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# ENHANCING PARTNERSHIPS



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THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 05  
JANUARY 2012

### Inspiring ideas for 2012

Get better at what you do with these strategies

### Your Say

Who should be responsible for the child's character building?

### Daily occupational hazards

Ignore them at your own risk



# EDUCATION



*How can we do better?*





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Mrs Lee Kim Lian,  
Mr Lim Sin Heng,  
Mrs Ranjit Singh,  
Mrs Ivy Tan,  
Mrs Tan Ming Hui  
and Mr Ezal Bin Sani.

Enhancing partnerships in education

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Lee Hong Leng  
Editor-in-chief

## Editor's note

Together, we achieve more – this aptly sums up why schools forge partnerships with parents and the community in their bid to provide our children with a holistic education. These key stakeholders have much to contribute to the education of our children, be it in reinforcing the learning of values or helping to identify the children's strengths and interests.

In our cover story "Enhancing partnerships in education", we look at ways that schools can build successful collaborations with these important stakeholders. GPC (Education) chairman and COMPASS member Lim Biow Chuan also shares his thoughts in Speak on how both these bodies have contributed to the education endeavour.

Picking up on an oft-debated topic, we invite a teacher and a parent to give their views on whether character building falls mainly on the shoulders of the school or parents in Your Say.

With the re-organisation of the Professional Wing, we sum up the changes in HQ so that you have a quick view of what to expect in the new year in "Developments in the year ahead".

Then start the New Year on an inspirational note with our centrefold spread of bright ideas to sharpen your professional skills – learn ways to improve your classroom management techniques, better engage students in Mother Tongue Languages and juggle your many responsibilities.

Remember to watch your health too, so read our tongue-in-cheek guide "Daily occupational hazards" and avoid bad habits that may have negative outcomes. Protect yourself from common ailments like sore throats and migraines by biting into some "Food to stay in the pink".

Finally, we share with you, below, the encouraging comments we have received from our readers. We are buoyed by these affirmations and look forward to bringing you more good stories from our schools and teachers.

We wish you a happy and fulfilling new year ahead!

## Readers' comments on



I applaud your team for coming up with a fresh and informative magazine for teachers. I look forward to reading *Contact* for the articles on other education officers who inspire me to give of my best.

**Juliza Zulkifli**  
Christ Church  
Secondary School

Minister's note in the October issue of *Contact* gives us much food for thought about our education system. It's not just for teachers but for everyone.

**Elsbeth Xie Xinyi**  
West Spring Secondary School

**Varalackshmi Durai**  
English Language Institute  
of Singapore (ELIS), MOE

I am touched that Minister shows that he understands the challenges teachers experience on the ground, and has clearly and appropriately anchored the purpose of a teacher's job in the heart, the head and the spirit.

**Zach Ong Kong Hong**  
Tekk Whye Secondary School

I would like to congratulate the *Contact* team on a job well done. It is the wonderful work of a team committed in their belief in the importance of communication and interaction within the fraternity.

**Denise Petrina Chan Meng Wah**  
Flexi-adjunct staff

I think the editorial team has done a great job balancing the professional and personal interests of teachers; and the magazine has a vibrant and 'fresh' feel. It is as if you have re-invented yourselves.

It's really nice to hear such appreciation for teachers in Minister's note in *Contact*.

**Kamala Malar**  
Pei Hwa Secondary School

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run entirely by parents, most of whom are part-timers and homemakers. They befriend at-risk students, mentor them, and even provided an X-box and board games for the hub. Dedicated parent volunteers also prepared and sold food weekly to raise funds for the running of T-Zone, and the school used part of the funds to reward students for displaying good character or improving in their studies.

In addition, parents help out at key school events such as the Teachers' Day celebrations and volunteer as chaperones for service learning activities. Fairfield's parent support group, known as Partners-In-Education (PIE), is also the mediator in disagreements between the school and other parents.

#### GOLDEN RULES FOR ENGAGING PARENTS

So how does the school attract parent volunteers?

Be open and quick to respond to feedback from parents, says Mrs Ivy Tan, Chairperson of PIE. For instance, a few years ago, when students complained to their parents that the canteen food was lousy, parents gave feedback to Fairfield and quickly, measures were taken to improve the quality of the food. Incidents like this assure parents that their feedback counts and make them feel appreciated by the school, explains Mrs Tan.

