

Outdoor Learning

CHEMISTRY



Ice-Cream making

Molecular Gastronomy

Adventures INVENTIVE

Teamwork

X + Y = Z

Story telling

Story telling



contact

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 14 • APRIL 2014

Building a forgiving classroom

Expect missteps and learn from them

Character assessment made easier

Tracking the good in students can be simpler

Getaways off the beaten track

Have a break at these lesser-known places

Whipping up different flavours of teaching

Teachers find new ways to whet students' appetite for learning.



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Ms Tan Wen Yi
Clementi Town
Secondary

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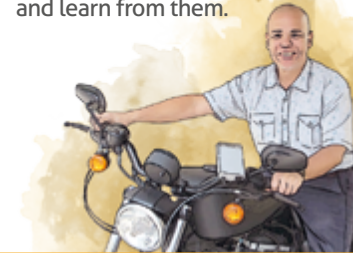
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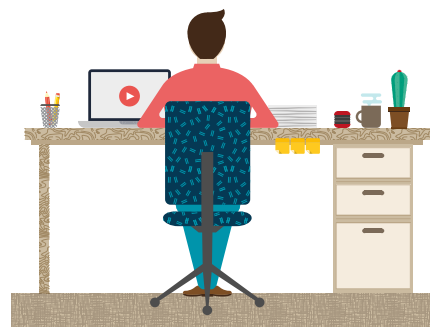
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Wacky memories with students

This issue...

We may think that innovations only come about from clever ideas devised by brilliant minds. While that may be true, we don't look to why people thought of them in the first place. Many inventions came about because individuals saw a need, and then went on to address it. They sought solutions, spent hours to devise a plan, and worked tirelessly to execute it, even in the face of challenges.

The teachers in our cover story are such individuals. Their inventive teaching approaches inspired the students and delivered results to boot. Their smart solutions and spirit of innovation are driven by their dedication to their charges.

In this issue, we also share how teachers have designed new software to help their colleagues better track the character development of their students. Readers may also be glad to learn about the revisions made to the Enhanced Performance Management System, or EPMS, that promises to improve the appraisal experience and career development of teachers – our infographic feature provides a quick overview of the changes.

Education systems around the world are seeing changes, while new ways of teaching using social media tools are gaining momentum. Read about these exciting developments and more in FYI: The makeover edition.



From left: Sharon, Zi Rui, Paul, Tsuey Ling & Pamela

To make learning a holistic experience, students need to understand the value of forgiveness, says Mr William Grosse, Master Teacher (English Language). In Heart to Heart, he shares why and how.

Finally, have a peaceful break with help from our Lifestyle section on less common getaways. You deserve it.

Happy reading!

The Contact Team

Readers' comments



Contact has many a times provided an enriching read after a long day of teaching. The stories shared by fellow educators make me feel less alone in striving for excellence. I have also often used the refreshing design of the magazine as a reference for the school's publications due to its consistent art direction and neat layout.

Mr Tay Li Cheng
First Toa Payoh Secondary School

I read the January 2014 issue of *Contact* and noticed your new FYI section. I quite enjoyed your little 'Fact or Fiction' corner in the centrespread. The fourth item in particular sparked off an interesting discussion between my colleague and I. We debated at length on whether students will be more motivated to learn if rewarded (with candy and stationery, for example).

Ms Lim Ai Phing
River Valley High

What do you think of *Contact*? Share your thoughts at contact_online@moe.edu.sg
Get the soft copy of the magazine at bit.ly/contactmoe

Whipping up DIFFERENT flavours of

TEACHING

Teachers find new ways to whet students' appetite for learning.

By Kate Lilienthal

Making ice cream. Telling the story of a Japanese cartoon character. Tackling an outdoor obstacle course. They don't seem to have anything in common, but they most certainly do.

They are innovative strategies adopted by teachers to motivate students to love learning more.

At Jurong Secondary, a multidisciplinary programme offers a hands-on, authentic learning experience for Normal (Technical) [N(T)] Stream students. That experience involves making something that almost every child enjoys – ice cream.

Nearby, Peicai Secondary School developed an initiative called the 4+1 Hands-On Elective Modules (HOME), where students spend four days a week in conventional curriculum classes and one day in enrichment learning a new skill like designing cars, sport or activity such as outdoor obstacle courses, hairdressing, sailing, or cooking.

Over at Clementi Town Secondary, Express Stream students are learning Chemistry through the unfolding story of a cheeky Japanese cartoon character named Mao.

The three programmes are new, introduced over the last five years, and each was kickstarted when teachers saw a need to engage students in different, more novel ways of learning. All three schools have won Innergy Awards for their innovative programmes – Jurong Secondary in 2009, Clementi Town Secondary in 2011 and Peicai Secondary in 2013.

Different flavours, flying colours

Not only are these strategies innovative, they work.

Mrs Juliana Ng from Jurong Secondary, the Head of Department for the N(T) curriculum, says that the number of latecomers and rate of absenteeism have decreased and N(T) students express a greater affinity for the school, since the multidisciplinary programme began.

Meanwhile, Peicai Secondary has seen improvements in the results of students. In 2007, before 4+1 HOME began, only 11.1 per cent of the N(T) students passed both English and Maths at the GCE 'N(T)' Level Examinations. By 2011, the passing rate had increased to 30 per cent. Also, student response to the Quality Student Experience (QSE) survey has shown improved feelings of association with the school.

Students at Clementi Town Secondary are also showing greater interest in Chemistry. They are always asking their teachers about upcoming lessons, says Ms Tan Wen Yi, a Senior Teacher for Chemistry. To her, this is a clear sign that the curriculum is effective in motivating students to learn the subject.

Ms Tan attributes the success of the curriculum to teamwork. "As long as teachers have a shared vision, innovation will fall into place nicely. It's difficult to innovate alone."

Ingredients for success

To craft successful curricula, teachers first had to understand the learning needs and styles of their students.

At Jurong Secondary, the effort to create a different teaching approach began in 2008 when a team of teachers sought to get Secondary 1 and 2 N(T) students excited about coming to school to learn.

The teachers started with what they knew about these particular learners. First, the students needed their learning to be relevant to their own lives; they also responded better to lessons that were active and interactive, and most of all, the students needed to see, and experience, immediate benefits.

