



THE FRESH



CONTACT

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 01
JANUARY 2011

A new year, a new you

Ready for the new year?
Step into the classroom
refreshed with tips from
other teachers.

Notes for teachers

DGE Ho Peng shares her
vision on what makes a good
teacher in the 21st century.

Bag it with style

Totes that are fashionable
and functional



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Editor's note

Dear readers,

Happy New Year! We hope you had a
good break and are recharged for the
new year. At *Contact*, we certainly are,
and we're kicking off 2011 with a revamp.

We are calling the first issue of the year "The Fresh Issue"
because it is a fresh start for the team. You will notice the new
masthead, to reflect the change we are undergoing. While we
sport a new look, readers can take heart that we will continue
to keep you updated on the latest happenings in schools and
the education system. Also, we've kept the popular Lifestyle
pages and Your Say column.

In our cover story, we spoke to five teachers to find out how
they keep their lives on an even keel even as they handle the
demands of teaching. In Speak, Director-General of Education,
Ms Ho Peng, talks about her personal experiences in teaching
and what she thinks makes a great teacher in the 21st century.

Also, in our feature story, creative teachers at Ping Yi Secondary
and Rosyth School share how they inject fun and interactivity
into National Education.

Should schools get tougher on discipline? You decide after
hearing from two teachers with opposing views in Your Say.
Finally, take a look at Lifestyle that features trendy satchels
that will make you a hit in and out of the classroom.

Let us know what you think of the new *Contact*. Send your
thoughts to contact_online@moe.edu.sg

Happy reading!

Lee Hong Leng

Editor-in-chief





A new year, a new you

The new year marks a new chapter in the lives of those who have just joined the teaching force. There is much to look forward to and caring for ourselves well is a good start. *Contact* speaks to five teachers to find out what spurs them on as they keep their lives on an even keel, in and out of the classroom. By Geraldine Ling

The first day of school can be a nail-biting experience for new teachers who have never faced a classroom of students before.

"There are 1,001 things that seem to be happening all at once. You have many things to learn and prepare for, including school culture, names and lesson plans," says Ms Christine Chen, 26, who started teaching last year at Dunman High School. But Ms Chen, who is a H1 General Paper teacher and supervising tutor for H1 Project Work, has developed strategies to overcome her obstacles. Besides seeking advice from more experienced teachers, she also attends training workshops on creative teaching mostly organised by the school.

"I try not to be too hard on myself or worry unnecessarily. I'll do my best and learn at a pace that I am comfortable with," says Ms Chen, who unwinds at the end of the day with a good meal with her family and occasional long walks with her mother.

"With the experience from the corporate world, I am now in a better position to contribute to the students' education."

Mr David Ho, 47, who made a mid-career switch to teaching a year ago, shares her sentiment. His biggest challenge was making the transition from the corporate world to the classrooms of Bukit View Secondary School.

"I used to interact a lot with adults but now many of the people I talk to are teenagers. I need to learn how to speak my students' language," says the former organisational development manager, who now teaches Geography, Elements of Business Skills and Social Studies.

To build rapport, he chats with them during breaks, catches the latest movies and

reads about newly released computer games that his students like.

Mr Ho prepares his students for the corporate world by sharing with them qualities that employers want in employees, drawing from over 20 years of experience in the transportation and logistics industry. In addition, he gives them advice when they face difficulties during their work experience programmes.

The geography major notes: "With the experience from the corporate world, I am now in a better position to contribute to the students' education."



► Ms Chen seeks advice from more experienced teachers whenever she faces challenges.



▼ To relate to his students, Mr Ho keeps himself updated with the latest movies and computer games that teenagers like.

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

Seeing change in his pupils – not necessarily in academic performance – is what keeps young teacher Muhammad Fadylla B Rashiman motivated about his job. Four years ago, the 28-year-old Physical Education (PE) teacher at Boon Lay Garden Primary School volunteered to mentor a pupil in the school. The boy came from a broken family; he had problems controlling his anger and would often shout at teachers and peers. Mr Fadylla felt the pupil needed a father figure and stepped in.

Mentoring was a long process, but the hard work paid off. The pupil successfully resolved his anger issues and has started secondary school this year.

“There is no instant gratification when it comes to mentoring. You need to invest time,” says Mr Fadylla who is the school’s subject head of Science and assistant discipline master.

He credits his supportive colleagues for keeping him upbeat. They encourage him daily and give him constructive feedback when he structures new department-based initiatives. Despite his busy schedule, he dedicates at least two days a week for family outings. “I have a lot of support from my family and I like my job. When you do things that you like, you feel energised,” he says.

A CARING CULTURE

Last December, Mr Fadylla, an Outstanding Youth in Education Award (OYEA) recipient, had the chance to observe how lessons were conducted in a German primary-middle school as part of the professional development trip organised for OYEA winners.