Parents are valued partners in education and in Temasek Primary they act as "co-educators" and "character coaches", says Mrs Ranjit Singh, Vice-principal of the school.

programme for lower primary pupils. Mrs Monica Phua, the school's Subject Head of Character Education, collaborates with parents in the committee to design lessons which incorporate the school's core values and lifeskills. Parents in the committee also hold training sessions for other parents conducting these lessons and help prepare teaching materials.

"Parents need to have the right attitude – they must (volunteer) with the purpose of serving every child – and have fairly good inter-personal skills," says Ms June Tan, the committee's Chairperson.

Trust is also an important factor when engaging parent volunteers. Last year, the school gave the committee free reign in planning and executing the programmes for Teachers' Day. The one-day celebration included performances by upper primary students in the assembly hall followed by surprise performances by every class for teachers in the classrooms. About 70 parents were roped in to sing and act in a skit while others guided students in planning their surprise performances for their teachers.

**"PARENTS BECOME MORE EMPATHETIC TOWARDS TEACHERS ONCE THEY UNDERSTAND HOW CHALLENGING IT IS TO EDUCATE CHILDREN."**

Parents in Temasek's ParentConnection Committee (the school's parent support group) are actively engaged in spearheading SPARKS (School Parents Are Reinventing Kids' Skills) and VOICE (Vision Of Inspiring Character Excellence), – the school's character education

Ms Tan was "amazed" at the turnout of volunteers: "Seventy parents came for a single event – it was a record breaker." Some working parents even applied for leave just to help out on that day. Mrs Ranjit and Ms Tan believe that parents are supportive of the school's events because

Delivering a holistic education to prepare students for the future is a critical role that schools alone cannot achieve. *Contact* finds out how some schools build meaningful partnerships with parents to garner support for this journey. By Chen Jingting

In an African village tradition, bringing up a child is a communal responsibility. Besides the parents, the child's extended family and even his neighbours have roles to play in his well-being. Hence the ancient African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child".

Similarly, "We will need community support to allow students to take part in meaningful activities and to learn useful life-skills. Such a partnership (with parents and community partners) is even more important as we focus on values and holistic education, because these

objectives cannot be achieved by schools alone," said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat at the work plan seminar last year.

Parents are also better informed now and wish to get more involved in their children's progress in school, says Mr Lim

Sin Heng, Vice-principal of Fairfield Methodist Secondary.

Fairfield has a long tradition of giving parents autonomy in running programmes for students. Case in point: the school's T-Zone is a student hub



of the school and committee's efforts to connect with them.

#### LEADING THE ENGAGEMENT

School leaders set the tone when it comes to working with parents, says Mrs Phua. In 1999, when then-principal S Manogaran set up the ParentConnection Committee, he advocated an open door policy with parents, providing them the avenue to be engaged in the school's activities. From then on, subsequent principals actively engage parents in open dialogue sessions, giving them an "insider's perspective" on the school's focus and culture.

The result? "Parents become more empathetic towards teachers once they understand how challenging it is to educate children," says Mrs Ranjit.

At Fairfield, school leaders have a part to play in building good relations with parents. Mr Lim, who is the vice-principal, makes it a point to join the parents' monthly fellowship meetings as much as possible, where parents draw support from each other and learn parenting tips. In return, parents show appreciation to teachers by organising Thanksgiving dinners for the school management committee and counselling staff who work closely with them.

**"THERE MAY BE ISSUES FROM TIME TO TIME WITH SOME PARENTS, AND WE WILL EXPLAIN TO THEM WHAT THE SCHOOL IS TRYING TO DO..."**



**"SUCH A PARTNERSHIP (WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS) IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT AS WE FOCUS ON VALUES AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION, BECAUSE THESE OBJECTIVES CANNOT BE ACHIEVED BY SCHOOLS ALONE."**

◀ At Temasek Primary, Mrs Monica Phua (left) and Mrs Ranjit Singh (centre) work closely with parents like Ms June Tan (right) in the character education of students.

#### FAIRFIELD'S TIPS FOR TEACHERS ON RELATING WITH PARENTS

- 1) Put in effort to know students well. Being proactive in updating parents on how the child is doing in school is helpful in strengthening the trust between parents and teachers.
- 2) When there is an issue with the child, gather and establish clearly the facts of what has happened. This will ensure that you are well-prepared to engage the parent in a constructive manner rather than appearing to be defensive.
- 3) Help parents understand that the school is always concerned about the well-being of the child.
- 4) When meeting parents, discuss what is best for the child and what the child can learn from this incident.
- 5) Should the matter escalate, consult more experienced teachers, middle management and school leaders.