With these guiding principles in mind, the teachers met once a week during Professional Development time to discuss and collaborate on a plan – a multidisciplinary programme that would help students learn and apply concepts



Ms Tan Wen Yi from Clementi Town Secondary sees the spike in students' interest in Chemistry as a sign that the creative curriculum is working.

"As long as teachers have a shared vision, innovation will fall into place nicely. It's difficult to innovate alone."

from different subjects in a meaningful and fun way.

How it works: Over the course of one semester, students study the chemistry of making ice cream (Science), use fractions to decode the recipe and calculate the costs of ingredients (Mathematics), and develop a written plan for production (English). They design a logo for their own brand (Computer Programme Application), present the process in a storyboard (Art), and then make and evaluate their product (Food and Consumer Education). Students will apply these concepts they learnt in making an end product – ice cream.

"[The programme] leverages the strength of this group of learners — they tend to be good with their hands," says Mrs Ng, alluding to the students' ability to learn more effectively through hands-on activities.

The students made bubble tea when the programme first started, and then smoothies, and for the last two years, ice cream. "It's important to have the students create products that are trendy.

They respond to what's popular... We'll evolve our products to keep the students interested," adds Mrs Ng with a smile, "but I think ice cream will stay a while."

Cooking up a story

Sometimes, teachers need to use unconventional methods to explain course material.

At Clementi Town Secondary, teachers attempt to interest students in Chemistry by weaving the course content into the adventures of apprentice chef Mao, the Japanese cartoon character they created.

In 2010, Ms Tan and four other colleagues began the Chemistry curriculum with two premises in mind. The first was that there is much to learn about basic chemistry through cooking. Secondly, young students like to cook. Ms Tan and four other teachers then came up with a plan to teach Chemistry concepts through molecular gastronomy – the science of cooking – and the antics of Mao.

To become a professional chef, Mao must accomplish tasks that require students to



Teachers at Jurong Secondary do their best to make learning interesting and applicable for students. From left: Mrs Juliana Ng, Mrs Pasupathy, Mr Deryk Stronach, Mdm Hamidah Hamin and Ms Norliyana Binte Matin.

study and apply knowledge of Chemistry. For instance, when Mao makes synthetic caviar with two chemicals, students learn chemical bonding. When Mao makes a mess in the kitchen, students learn how to separate pure and impure substances. Students get to do the actual cooking right in the laboratory.

The curriculum runs for one semester in either Secondary 1 or 2 and covers five topics across six cooking sessions over a 15-week period.

Enlarging their world

Adventures don't just have to happen in fiction. Students can have their own adventures too when they have the opportunity to try different experiences.

But "Often, our N(T) students aren't much exposed to [experiences] beyond their homes or classrooms. Our goal is to help them experience a broader variety of possibilities in life. We want them to learn that there's so much they can do if they try," says Ms Ming Fong Yee, Head

"Our goal is to help them experience a broader variety of possibilities in life. We want them to learn that there's so much they can do if they try."

of Department for Pupil Management at Peicai Secondary.

The school's N(T) students also used to score poorly at the GCE 'N' Level Examinations for both English and Maths and gave a subpar rating on the Quality Student Experience (QSE) survey. In response, a team of teachers and Allied Educators led by Ms Ming, was tasked to design a programme that would improve the students' academic performance as well as their affiliation with the school.

That's how they came up with the initiative called the 4+1 Hands-On Elective Modules (HOME) that offers students a variety of enrichment activities outside the classroom.

Unlike other enrichment programmes that run for a five-day period after exams or once a week after school, 4+1 HOME runs every week and ties in with the conventional curriculum. For example, students may visit a car repair shop on a Friday, and then the next week in Science lessons, they may study car engines.

A more recent Friday enrichment activity had Secondary 1 and 3 students participating in an outdoor obstacle course at the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Labrador Adventure Centre. While the younger students learnt to overcome fear and get out of their comfort zones, the older ones were trained in mentoring and facilitating skills as they guided their younger counterparts to complete the course.

The programme began in 2008 with a pilot course in the Secondary 1 cohort and now extends through Secondary 4. Each cohort includes one Allied Teacher and one form teacher, involving eight teachers in all.

Overcoming glitches

Starting 4+1 HOME has not been a walk in the park. Initially, teachers resisted tying their instruction to the programme. Ms Ming had to convince them that while it may require more work to design their

curriculum for the programme, it could benefit them, too. For one, it gives them more teaching time. Instead of, say, three periods a week for a particular class, the teacher can extend the learning into Friday's activity, effectively adding a fourth.

Getting financial support for 4+1 HOME was also an issue, but the resourceful and dedicated team was able to find the funds they need from a variety of sources within the MOE – such as the

Sports Education Programme and the Arts Education Programme Funds – plus the students' own Edusave accounts. Today, they continue to tap these sources.

At Jurong Secondary, a regular challenge in running the programme is integrating new teachers into it, as they could do with some help incorporating their subjects' content into the programme. Also, not all new teachers have experience teaching N(T) students and many have expressed concerns on how best to engage them, Mrs Ng explains.

"Part of our work is building new teachers' confidence in the classroom. These students aren't harder to teach. You just need different ways to teach them," she says.

To support these new teachers, Mrs Ng and her core team of curriculum leaders, Senior Teachers and Allied Educators share pedagogy and teaching techniques with them during their weekly Professional Development periods. The team also invites the new teachers into their classrooms to observe how the lessons take place.

Initially, another challenge for the programme was obtaining the necessary funding to purchase equipment. At the school principal's suggestion, the team tapped the Coyote Fund from MOE that awards up to \$10,000 for programmes that experiment with new and innovative ideas. They succeeded in getting enough money to purchase the ice cream machines.

Despite the challenges, it is clear that these teachers will continue to find new ways to pique and stimulate their students' love for learning. For them, the adventure has only just begun. ♡



At Peicai Secondary, teachers want students to not just learn from but also enjoy their experiences in enrichment activities. From left, clockwise: Mr Anbarasu s/o R Jeyadevan, Mr Oei Wei Phing Graeme Conrad, Mr Hong Junxian, Ms Ming Fong Yee and Ms Siti Khadijah Binte Taib.



Character assessment made easier

Teachers from two schools develop software that charts students' character development.

By Mavis Teo

With the growing focus on 21st Century Competencies (21CC), the responsibilities of teachers have gone beyond imparting the rudiments of a subject to developing a student's character and moral values. However, tracking the character development of every student, in addition to teaching, is both challenging and time-consuming. It is also hard to precisely identify the areas for improvement in a student's character. Furthermore, having to write comprehensive reports to parents in an area of development that is largely subjective, requires much effort.