OYEA is a national award that recognises excellent young teachers for their involvement in youth development beyond the formal curriculum.

Mr Fadylla was struck by the strong culture of care in the classroom, where students were encouraged to share questions and ideas, without fear of mockery. “The teachers didn’t expect students to be perfect so there’s room for error. Once you have that established, the classroom environment becomes friendly,” says Mr Fadylla who is now putting this into practice in his classes.

WORKING SMART

For many teachers, stress is a much-dreaded affliction, but Mrs Looi Lay Geok, 50, has the perfect antidote: effective time management. The Chinese Language teacher, who has 26 years of experience, juggles her roles as a teacher and a mother of two teenage boys.

“Time is very important for working mums like me, so we need to maximise it,” says Mrs Looi who teaches at Outram Secondary School.

For example, if she has a one-hour break between classes, she goes for a quick meal and then focuses on completing her administrative work or marking multiple-choice scripts. “I usually won’t do time-consuming work like marking essays. I’ll leave the portion that needs careful marking when there is more time available,” she says.

Mrs Looi also makes it a point to leave Sundays free to pursue her hobbies of reading fashion and home decor magazines which give her inspiration to be creative at work.

Another secret for staying upbeat is the encouragement she receives from her students. Once, a graduating class gave her a T-shirt with the word “Mummy” emblazoned at the back. “When I was younger, many students saw me as a friend. Now, they see me as a mother,” she says.

CHANGING LIVES

If there is anything that motivates teachers, it is when their actions have a real impact on their students’ lives.

“Sometimes, teachers may teach the subject but forget about the pupil. When the pupil realised I cared for him, he took an interest in the subject and started paying more attention in class.”

Mr Devindra is motivated by the changes he sees in his pupils after investing in their lives.



This is what has been driving Mr Devindra Sapai s/o Indrasapai for 20 years of his teaching career. The Dean of Pupil Development and PE teacher at Seng Kang Primary School was recognised for his passion, innovation and dedication in teaching last year when he received the prestigious President’s Award for Teachers.

Mr Devindra, 45, is known for reaching out to troubled pupils. Last year, he had a pupil with autism who hardly smiled, was aloof and kept failing his English Language (EL) tests. Getting the pupil to open up was a challenge at first, but Mr Devindra made an effort to enter his world. He broke the ice by talking to him about music, which the pupil loves. Conversations eventually moved on to EL assignments, with Mr Devindra encouraging him to do his best. “I needed to win him over,” he says.

“Sometimes, teachers may teach the subject but forget about the pupil. When the pupil realised I cared for him, he took an interest in the subject and started paying more attention in class.”

Half a year later, the boy passed his EL test for the first time. Mr Devindra received a hug from the grateful pupil.

“At that moment, you know you’ve done something right. You’ve reached out and touched a person’s life forever,” he says. But Mr Devindra is quick to remind that he is also human: “There are times when you really feel wiped out, but that’s when you need to re-energise yourself. That’s what the weekends are for.”

Every Saturday, Mr Devindra makes it a point to spend time with his family to go bowling or watch movies. “That bonding time is very important to me – my family is an integral part of who I am,” he says.

Coming back from his well-deserved break, the veteran teacher is raring to go again. “I’m very excited to see how lives will be touched. You can be teaching for 20 years, but every year is different.”



Mrs Looi makes use of her breaks clearing administrative work or marking multiple-choice scripts.

LIVING WELL AT WORK

Here are some tips to help you recharge for the new year:



Stay positive. Happiness is a state of mind.



Refresh your mind. To disconnect from work, pick up a new hobby or meet friends for relaxing meals.



Know yourself well. For example, pace yourself to reduce anxiety. Instead of marking 300 exam scripts at once, try dividing the workload over a week.



Set realistic targets. It is often impossible to change the entire class. Instead of feeling discouraged, choose to reach out to, say, five children.

Advice from Ms Rosaline Chan, an iCARE officer at MOE. iCARE provides counselling services and organises workshops related to emotional and occupational well-being.

For more information,
• call iCARE officers at Tel: 68381721
• e-mail moe_icare@moe.gov.sg or
• visit iCARE at Blk 7, Teachers Network, 51 Grange Road, Singapore 249564. (Please call to make an appointment)



Mr Fadylla bought his brown bag to commemorate the start of his teaching career. Whenever he feels down, it serves as a reminder of how blessed he is to be a teacher.



Singapore's school system is among world's best

Singapore may be a front runner in international assessments of school systems, but it is not resting on its laurels – new skills are needed in the new era, and teachers are key to driving that improvement in the education system. By GT Chua



Singapore is regarded highly in studies on school systems around the world.

McKinsey & Company, a global consulting company, recently released a study of how the world's most improved school systems keep getting better. It affirmed what Singapore has been doing and said that Singapore is now on a "great to excellent" journey.

