable plastic ball might be just the activity for thrill seekers. There are two options for the tumble: Harness zorbing, in which you are strapped inside the sphere, or Hydro zorbing, in which water is added into the sphere. Other than letting you experience the life of a hamster, the walk back uphill in the orb also allows you to work on balance and coordination.

Good for: Adrenaline junkies, adventure lovers, or anyone up for some fun.

Where to try: Land Zorbing with ZOVB Singapore

Where: Field along Old Holland Road, at the junction of Brizay Park

Price: \$50 for 2 roll-downs (additional \$3 for hydro zorbing)

More information: www.zovbsg.com/ZOVBlad/index.htm or email zorb@zovbsg.com to book. At least 10 participants are required for every session.



UNDERWATER HOCKEY



Break through the opposing team's defences and score a goal. Sounds straightforward? Imagine doing all that while holding your breath to manoeuvre the puck across the bottom of a pool. Teamwork is essential since each player can only stay under for a limited amount of time. Underwater hockey is a challenging workout.

Good for: Water sports enthusiasts, folks who like to swim, or swimmers who want a full-body workout.

Where to try: Stirling Underwater Hockey Club

Where: Queenstown Swimming Complex, 473 Stirling Road

When: Tuesdays & Fridays, 7-9pm

Price: Free for first timers, \$6/7 (members/non-members) from second session onwards. Additional pool entrance fee of \$1.

More information: bit.ly/stirlingunderwaterhockeyclub or email suhc.enquiry@gmail.com



Name :
Class Teacher :

Class :
Serial No. :

Reading between the lines

We know that when it comes to writing comments in a student’s end-of-year report card, you may have toyed with being creative with the truth. Here’s what might have gone through your mind.

What was written

Sufen is a creative individual who enjoys expressing her ideas on paper.

Muthu works hard to improve in his weak areas and always seeks to do better.

Candy participates actively in class and interacts well with her peers.

Sing Yee shows interest in learning but could take more ownership in charting her progress.

John shows a positive interest in school, but could work on getting to school on time.

Yong Xiang is very receptive towards feedback.

Ahmad goes out of his way to help his peers and is well liked by his classmates.

Elena’s gentle spirit and disposition is admirable. She is a joy to have in class!

Divya’s dedication towards academic and all-round excellence is admired by her peers.

What you were really thinking

Sufen’s Mathematics worksheets are always full of doodles in the working column! If only she were in my Art class instead...

Muthu corrects the mistake I circled in his sentence and then he makes an error elsewhere in the same sentence. How many times must I make him do re-corrections?

Candy is very talkative and must be told to pay attention instead of gushing about One Direction at any opportunity!

Sing Yee does not hand in her homework and only starts digging for it in her bag when prompted.

So the bus broke down today again? What other excuse will John give next for always being late for school?

Yong Xiang always looks contrite and promises not to misbehave again but he somehow cannot stay out of trouble...

If Ahmad gave half the attention he gives his female classmates to his schoolwork, he would get much better grades.

Elena? Hmm, she sits on the left... she’s rather quiet, but is one less troublemaker in this boisterous class. Phew!

Divya is WAY too competitive, but proves it is possible to get full marks in exam sections that her classmates complain are too difficult to pass.



Teacher’s Signature

Principal’s Signature

Parent’s Signature

CAPTURE moments WITH CONTACT



WINNING ENTRIES FOR JANUARY

Thank you for sharing photos of how you get inspired. Winners get shopping vouchers worth \$30.



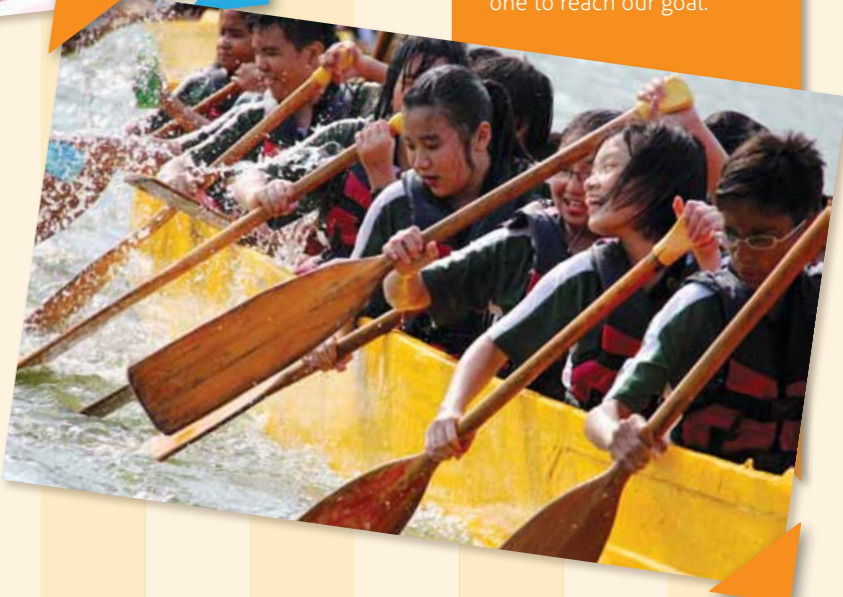
CONTRIBUTOR:
Mr Lim Kok Swee
Subject Head (ICT), Chongfu School

By going higher and looking further and wider (on a hot air balloon).



CONTRIBUTOR:
Mr Sui Siang Wey
Teacher, Gan Eng Seng School

Mr R. C. Scharenguivel sharing the challenges he faced composing our school song 48 years ago became our inspiration.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Mr Ong Yung En, Benjamin
Teacher
Pasir Ris Secondary School

Inspired by victory, we strive and paddle hard as one to reach our goal.



"HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR HOLIDAYS?"

Share your happy moments with us! Snap a picture, send it to us and stand to win vouchers worth \$30 each!



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. All winners will be notified by email. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
11. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 27 May 2013.