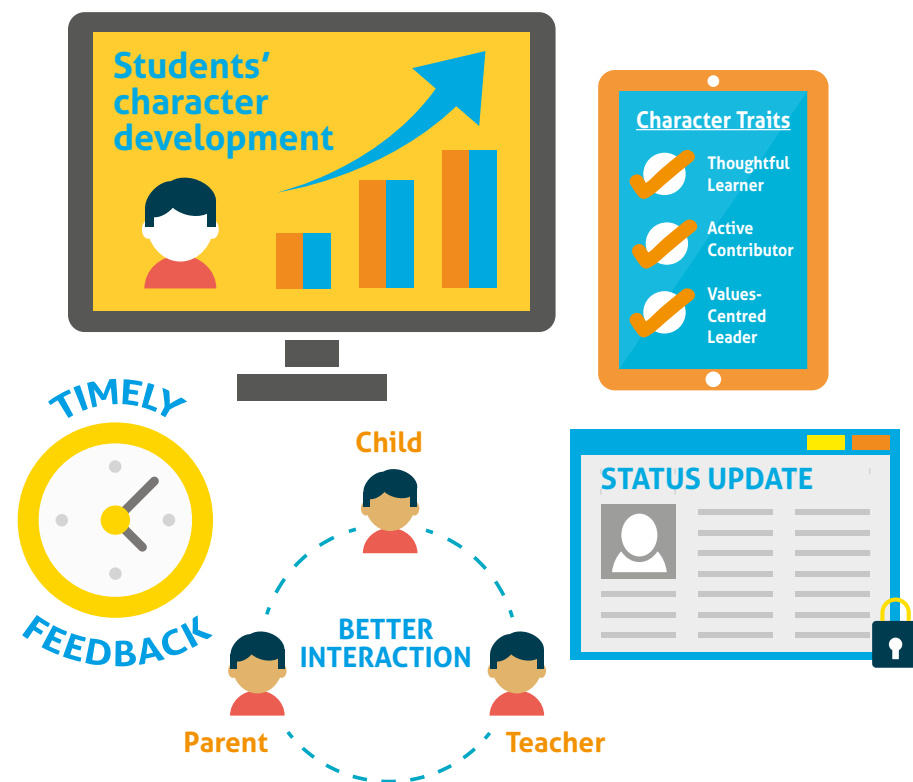
Thankfully, while the Student Development Curriculum Division is looking into ways to improve methods of character assessment, two schools are developing systems to address such concerns and difficulties that teachers have about monitoring and assessing a student's character.

The solution

In 2010, Mrs Clara Lim-Tan, former principal of CHIJ (Kellock), led a team of educators to put together the online portal K-SHARP (Kellock Student Holistic Assessment Reporting Portal). It provides timely and quality feedback about students' learning and development to students, parents and teachers.

K-SHARP began by charting students' academic progress through qualitative feedback to identify gaps in learning. The portal evolved into analysing their character development in 2013 (at the time of the interview, the character development module is in its pilot stage).

K-SHARP Kellock Student Holistic Assessment Reporting Portal



Ms Sri Darmavijaya Govindaraj, Subject Head for Information and Communication Technology and Media, leads the K-SHARP team now.

Mr Chua Tung Kian, the Head of Department for Student Leadership at Catholic High, developed the C²HAMPS (Character & Cognitive Holistic Assessment and Management Programme for Students) platform in 2013. It entered its pilot stage in the first school term of 2014.

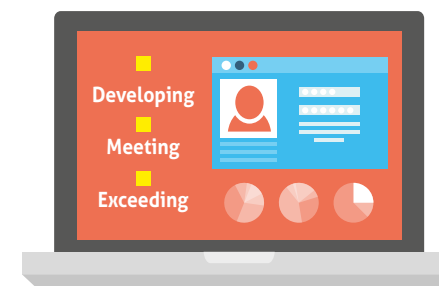
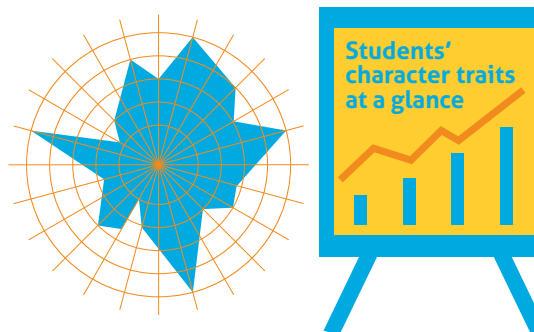
The C²HAMPS system will benefit students even after they have graduated.

It will generate a report of a student's progress across four to six years of post-primary education. The report can be used for applications to universities (local and overseas), internships, attachments and scholarships.

Recognising that every teacher would have a different idea of what a certain character trait means, Kellock is defining the traits based on attributes of the Kellock Girl Outcomes – Thoughtful Learner, Active Contributor and Values-Centred Leader. The portal aims to provide teachers with a platform to capture the students'

C²HAMPS

Character & Cognitive Holistic Assessment and Management Programme for Students



demonstration of particular traits during an activity or event.

Similarly for Catholic High, three levels of grading – “developing”, “meeting” and “exceeding” – are used to monitor the development of character traits based on the school's vision of grooming “leaders, gentlemen, and bilingual scholars of high integrity and robust character, who are passionate about life, learning and service to others.”

A highlight of C²HAMPS is that it presents information in graphs allowing teachers

to tell at a glance the traits students are faring well in, and areas the latter need to improve on. In addition, C²HAMPS is designed to be customisable to any school, and aims to allow the seamless transfer of records between different schools from the Primary to Junior College level, or to the Year 5 and 6 levels in Integrated Programme (IP) schools.

Users give the thumbs up

Teachers in both schools agree that the systems have helped to reduce their administrative load in assessing students' development in school.

“The interaction creates a closer tripartite relationship between pupils, parents and teachers.”

At Kellock, teachers can post photos or status updates which parents and students can view using personal logins. No one else can view or post comments, hence ensuring confidentiality. “The interaction creates a closer tripartite relationship between pupils, parents and teachers,” says Ms Sri.