In another recent international study, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Singapore's 15-year-olds came up second in Mathematics, fourth in Science and fifth in Reading, outperforming countries such as the US and the UK where English is the native language.

"This is quite a remarkable achievement because in a mixed-language environment like Singapore, for our students to be able to read and infer from what they read, I think this really speaks well of how the teachers have been teaching in the classrooms," Director-General of Education, Ms Ho Peng, says of the PISA results.

She adds that PISA takes random samplings of the 15-year-old student population, which includes top students and those who are getting average, even below average scores. Hence, every student, not just the top performers, has done well. Moreover, PISA assesses students' ability to think critically and solve real-life prob-

lems which are important skills for society and for the workplace.

Furthermore, Singapore's Mathematics curriculum, with its problem solving approach and use of models and learning blocks to help students in counting, is adopted by schools abroad. Local Mathematics textbooks are now used in over 35 countries. In New Jersey, US, Singapore's Mathematics helped an elementary school improve its mathematical scores by about 30% over the course of five years.

Delegations from the US, Western Australia, Taiwan, Brunei and South Korea have also visited Singapore to learn more about STELLAR – Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading.

A key feature of high-performing systems is the ability to maintain the calibre of teachers and principals for sustained improvement in the educational sector.

In this regard, Singapore was also singled out in the McKinsey report for its flexibility in allowing teachers to select the courses they wish to pursue on their recommended 100 training hours annually. In addition, competitive remuneration was used to attract top students into the teaching profession, and eventually groom them for leadership positions.

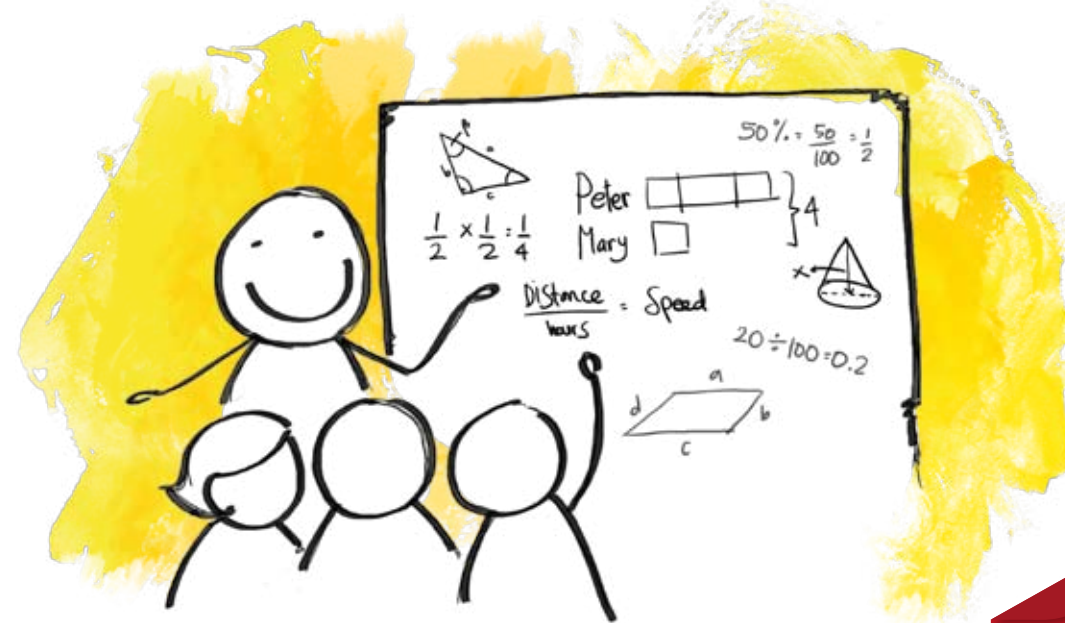
NURTURING 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS

Singapore is doing "a tremendous job of integrating inquiry learning, scientific literacy and technology into education [for] 21st century learners", says Dr Linda

"[The teaching profession] is going to increasingly become a profession that requires more and more training and access to knowledge. We need to provide that kind of support for teachers."



▼ Dr Darling-Hammond is President Obama's former education adviser.



Darling-Hammond, US President Barack Obama's former education adviser. She visited Singapore last year to speak at the Teachers' Conference.

In this new age, she says, it is no longer sufficient to just memorise facts from the textbook. Students need to have "the capacity to be analytical, to evaluate a situation, to come up with problem-solving strategies, to conduct research and try things out to solve problems".

Moving into the future, she suggests getting students into a cycle of self-evaluation by designing tasks where students present their work and receive feedback at each stage to help them improve it. This will help them to learn more in the process of revision.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

Teachers play a critical role in imparting 21st century skills, which is more challenging than merely teaching facts, says Dr Darling-Hammond, who is also the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University.