Parents welcome the interactivity feature, gauging from the response of Mr Philip Biancheri whose daughter is in Primary 2. “It's a positive experience for both me and my daughter as we get to view what she is doing at school. My daughter was very excited to see a photo posted of her sandwich-making class,” says Mr Biancheri.

At Catholic High, C²HAMPS has also garnered positive feedback from teachers who find it user-friendly. Secondary 1 form teacher Kenneth Loon says: “Even my older colleagues who were hesitant

about the technology have found it easy to grasp.”

Future plans

Both Kellock and Catholic High have benefitted from Tier 2 of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Innovation Fund, granted only to innovative projects that show strong potential of being implemented in other schools. With the funds, they are able to develop and roll out these systems with the aid of external software developers.

K-SHARP also received the Innergy Award (Bronze) at MOE ExCEL Fest in 2013. Currently, the team is fine-tuning the interactive portal.

Going forward, Ms Sri hopes that some aspects of MOE's School Cockpit system – a fully-integrated, web-based system that performs functions such as the tracking of examination results – can be seamlessly merged with K-SHARP, so that it provides a comprehensive overview of each student's performance. A meeting with MOE last year shows that there is potential in working together to support the transfer of data between the two systems, she says.

As for C²HAMPS, Catholic High's ultimate goal is to track each student's development (currently the system is piloted with five students from each Secondary 1 class). This will help the school better customise programmes and curriculum to meet the needs of students. Like K-SHARP, C²HAMPS has also shown the promising potential to sync with MOE's School Cockpit system.

Both K-SHARP and C²HAMPS seem to help teachers better understand their students and reduce the complexity of tracking the latter's character growth. Now that's innovating for good, in more ways than one. ✨

What teaching motto keeps you motivated?



★ WINNING ENTRY ★

"You don't always reap what you sow."

As counterintuitive as it may sound, teaching has turned this discouraging adage into the one thing that fuels my calling to teach. It's even a familiar lament that I hear from fellow teachers – those who often feel like they're pouring sands of effort and time into bags full of holes.

Yet, the statement is also a delightful truth.

*"You don't
always reap
(exactly)
what you sow."*



I find that our students are like the magician's hat; we never know what they are capable of. The A-ha! moment may come at the most unexpected of times, suddenly unleashing the latent potential that we always knew was there but woefully untapped into.

I think this is why a teacher never really reaps what she sows, for her fertiliser of love and commitment may not reap equal measures of her students' love and commitment for learning. It could be a lot more than she expects — a harvest of abundance that oftentimes surprises the teacher, and continues to make teaching an exciting vocation.

Ms Tey Pei Hwa
Teacher
Tampines Junior College

My motto is simple: **Always do what is right for our students.** What is right is not necessarily easy, but do it anyway.

We tend to forget that the one key goal in our profession is to educate – to ensure that our students learn well and deeply. This is more so because of our hectic schedule, or eagerness to complete our tasks.

We should not compromise on our students' learning for the sake of meeting our targets and objectives on paper. If we focus on that, our instructional strategies will naturally align themselves to effective teaching and learning. Let's not be unnecessarily driven by targets and deadlines to the point where we forget the true meaning of education.

Ms June Chng
Teacher
Jurong Junior College



Every child in your class is someone's whole world

I am a Tamil teacher. For the past two years, I have been teaching this boy who lacked interest in studying the Tamil language because he doesn't find it useful for his future. He refuses to speak and write in Tamil, despite his Tamil-speaking environment.

In 2013, I brought my class on a learning journey where they were given a task to communicate with Indian food stall owners in order to accomplish their project work. They realised that non-Indians learnt Tamil to communicate well with their customers. It was then that the boy promised that he would try to speak Tamil. From that day on, I found out that he has started to speak Tamil at home, too.

On Teachers' Day, his mum thanked me for making a difference in her son's life. I am proud to have shaped the thinking and action of someone who is the whole world to his mom.

Kalaivani D/o Ilango
Teacher
Sengkang Secondary School

NEXT ISSUE...

What do you love most about your workplace?

Is it that wonderful pantry stuffed with goodies, your inspiring colleagues or the mischievous but adorable students? Share with us!

The best entry wins a prize worth \$30! Other published entries get prizes worth \$10. All entries should be sent to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by **27 June 2014**. Entries should be no more than 150 words. Your entry might be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school and contact number.



THE MAKEOVER EDITION

While education gets a revamp in some countries, social media is changing the way teaching is like in the classroom. Here are some of the latest trends and updates you don't want to miss.

"Let's discover the earth first and after that reach for the stars. Let's teach the basics... If students don't know how to use IT properly for the purpose, it kills the joy of the whole project and takes the concentration to wrong places."

– Janne Männikkö, English/Swedish Teacher at Metsokangas Comprehensive School in Finland

TRIVIA

Singapore tops IB exam again
For the fourth time running, Singapore tops the Asia-Pacific region in the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. Last year, 43 students scored a perfect 45 points, up from 41 in 2012.

bit.ly/sgtopsib

TEXT BY SEAN LEE ILLUSTRATIONS BY NG SHI WEI

Could this be the future of education?

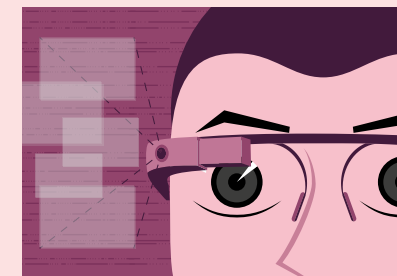
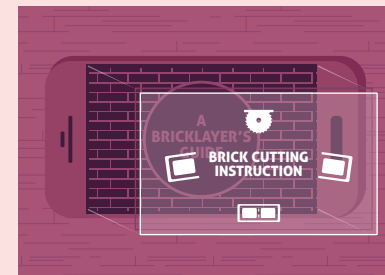
Technologies are opening up new frontiers to change the realm of teaching.

Read more: bit.ly/techforteach



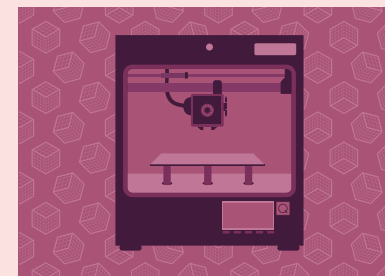
Augmented Reality app

Manchester University students can annotate on ancient manuscripts digitally without mutilating the artefact. Also, South Staffordshire trainee bricklayers can receive detailed instructions such as cutting a brick via a phone app and bar codes. Ninety-five per cent of students manage to cut bricks correctly at the first try, translating to huge savings on material costs.



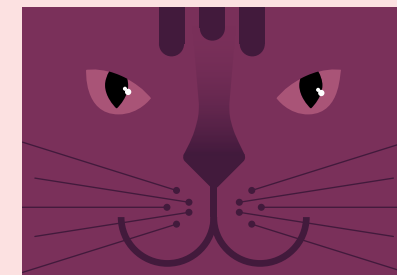
Google Glass

The much-hyped wearable tech allows users to access the Internet and record videos. With it, General and Trauma surgeon Rafael Grossmann (bit.ly/googlemed) let his medical students see through his eyes, by putting up a video feed while conducting live surgery. At the same time, he was able to field questions from them.



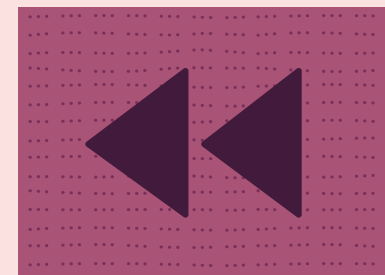
3D printers

Hailed as the tech of the future, these printers create three-dimensional objects with materials such as plastic, metal or nylon, by building them layer upon layer, until the entire piece is complete. Some 60 schools in the UK have introduced them to show, not tell, design and manufacturing concepts.



Cat Academy app

Feline lovers will purr over this app, which uses the power of visual mnemonics. Each Spanish phrase comes with a picture of cute cats illustrating the meaning of the phrase. Why so catty? Japanese research shows that *kawaii* images improve students' cognitive functions. Hello Kitty costumes, anyone?



Lecture capture software

Universities are recording lectures and making them available so that absentees do not miss out on lessons. Students away from class can log in and make notes onto their personal copies of the recorded lectures, or re-watch the lessons for clarity.



USA: Blueprints for the future

The education authorities’ blueprint launched in April 2013 – titled Recognising Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching, or RESPECT in short – embraces seven critical components of a transformed teaching profession:

- A Culture of Shared Responsibility
- Top Talent, Prepared for Success
- Continuous Growth and Professional Development
- Effective Teachers and Principals
- A Professional Career Continuum with Competitive Compensation
- Conditions for Successful Teaching and Learning
- Engaged Communities

The blueprint is the result of two years of discussion with teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders, taking reference from other countries including Singapore, Canada and China.

Read more: www.ed.gov/teaching.

UK: Specialist Maths free schools

The Exeter University and Exeter College, and the King’s College in London have announced that they would each run a specialist Maths free school with rigorous programmes for 16- to 19-year-old students to prepare them for university.

The schools, scheduled to open in September this year, allow the students to hone their critical thinking skills under the guidance of academics from these universities. Enrolment will be kept small, capped at 120 per school.

This is part of the UK government’s plans to boost Maths education, which also include overhauling the primary and secondary school curricula to keep up with some of the best programmes from other countries, and providing professional development to teachers.

Read more: bit.ly/UKfreeMaths and bit.ly/kclMaths

China: English weightage cut in *Gaokao*

Beijing authorities may reduce the weightage for English in the *Gaokao*, the high-stakes college admission test.

Currently the test weighs English, Chinese and Maths equally. But plans are underway to reduce scores for the English section to 100 points and increase the Chinese section’s weightage to 180.

In Shanghai, as well as provinces in Shandong and Jiangsu, English may be removed entirely.

A representative said the change highlights the fundamental importance of Mother Tongue in the curriculum. Proponents argue that this would encourage the students to learn English for communication purposes, instead of merely wanting to pass the subject in the exams.

Read more: bit.ly/gaokaoeng

South Korea: Test less, explore more

More emphasis on career exploration and teamwork has been placed on middle school education. The government has announced plans to replace examinations for a semester in their three-year education with a curriculum dedicated to outdoor activities, career planning and vocational training.

A pilot project involving 42 schools was rolled out last year. By 2016, all 3,200 middle schools will implement the test-free semester system.

However, the plan is not without its criticism. Parents are worried about the reduction in hours for teaching academic subjects such as Korean, English and Maths in school, and may turn to private tuition instead.

Read more: bit.ly/skoreatest and bit.ly/parentsfeedback

Thailand, Laos and Vietnam: Vocational education gets a boost

These countries are developing a vocational education programme to prepare graduates to work in any of their territories.

Courses for vocational and high vocational certificates that will be recognised by the three ASEAN countries will begin this year. The pioneer course of study will be on business computers, with an enrolment of 30 students.

Participating students may get to study in all three countries, for example, Thailand in the first term, Vietnam in the second, and Laos in the third.

The tri-nation programme aims to prepare the graduates to compete effectively in the ASEAN labour market. It may be expanded to include Myanmar.

Read more: bit.ly/vocednews

Malaysia: A holistic plan for the 21st century

Closer to home, the Malaysian government launched its Education Blueprint for 2013 to 2025 last year, focusing on a holistic plan to prepare teachers and students for the 21st century.

The 11 shifts spelt out in the blueprint include ensuring each student is proficient in English and Bahasa Malaysia, as well as making the teaching profession a career of choice. For the latter several plans are in place, like recruiting teachers from only among the top 30 per cent of graduates.

Read more: bit.ly/Malblueprint and bit.ly/malunesco

How to tweet to teach

How do you teach in 140 words? Twitter may be a treasure trove of frivolous updates from celebrities, but it can also be used as a tool to engage students and create online activities. The Center for Instruction & Research Technology, University of North Florida offers these tips:



Follow the tweets of celebrities yourself, and use them as a part of your tuning-in activity or a discussion point in your lesson.

#peerlearning

To encourage peer learning, create a hashtag for the course and let students tweet each other questions or comments. Seek approval from your principal first, of course.

Read more: bit.ly/tweetnteach

“Nowadays, training, learning and innovating are free, like Massive Online Open Courses, free apps, open access to scientific knowledge... All the knowledge and tools are there for you, you just need the courage to go for it.”

–José Manuel Sáez López, primary school teacher at CRA Laguna de Pétrola and Associate Professor at the National University of Distance Education in Spain

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When average is not safe anymore

Mediocrity does not cut it anymore, warns K Ranga Krishnan, the Dean of the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School Singapore, on *TODAYonline*. He argues that the average person will soon be replaced by automation and technology. He offers three tips to stay relevant: Learn to work with technology, relearn what has been learnt, and develop skills in trades and craftsmanship.

bit.ly/lifelonglearningwins



Since many of your students are probably already following others on Twitter, have them choose a topic to follow and complete an assignment with the knowledge they have gained.