She observes: "We expect them (teachers) to almost work miracles with kids who come from all kinds of different experiences, backgrounds, needs, sometimes problems. Teaching is still almost a super-human work."

Hence more needs to be done for the professional development of teachers, she

adds. "[The teaching profession] is going to increasingly become a profession that requires more and more training and access to knowledge. We need to provide that kind of support for teachers."

"People go into teaching because they want to make that difference for children and they will stay and succeed in teaching if society gives them the support to accomplish that mission."

Teachers here can take heart that their dedication to their craft has contributed to the success of Singapore's education system on the global stage. More importantly, it has led to the effective learning of students.

Results from international studies have shown that Singapore's well-structured curriculum meets the needs of students with different levels of abilities, says Ms Ho.

"This is very, very powerful because once you get the right corpus of learning, you ensure that students within the country are learning the right things and learning at the right level," she explains.

For that, credit goes not only to HQ officers and curriculum developers, but to teachers as well, who implemented the curriculum effectively. This is something that teachers should know and be proud of, says Ms Ho. 📌

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is still much to learn from school systems abroad and MOE officers regularly review literature or go on study trips to other countries. Through understanding how these different education systems work, they draw insights and learning points that can be applied to Singapore.

ARTS AND MUSIC:

MOE officers found that arts institutions in the US create opportunities for students to display their works or perform alongside professionals. Schools here can emulate that by exposing students to a wider range of professional arts practices.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION:

In Japan, schools provide children with disabilities early vocational training that has a strong emphasis on soft skills, such as basic social manners and good work ethics. Taking a leaf out of Japan's book, MOE officers recommend that a curriculum with a greater focus on soft skills be offered to 13- to 15-year-olds with mild intellectual disabilities.

Find out more about the sustained progress of Singapore's education system in the McKinsey report at <http://bit.ly/mckinsey2010>

Also, for more information on Singapore's standing in PISA, go to <http://bit.ly/oeecd2009>

Notes for teachers

Director-General of Education Ho Peng talks to *Ng Hwee Koon* about how teachers can stay ahead of the game, her precious memories of a very special teacher and why bumping into a former student recently brought music to her ears.

To Ms Ho Peng, there is no “perfect” child and neither does she expect it of Singapore’s students. But the Director-General of Education, who has spent more than 30 years in the education service, wants them to be more confident and unafraid of asking questions, like students she met in Shanghai and India.

“Why are [Singapore students] so different?” she asks.

This, she says, is where the teacher’s role is vital, in building strong, trusting relationships with students. “As a teacher, you need to relate to the students and be firm, so that the values are very clear,” she says. “At the same time, there has to be warmth, so that the children know they’re in a safe and secure environment and are not afraid to speak up.”

In addition, teachers need to focus on the learning outcomes rather than just prepare students to sit for examinations. It means focusing on the fundamentals of the subjects; for example, helping students to gain confidence in using languages. And while teaching a subject, teachers are building character and nurturing in children skills such as delivering presentations, carrying out projects and working as a team.

Teachers have been getting support as they continue to develop professionally – not only to educate students, but also to tend to their holistic development. At the same time, the Ministry of Education

is aiming to recruit new entrants from the top one-third of each year’s cohort by 2015. This is important as the university degree is the “training of the mind” that will form a solid knowledge base to maintain Singapore education system’s competitive edge. Ms Ho explains: “This is because when you explain certain scientific concepts to students it is not just about the facts, but really understanding the logic that is important.”

But simply relying on depth of knowledge is not enough; experience is just as invaluable. Case in point: Ms Ho’s own “superb teacher” in primary school who would sew bags of assignment cards so that the children could play a game by picking out cards and attempting to answer them before progressing onto the next bag.

“She’s a very skilful teacher. [She was] able to design the assignments such that they were for different abilities, so that when you finish one, you progress to the next level. This is not just depth of knowledge, but the understanding of the students and how they learn,” recalls Ms Ho.

The Academy of Singapore Teachers will soon introduce a mentorship scheme to give new teachers such guidance but Ms Ho hopes experienced teachers will take their own initiative to guide their younger colleagues into the “teaching craft”.

The challenge is how to support the desired teaching outcomes when there are so many other demands and expectations.



“I finally told myself ‘This cannot be. I must have a life outside work’.”

At the school level, Ms Ho believes there should be a clear sense of priorities where time and space is organised such that teachers have more time to think about their work and confer with colleagues. At the individual level, she encourages teachers to strike their own work-life balance. She says: “I want to see teachers having a life outside school, which I do believe in.”

The former teacher shares that she too had a tough time juggling course work and her numerous duties when she was in charge of performance groups in her junior college.

She says: “I finally told myself ‘This cannot be. I must have a life outside work’.”