To hone your students' comprehension skills, task them to select a tweet and elaborate on it beyond 140 words.



Want to teach your students to communicate succinctly? Get them to paraphrase a book or article in 140 words or less.



Putting the children in charge

What happens when students decide what they want to learn?

Paloma Noyola Bueno, 12, lives beside a dump in Mexico. She was also the top Maths student in the country in 2012.

Her talent would have gone unnoticed if not for her teacher Juarez Correa. Correa was inspired by India's Sugata Mitra, who left an unmanned computer in a slum and discovered that the village children could learn by themselves.

Correa then experimented with the idea of a decentralised system in which the teacher is the facilitator while the students decide what they want to learn. However, where Mitra's kids had access to the Internet, Correa had to play middleman in his financially strapped school: the kids would ask the questions and he would return home to Google the answers, delivering them the next day.

Correa applied the concept across subjects – he would host debates on abortion, or simply write a Maths formula on the board, and the children had to ask how it came about.

The result was evident from the performance at the national examination: the class outperformed the previous cohorts in Spanish and Maths. More stunningly, Paloma scored 921, the top score in the entire country. And this is a girl who showed little interest in Maths because “no one made it this interesting”.

Read more: bit.ly/mexgenius

Building a forgiving classroom

Dear colleagues,

As educators, every day we are called to give of our best in that special place called the classroom. Yet, one certainty is that we will often fall short. We will fail. And fail again. But we will get up and get on with the learning, and persevere with the teaching.

I feel that forgiveness is a missing element in our classrooms. When my students fail to submit their work, I ask why, then give them a chance – simply because we are human. We need to learn to forgive.

Teachers need forgiveness too. I once crafted a challenging piece of work on creative thinking and problem solving for my students. In my haste to be creative and efficient, I did not trial the piece of work myself (I usually do so to ascertain the time and effort the work requires). Many students failed to hand in the piece of work on time and explained that it was impossible to complete. It was only upon taking a closer look at the task that I realised they were right.

“Boys and girls,” I told them. “I’m so sorry. It’s my mistake, my fault. I designed an impossible task.” I expected moans and reprimands, but instead the whole class laughed and cheered, and a student said loudly to me, “It’s okay Mr Grosse, you are only human. We forgive you.”

I taught and served the students at Rosyth School for 25 years. And I have come to recognise that teaching is firstly, and ultimately, an act of courage. The etymology of the word “courage” has



Mr William Grosse

Master Teacher (English Language) at the English Language Institute of Singapore

nothing to do with heroism, but rather, is derived from the Latin word “cor” which means “heart.” We have to open our hearts – to learning, to possibilities, to missteps.

Teaching can be full of tough, challenging and even, sad days. On such occasions, I often made my way to the school hall to be present during the Lower Primary Assembly. Listening to the little ones with their big voices singing the national anthem with every ounce of energy they possess, and reciting the pledge with an earnestness and conviction sent tingles down my spine every single time. I became recharged. Things would get better. My students were and are the reason why I want to teach and learn everyday.

In teaching, we lead our students in a personal journey to their true, best selves. We have to wait (at times the most powerful expression of love) for them to discover who they are, can be and want to be for themselves.

Teaching’s like riding a motorcycle. It is a joyful experience. Different drivers

and road conditions require awareness and timely responses – just like in the classroom. This makes the ride challenging and presents opportunities for us to improve and become a better, more proficient rider.

Similarly, a teaching career is joyful and challenging; it is a never-ending learning journey about yourself and the subject(s) you teach. You learn new skills as you engage in new ideas about pedagogy. You learn how to deal with people in every conceivable emotional state. And you learn how to communicate a message and how to turn ideas into action.

Officially I am a Master Teacher, but I tend to see myself as a Most Senior Learner. I tell my students repeatedly, “I will quit teaching when I have nothing left to learn about myself, about you and about the subject.”

Every day we are invited to do important work with these very important people in the classroom. You are in the right place.

Be happy. ♡



Your appraisal and career planning process streamlined

If you've always found the appraisal experience time-consuming, here's the good news. Now you can reduce the time taken to complete the work review form and plan your career growth more effectively with the revisions made to the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). Here are nine changes you can look forward to. Text by Yvette Kan

1. FORM IS NOW SHORT AND SWEET

BEFORE: The form was lengthy and tedious to complete.

NOW

Number of pages reduced from 15 to
Number of sections reduced from 8 to
Number of KRAs* reduced from 7 to

5

* Key Result Areas (KRAs)
– the main contributions Job Holders (JHs) should indicate in the form

2. CLEAR KRA CATEGORIES

BEFORE: JHs were unsure of the contributions to include in the appraisal form.

NOW

The KRAs are categorised under three main headings:

STUDENT OUTCOMES:

- a. Quality learning of students
- b. Character development of students

PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES:

- a. Professional development of self
- b. Professional development of others

ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES:

- a. Contributions to projects/committee work

These highlight the areas of work JHs should prioritise.

PLUS This is accompanied by the Individualised Profile, a document customised to each subgrade that explains what each KRA involves.

3. MORE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

BEFORE: The KRA section was more focused on quantitative outcomes.

NOW

TARGETS are renamed **PLANS** to encourage JHs to



GO BEYOND NUMBERS and include **QUALITATIVE PLANS AND OUTCOMES.**

TIPS When completing this section, use the 3Ps approach:
What is the purpose of the task?
What is the process adopted?
What is the impact of your work on students/colleagues/organisation?

TIPS Write it in point form – there's no need for lengthy essays!

5. CONNECTING THE DOTS

BEFORE: The individual sections in the form come across as being separate, with no bearing on the other sections.

NOW



The connections between various sections are indicated clearly for JHs to understand the EPMS as a whole.

4. MERGING SECTIONS

BEFORE: Section 4: Training & Development Plan During Period Under Review
Section 6: Training & Development Plans for Next Assessment Year

NOW



TIPS When designing your development plans, consider the different avenues and ways to hone your skills and develop your competencies, such as signing up for courses, taking on mentoring duties or participating in Professional Learning Communities.

6. GROW AND LEAD

BEFORE: There was no apparent link between the competencies JHs were tasked to develop and the skills highlighted in learning frameworks such as the Teacher Growth Model (TGM) and Leader Growth Model (LGM).

NOW

EPMS competencies are linked to the Learning Outcomes under the TGM and LGM. This information can be found in the Individualised Profile.

7. BROADER DEFINITIONS

BEFORE: Each competency was strictly defined by specific Behavioural Indicators (BIs).
The JH was assessed on his competencies using a 4-point scale.

NOW

In addition to BIs, each competency has a one-line definition that captures its key elements. This allows the JH to think more broadly about his development, and encourages in-depth qualitative discussions with the Reporting Officer (RO).

The 4-point scale has been removed. The JH and RO will discuss the 13 competencies and identify areas of strengths in the context of work outcomes stated in Section 1 of the form.

The JH and RO will also identify competencies that the JH would like to develop for the year.

PLUS The BIs can be found in the Individualised Profile, which customises the BIs for each subgrade.

8. SMOOTHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT

BEFORE: There was one Competency Model for each career track – Teaching, Leadership and Senior Specialist.
This made it difficult for those moving across tracks to monitor and plan their career development.

NOW

The three models are integrated into one single Competency Model that is applicable to all three tracks.
In the new Competency Model, there are 13 competencies categorised into four broad areas (see diagram, below).



9. CUSTOMISED SUPPORT

BEFORE: When the EPMS was first rolled out in 2005, supporting materials comprising nearly 250 pages were provided to all educators regardless of their job function.

NOW

The supporting materials have been streamlined into just two key documents:



7- TO 8- PAGE USER GUIDE

&



1 A3 PAGE CHECKLIST

to provide the right amount of customised support for our educators, whether they are teachers, ROs or school leaders.

★★★ IMPROVING THE EPMS TOGETHER ★★★

The Human Resource Group (HRG) actively worked with other divisions and stakeholders to revise the EPMS. Here's how the collaborative effort happened.

- The Education Minister announced the review at Workplan Seminar 2012.
- Engagement of educators started in September 2012.
- HRG formed a Steering Committee, partnering the Academy of Singapore Teachers and the Organisational Psychology Branch on reviewing the competency model.
- In March 2013, HRG and Schools Division piloted the revised form in 12 schools involving 1,300 officers.
- Feedback from educators was gathered through check-in sessions at the pilot schools, surveys and small-group discussions.
- In early 2014, HRG and Schools Division conducted workshops with school leaders and middle managers to strengthen their understanding of the EPMS and discuss good appraisal practices that could be shared across all schools.
- HRG will continue to enhance these practices and provide additional training support to Reporting Officers (ROs).
- Teaching staff can email their feedback and/or enquiries on the EPMS to MOE_HRG_EPMS@moe.gov.sg

Reflections from the ground

School leaders from two pilot schools share their thoughts on the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS).

What do you think of the EPMS?

Mr Dennis Yap, Principal of Opera Estate Primary School: The new form is streamlined to capture only the essential information the Reporting Officer (RO) needs to engage in quality conversation with the Job Holders (JHs). The improvement I appreciate most is that though the quantity of information needed is reduced, the quality of the information is not compromised.

Mrs Christine Kong, Principal of Catholic Junior College: The revision has been timely. The original EPMS was both an appraisal and development instrument but

many JHs lost sight of it as a development instrument and were more focused on results and performance.

The newly revised form reinforces the need to look at the purpose and process of appraisal. This provides room for greater and more in-depth discussion.

How does the integration of the EPMS with learning frameworks like the Teacher Growth Model and Leader Growth Model benefit JHs?

Mrs Kong: The alignment of the EPMS with the TGM encourages the JHs to take a longer term and more systematic approach to their development.

Mr Yap: It is also a good move to merge Section 4 and Section 6 as it allows the JHs to provide more focused input on their learning and development plans.



Photo courtesy of Mrs Christine Kong

▲ **Mrs Christine Kong**
Principal
Catholic Junior College

► **Mr Dennis Yap**
Principal
Opera Estate Primary School



Photo courtesy of Mr Dennis Yap

Tips for school leaders and middle managers to strengthen appraisal practices.

Do's

- ✓ Set clear priorities in work and establish a common understanding of what needs to be achieved in work plans, competencies and expectations
- ✓ Share honest and useful feedback with JHs
- ✓ Meet JHs regularly to share feedback on how they have progressed throughout the year

Don't's

- ✗ Use separate school-based appraisal forms
- ✗ Ask JHs to include their school's entire strategic thrust in their plans – just select what is relevant to their work
- ✗ Rely on matrices solely to quantify JHs' performance – assessment of JHs should be a holistic process that is contextualised to their work outcomes

It makes establishing a JH's learning and development needs neater and more purposeful.

How do you think ROs and JHs can be guided in using the revised EPMS?

Mr Yap: The complementary EPMS guide and checklist prepared for ROs and JHs are very comprehensive and they are sufficient to guide the ROs and JHs in using the revised EPMS.

Mrs Kong: The effectiveness of using the EPMS will still depend on the ROs adopting good coaching and performance appraisal protocols (while upholding the right intent and purposes of guiding JHs). These include the frequency and sequencing of conversations between JHs and ROs, and the type of questions raised by the ROs to elicit honest and reflective responses from the JHs. 🗨️

How to beat those marking blues

Buried under a mountain of paper and workbooks to mark? Here are some pointers to keep those blues at bay. Warning: Results may vary!

Text by Yvette Kan Illustrations by Ng Shi Wei

Get organised

With heaps of papers and workbooks to go through, get paperclips, binder clips, folders and staplers in quirky designs to help you stay hip and tidy.

Start planning your next holiday

This gives you something to look forward to during the term when you feel like you're trudging through all that paperwork.

Take a snack break

For every 10 workbooks or test scripts you get through, enjoy a small snack like a square of chocolate or one cookie. Now that's something sweet to look forward to.

Buy new pens in your favourite colour

Hey, if you're going to be doing a ton of marking, why not embrace it and snazz up those test scripts and assignments along the way?

Keep a cactus in the office

Caring for it is a no-brainer – It's hardy, doesn't require much water, and you can give it a funny name like Spike. It'll be a great marking buddy!

Play some music

Listening to your favourite tracks will ease the load. Bored of your playlist? Head over to 8tracks.com to discover fresh tunes.