She decided to put aside a “precious” one hour per week to go back to learning the piano which she had stopped while in secondary school. But when she joined the Ministry she had to drop her interest again because of work demands.

“Today, I’ve picked it up again, and every time I go to the (piano) teacher’s house, I feel kind of sheepish because I haven’t practised. So I understand how it’s like for a student who hasn’t done her homework,” she says.

Nevertheless, she is “very resolved” to stick to it. “When you actually go into something that you enjoy, you have a mental break. Then, you come back and say ‘I owe it to

myself’, and you feel a sense of satisfaction that ‘I also treat myself well’.”

Ms Ho believes teachers must have a strong interest in helping people learn – the right motivation is what will keep a teacher going even during challenging times. Despite the tendency for the media to harp on the monetary aspect of the job, she says: “My advice is, if you are looking for the money, don’t come into teaching. I don’t think you can last very long.” The Ministry, she says, ensures that teachers’ salaries are comparable to their peers in other sectors “just to make sure that our teachers are not short-changed”. For most teachers, the rewards come many years later – in unexpected ways.

Just recently, a former student whom Ms Ho had taught 15 years ago went up to her and greeted her. “For him to just come up and say, ‘I was your student’, that’s a big thing!” says Ms Ho, “It means you’ve meant something to him at that point in time otherwise he would’ve run a mile away. To me, having been a teacher, it’s a very deep sense of satisfaction to know that you’ve done something for somebody at some time in your life.

“It seems almost trite to say, but it is a fact for many of us.” 🎵

▼
Ms Ho tries to strike a work-life balance by setting aside time every week for piano lessons.

School of the future

By 2016, all primary schools will have enhanced infrastructure that facilitate your pupils' learning and assist you in teaching. *Contact* shows you what facilities to look forward to – you may be seeing some, not all, of them in your school soon. The types of amenities installed will be based on the school's size and requirements. Illustration by Ng Shi Wei and Huang Weiming

REDESIGNED CLASSROOMS

- A 'home base' with customised spaces for peer teaching and presentations
- Facilities to support a range of different learning approaches

OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- Outdoor labs and eco ponds that help students better understand scientific concepts through self-discovery

SYNTHETIC TURF FIELDS

- Superior in performance and easier to maintain than natural turf fields (they dry faster than natural ones after rain)

TEACHING LAB

- Equipped with a one-way observation mirror, multi-angled video cameras and audio equipment for teachers to observe teaching in progress
- Enables teachers to share, experiment with and improve on teaching methods

PERFORMING ARTS STUDIO

- Remodelling the Media Resource Library to become a Performing Arts Studio for activities such as music and drama performances, public speaking and film screening

- Can cater to an audience size of 100 to 200 pupils

OUTDOOR FITNESS PLAYGROUND

- Allows students to enjoy a full body workout while having fun

STUDENT CARE CENTRE

- A home-like environment for students who may not have adequate supervision at home after school hours

INDOOR SPORTS HALL

- Able to accommodate a basketball court which is also drawn with court lines for four badminton courts, a volleyball court and a netball court
- Allows teachers to conduct Physical Education lessons or co-curricular programmes regardless of the weather
- Also for mass sports activities and/or training for various competitive sports



How can you use these facilities to enhance your teaching? Share your views with us at My Forum at <http://myforum.moe.gov.sg>

NEw ways to love Singapore

More than 95% of students say they are proud to be Singaporeans, according to the latest National Education survey conducted last year. And teachers are playing an important role in forging a stronger sense of identity through innovative methods of learning. *Contact* looks at two schools with NEw ideas. By Natasha Hong

Imagine bringing History and Social Studies classes to life by going on actual heritage tours conducted by your own students.

This was the case at Ping Yi Secondary School as a team of four teachers came up with an idea to make the study of National Education (NE) more realistic and engaging for their students.

The teachers personally went out of their way to conduct research in the historically rich neighbourhoods of Joo Chiat, Katong and Chai Chee.

They took photographs, wrote scripts and led students on tours to religious places of worship and historical landmarks. "We wanted to supplement what the students learnt in their History and Social Studies

classes and make it come to life," says Mr Samuel Wee, the NE coordinator who came up with the idea of the heritage trail.

"Then the students took over to conduct the tours themselves," he adds.

Such is the dedication and enthusiasm of students for the programme that they would even meet their teachers at 8pm to run through the scripts and plans for their very own NE tours.

The trail is now conducted on a regular basis for primary-level students and foreign students from other schools.

Ping Yi's NE trail leaders have also guided visiting students from India and Hong Kong, making sure that the trail content is



Students from Ping Yi become tour guides as they lead their peers on a tour around heritage neighbourhoods.



"We generally have students who like to engage in public speaking taking part, but we have seen our quieter students grow so much upon taking up the challenge to be tour guides."



tailored to their audiences' backgrounds and understanding.

"The students' exposure to a range of guests has been good for us. It keeps us adaptable as every guest is different – some don't speak English well, some have a fair amount of background information. Hence our students learn how to cater to an audience," says Mr Wee.

Such is the success of this NE trail programme that other departments in the school have asked to come onboard to provide a fuller experience for future participants. The Mathematics department, for example, has Mathematics-based activities relevant to the trail in the works.

Another school that has taken the interdisciplinary approach in teaching NE is Rosyth School.

Students have a fun time during their NE classes under the HAPIER (the Humanities, Aesthetics Programmes Integrated with English at Rosyth) programme where they are given more variety when learning about the history of Singapore.

The school's Primary 5 students, for example, learn about Singapore's first-generation leaders such as Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, Dr Goh Keng Swee and Mr S. Rajaratnam, through English Language comprehension and cloze passage worksheets and a Manga Art programme.

Manga art is commonly used in Japanese comics and cartoons.

Students conduct research over the Internet and come up with charts and presentations detailing the career achievements and milestones of their assigned leader.

"This is done so that the drawing is more realistic and practical as the students would already have some prior knowledge of the person," says Ms Evelyn Lem, one of the teachers in the HAPIER team.

Under the guidance of the school's Resident Manga Educator, Ms Andrea Ling, students then design Manga-style characters of the first-generation leaders using





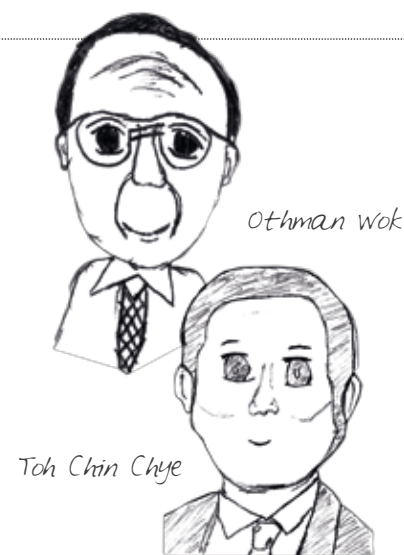
Rosyth students dabble in Manga art to create their own impressions of Singapore's first-generation leaders.



Lee Kuan Yew

S. Rajaratnam

Lim Kim San



Othman Wok

Toh Chin Chye

tablets and design software during Art lessons. Four of the art pieces created by the students under Rosyth's Manga Art programme were also featured in the Singapore HeritageFest 2008 patchwork, giving the works a greater reach than just the students' peers.

The two schools were also awarded the Outstanding Development Award for National Education in 2010 for excelling in their NE efforts in imbuing students with a strong sense of national identity and social responsibility.

Besides learning about the history of Singapore, students from both schools also build up their confidence and improve on their social skills.

Mr Raymond Bong in the HAPIER team, then Subject Head for National Education and Social Studies, says: "As this is a group project, the children learn how to critique each other. They also learn social skills and we feel that this is a more interesting way for the students to learn about Singapore's history."

Agreeing, Mr Wee also sees his students at Ping Yi growing more confident, thanks to their participation in the NE trail.

"We came up with this programme to give students the opportunity to be in non-traditional leadership roles," he shares.

"We generally have students who like to engage in public speaking taking part, but we have also seen our quieter students grow upon taking up the challenge to be tour guides." ❧

Are we going too soft on discipline?

Two teachers from opposing camps share their views.



By: Ms Arnita Abdullah
Teacher, Head of Level Sec 4/5,
Junyuan Secondary School

Yes, I feel that generally teachers are being too soft on student discipline.

Discipline in school can be improved if we ensure a similar set of expectations and consequences, instead of having different teachers setting different "subrules", causing confusion to students. Also, teachers should not be alone in disciplining the students. Parents should play a major part in monitoring their children's behaviour. Some parents cite various factors for not being able to be actively involved in their children's lives. These excuses should not be a ticket for them to leave the disciplining solely to the school.

For me, disciplining commences the first time I step into the classroom. Expectations need to be communicated clearly to the class. Time needs to be invested in ensuring class discipline and appropriate behaviour. Students also need to know that besides completing lesson objectives, teachers want the best for them. Of course, teachers should not abuse the classroom authority given. Reasoning with students needs to be carried out so that they know why they are being reprimanded.

A child is like a kite that needs to be tugged at (disciplined and reprimanded) occasionally. A kite can soar in the sky and yet be pulled back to the ground if it needs to be repaired, for example, when there is a tear. A kite should not be held too tightly, in case the string snaps and the kite will be lost. When it is time, we will let go of the kite so that it can fly well in the sky.