Do something nice for colleagues

Come to work earlier to surprise your colleagues with little surprises like encouraging messages on stickies. Doing good makes one happier, according to a 2008 study in the USA.

Watch inspiring films

When you're mired in work, it's easy to forget why you love teaching. Remember the nobility of your vocation through movies like *Dead Poets Society*.

Take a leisurely stroll to the washroom

Stand up and stretch your legs to revitalise yourself for the next round of marking. Bring it on!



Getaways off the beaten path

You need to get cracking on planning a vacation for the June holidays to beat fully-booked situations. Check out these lesser-known vacation spots (so you don't bump into your students) here and overseas. By Yvette Kan



This seafront colonial-style cottage is just what the doctor recommends to take your mind off teaching. Privacy is guaranteed in this fenced three-room cottage complete with a large garden. Lots

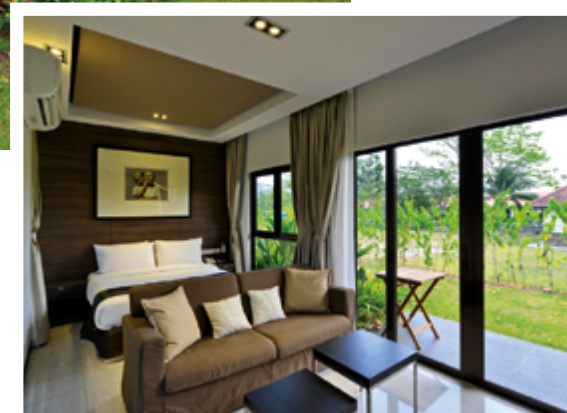
of space for kids to run around in, fly kites or kick a ball. The beach – accessible via a gate at the bottom of the garden – ensures sandy fun under the sun. Did we mention the BBQ pit? Here's your chance to enjoy barbecuing chicken wings and marshmallows under the stars.

Public rates from \$540 per night, with special rates for public officers



Take a break from urban life, forget about school and head for the D'Kranji Farm Resort. The villas are self-contained and the executive villa comes with a Jacuzzi to help soothe the frazzled nerves (possibly caused by too much marking). Enjoy delicious food at the Resort's restaurants with fresh greens plucked from its vegetable farm. You can also go fishing and prawning at the fishing village, where there's a special rate for children (\$12 for 45 minutes).

From \$170 to \$420 per night



With just 40 rooms, you'll enjoy a quiet stay at Rider's Lodge without bumping into colleagues or students. If that still happens, dodge them by hiding at the nearby Gallop Stables and try horseback riding. You can go on a trail ride exploring Bukit Timah to spot the rare pangolin, feed miniature ponies and donkeys (the kids will love it) or take a carriage ride (like the Queen!). For a hearty meal, head to Rider's Café and dig into French toast and eggs benedict.

From \$225 to \$350 per night, including breakfast



QUEPOS, COSTA RICA

Lonely Planet says Costa Rica is “the most kid-friendly and most-developed travel destination in Central America”. Quepos is nestled amidst tropical forests, where you’ll have a higher chance of meeting the sloths and monkeys that roam freely rather than your students. The town is touted as an ideal gateway to many natural attractions – waterfalls, rapids and nature reserves. The most famous is Manuel Antonio National Park, named by *Forbes* in 2011 as one of the world’s most beautiful national parks.

From \$2,900 for a 7D6N stay, including a round-trip flight and three-star accommodation



Quepos, Costa Rica: Photo by flickr | nertog (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nertog/3123967344/>)



Vang Vieng, Laos: Photo by Peh Yuxin

VANG VIENG, LAOS

A popular spot with Western backpackers, it manages to retain a peaceful, small-town charm. Wifi connection isn’t that reliable so you’ll get a social media detox from students who are friends on your Facebook. Hit the night markets for Laotian snacks and soak in the fun-fair-like atmosphere. Children will enjoy the impressive caves surrounding the town. Your inner daredevil geographer (who says teachers can’t be adventurous?) will love exploring the Water Cave, with just an inner tube and a headlamp.

From \$540 for a 4D3N stay, including a round-trip flight and accommodation at *TripAdvisor’s* 2014 Travelers’ Choice Bargain hotel, Inthira Vang Vieng



Cape Town, South Africa: Photo by Desmond Ee

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

On the southern tip of the African continent, Cape Town has so many attractions you needn’t fear your children getting bored. Take part in culturally enriching activities like African dance or ostrich-egg painting, and share interesting stories about South African culture with your students when you get back to school. Head out to the iconic Table Mountain, which a 2011 global poll decreed one of the world’s seven wonders of nature. While you’re there, visit Boulders Beach, where you can see endangered African penguins from the boardwalk.

From \$1,900 for a 7D6N stay, including a round-trip flight and accommodation at the Table Mountain National Park

AN ALTERNATIVE HOLIDAY

Volunteer with Cross-Cultural Solutions

If you’ve always wanted to volunteer, why not combine your holidays with volunteer work? It’s a good way to explore the world with your kids while contributing to the wider community. Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS) is a non-profit organisation that places volunteers with communities all over the world. For instance, you can help out at homes for the elderly and organisations that serve the disabled in nearby Thailand, or make your way to far-flung Guatemala to teach English to children (perfect for pros like you!).

While volunteering with smaller companies may be less expensive, CCS’s fees go to providing volunteers with a safe and seamless stay, transportation and meals. To cater to families, they offer family-oriented programmes and an \$890 discount for children.

From \$2,260 for a week



CAPTURE moments WITH CONTACT

WINNING ENTRIES FOR THE PAST ISSUE

‘MY FAVOURITE MARKING SPOT!’

Thank you for sharing photos of the places where you usually do your marking. Winners get shopping vouchers worth \$30.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Ms Hazel Shen
Teacher
Singapore Chinese Girls’ School

A quiet afternoon at home is always the most relaxing and comfortable for marking.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Ms Tan Hui Xian
Teacher
Kong Hwa School

Staying back after school hours to complete the marking when everything quietyens down in the staffroom.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Mr Muhd Al Fasha
Teacher
Jurongville Secondary School

Nothing like marking on the sofa, with the cat for company.



WACKY Memories with STUDENTS

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 the photo submitted.
 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. Upon receiving their prizes, winners are required to send an email acknowledgement, indicating their name, NRIC and contact number.
 11. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
 12. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 27 June 2014.
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