By: Mrs Gladys Lim
Senior Teacher
East Spring Primary School

The general sentiment among long-serving teachers seems to be that students are misbehaving to a greater extent these days since teachers are not allowed to mete out corporal punishment. There is also a tendency among teachers to associate corporal punishment with the "hard approach", and anything short of that as the "soft approach". Hence, the misconception that teachers these days are too soft on student discipline.

Actually, we can be "hard" without having to punish and instil fear. The true spirit of discipline is about letting the student realise his mistake, make amends and correct his misbehaviour.

To me, it's a process, and often a long-drawn one for the recalcitrant. It takes time and the approach should not be deemed as being "too soft". From my personal experience, I feel that if the important elements of building a strong rapport, showing the student I care and winning his respect are present, it becomes a win-win situation. It allows me to be firm yet effective in student discipline. It allows the child to be trained to do the right thing, not merely to be told that what he did was wrong.

My personal philosophy is that each day presents itself with opportunities to make or break a child. To me, this means that when a student misbehaves, I choose to discipline him to become a better person (long-term, may not yield immediate results), not punish and "break" him (quick fix, but possibly with dire consequences). The importance of good parenting also cannot be under-estimated. ❧

What's your say? Share your views at My Forum at <http://myforum.moe.gov.sg>

Peek into HQ

As part of their professional development, teachers have the opportunity to take up a posting at the Ministry's headquarters (HQ) where they get to see how policies and initiatives are formulated and implemented. *Contact* talks to three teachers, who unanimously agree that the experience will help to broaden their perspectives and enable them to become better teachers. By Daphne Chuah

THE VISIONARY LEADER

When her secondment to Raffles Institution (RI) drew to a close after eight years, **Mdm Bek Su Ling** was faced with the choice of staying on or transferring to another school.

The former Head of Department (HOD) of RI's Mother Tongue Languages division decided it was time to "renew" herself to become a better educator.

With that in mind, she took a two-year sabbatical from teaching, and joined the Schools Division in the Ministry of Education's (MOE) HQ as a Special Assistant at its Student Development Division. She provides support for her Deputy Director and the Cluster Superintendents, as well as plans and facilitates meetings and networking events for school leaders.

"I felt I needed to learn from a different and higher perspective, and see leadership in action," she explains. "So I came to the HQ in hopes of becoming a more visionary leader as I found myself lacking in strategic planning and management skills."

One of her fondest memories in her 11 months at the HQ so far is organising the



third Director of Schools meeting of the year, which brings together school leaders to discuss issues related to curriculum and leadership development.

"The people I'm working with are usually current or ex-school leaders. They are very experienced professionals in running schools and in policy implementation," says Mdm Bek.

"Back then as a classroom teacher or even as a HOD, we tended to just take instructions when new policies came in, but here in the HQ, I have come to understand the original intent and rationale behind them," she notes.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Ms Poh Qinyu credits the two-year stint under her MOE scholar's programme at the HQ for her professional development and the broadening of her perspective.

"Coming to the HQ has given me a more macro perspective, in that we really get to see how HQ work impacts 356 schools, 30,000 teachers and ultimately thousands of students," the former Subject Head for Mother Tongue Languages at Damai Secondary School notes.

Being part of the Organisation Development Division at the HQ, Ms Poh's job entails maximising each HQ division's potential and looking at how they can better help schools.

"I miss the interaction with students, but I feel that in order to become a better teacher, I have to come out of the profession for a while to get myself retrained," she says. "The opportunities to work

"Coming to the HQ has given me a more macro perspective, in that we really get to see how HQ work impacts 356 schools, 30,000 teachers and ultimately thousands of students."

with other HQ divisions and external agencies allow me to understand their various functions, processes and cultures.

"This in turn puts me in a better position to find the right resources to enhance the learning experience for students when I return to teaching.

"Another key learning point I got from this stint is the in-depth knowledge of the different MOE policies. Instead of simply receiving information top-down with little clue of the thought processes involved, I have benefited greatly from knowing how policies are formulated from scratch and both the strategic thinking and operational considerations behind them. This will enable me to implement the policies better when I'm back in school."



"So I came to the HQ in hopes of becoming a more visionary leader as I found myself lacking in strategic planning and management skills."

REACHING OUT TO INTERNATIONAL KIDS



he says. "As such, I decided to move on to teach a totally different audience."

Four years down the road after his secondment to the Home Affairs Ministry ended, he found himself desiring for another change, in the form of a three-year stint at the MOE HQ.

As his ultimate love still lies in teaching, he decided the School Planning and Placement Division was the best place for him as it still allowed for some form of interaction with students. His current job involves dealing with the pastoral care and integration of the international student community in Singapore.

"So what we do is help them integrate not only within their respective schools, but also in the society here," he explains. "The most interesting thing about this for me is the sharing and exchange of cultures and practices between the students and myself.

"I think with these skills, I will return a stronger teacher in that I would be able to cater more to students with different learning abilities, and hopefully be able to bridge the gap between international and local students." ➤

Being a person who thrives on change, **Mr Dennis Chan** was fully aware that he would not be able to improve if he stayed on in one place over an extended period of time.

So after teaching at Serangoon Garden Secondary School for five and a half years, Mr Chan opted for a stint at the Singapore Prison Service Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School) when it came along.

"In my definition, doing something different does not mean transferring to another school just to repeat the whole cycle of teaching students of the same age group all over again,"

"The most interesting thing about this for me is the sharing and exchange of cultures and practices between the students and myself."



Bag it with style

Need a tote that is sturdy enough to fit your paperwork and laptop, and yet doesn't scream "stuff"? Get the best of both worlds – fashion and functionality – with these stylish satchels. By Yip Min-ting

FOR HIM

FOR HER



HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TOTE

TIP 1: GO EASY ON YOUR BAG

Overloading your tote can stress it out. Avoid packing a week's worth of marking in it to prevent the straps and body from getting stretched out of shape.

TIP 2: BALANCE IS KEY

Match bright, cheery bags with neutral or dark coloured outfits and vice versa. Carrying patterned bags when you're wearing prints is a sure no-no.



1. Mismo tote, Asylum, **\$399**; 2. Patch tote, Egg3, **\$250**;
3. Whillas & Gunn bag, Asylum, **\$209**; 4. Fred Perry Leather overnight bag, Fred Perry, **\$579**

1. Pleat bag, Egg3, **\$250**; 2. Scale bag, Egg3, **\$95**; 3. Lisa Stickley tote, Antipodean, **\$208**;
4. Nava N_Wool Large Grapes, Hide & Seek, **\$209**; 5. mrkt at Rockstar, **\$116.60**; 6. Bombastic Plastix Souljah bag, Trolley, **\$45**

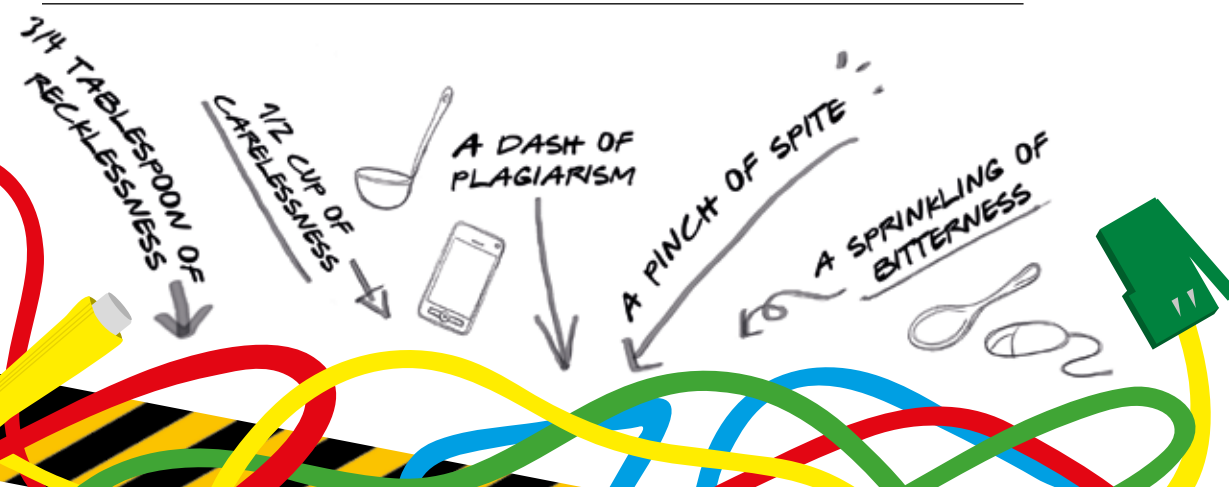


IT SAVVY



Recipe for (online) disaster

Are you the type who loves to express your opinion or “friend” your students on social networking sites? With tongue firmly in cheek, we recommend you a recipe that’s sure to land you in hot water. By Chen Jingting



PREPARATION

1. Season your blog posts with ingredients stolen from others, without giving due credit.
2. Pepper your Facebook page with photos taken at a wild party. Let your students and peers, who are your “friends”, spice up your life by questioning the values you represent.
3. Pour in confidential information about MOE, your school, colleagues or students on your blog. It is a sure way of frying your reputation.
4. Whip up a heated online debate with your controversial or incendiary views, without stating that they are your own opinions and do not represent those of your school or MOE.
5. Stir in pointed complaints about your colleagues and students on your Facebook and blog.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
If you have concerns and views to share, approach your school leader or clarify with the Ministry through internal channels like My Forum and Ask Senior Management.

For safer recipes and feedback, please log onto My Forum at <http://myforum.moe.gov.sg>



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