Mrs Ivy Tan, Chairperson of the school's parent support group says that parent volunteers do not just "provide physical labour". "At Fairfield, you can find genuine and sincere friendships (between parents and teaching staff)."

However, working with parents can be challenging for teachers, especially when some parents are demanding and unreasonable. "Younger teachers may also find it difficult to engage parents who are older," says Mrs Tan Ming Hui, Fairfield's Subject Head for Partnerships with Parents. Knowing that teachers need help, the school provides advice for teachers on relating with parents. (see sidebox). It also gets teachers who are experienced in this area to share tips during staff contact time.

Despite the challenges, collaboration is the way to go in education. "There may be issues from time to time with some parents, and we will explain to them what the school is trying to do and help them better understand our approach," says Mr Lim.

Still, schools do not have all the answers, adds Mr Lim, which is why "we listen to (parents') views and tap on their expertise." 📌

# Create a win-win situation

Pioneer Junior College's secret to successful collaborations with community partners.

Know your objectives and those of your partners' so that you can meet everyone's expectation, says Vice-principal Michael Muhunthan when asked what makes meaningful and sustainable partnerships between the school and its external stakeholders.

Since 2006, the college has been actively collaborating with community partners on developing work competencies in students and fulfilling its vision of "nurturing committed learners and compassionate leaders".

For instance, when the ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands held opening exhibitions on the theme of China last year, it approached the college to conduct workshops for museum visitors, knowing that students and teachers of the college had designed an educational board game on China.

Aware that the museum's goal was to attract crowds, besides ensuring that students were able to play and teach the game well, "the college conducted workshops to train students on how to carry themselves well and engage the public," says HOD of Humanities William Chan.

As a result, a win-win situation was created – the museum attracted visitors while the college used the opportunity as a platform to develop its students' communication and leadership skills.

#### A RACE AGAINST TIME

The road to success is not easy. Many times, Mr Chan had to be "thick-skinned" to look out for potential organisations

to work with. Mrs Natasha Tay, the college's Subject Head for Student Development, also needed to take rejections in her stride as not all organisations she approached were willing to work with the school.

But the biggest challenge the school faced so far? Finding time to meet the external partners.

"The teachers and school leaders are busy. The partners are also busy. But we still have to meet face-to-face to understand each other and state our objectives clearly. If you have clarity in what you are doing, many potential conflicts can be avoided," says Mr Muhunthan.

In addition, various issues are discussed – the curriculum calendar, scope of the work and timeframe of the projects, to name a few. Such extensive planning would probably have to take about a year, says Mrs Tay.

The workload of teachers is also a key concern. "The school management needs to be aware of the teachers' overall workload. While we push forward (with projects involving partners), we make sure that teachers do not get overloaded with work," says Mr Muhunthan.

Despite the challenges, teachers believe that they benefit from such partnerships too. "I personally feel that engaging external

stakeholders will help teachers in their professional development. They get to see the relevance of their teaching in the real world," says Mrs Tay.

Mr Chan, adding that there are experienced teachers to mentor their younger colleagues on managing the partnerships, concludes: "Teachers can no longer work in silos." 📌

**"I personally feel that engaging external stakeholders will help teachers in their professional development. They get to see the relevance of their teaching in the real world."**

▼ RJC staff (from left: Ms Alice Seah, Dean of Character Development, Mrs Natasha Tay, Mr William Chan and Mr Michael Muhunthan) have a go at "The Middle Kingdom Race", a board game on China designed by teachers and students of the school.







# Educating parents

On 19 November 2011, MOE and primary schools in Jurong conducted an outreach seminar at Corporation Primary School for parents so they could learn more about primary school education. By Nazurah Sa'ad



Pupils from Jurong West Primary showed off their handmade puppets.



Teachers and students from Corporation Primary showcased their green efforts exhibit, such as egg trays which had been reused as object holders.



Photos of activities conducted in school and colourful drawings made up Lakeside Primary School's booth.

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO SAY

### PARENTS

"The booths set up by different schools during this event are very good as they help me to know about different Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) offered by the schools which may interest my son."

– Mdm Tang Jiang, 37

"(The seminar) has been helpful because I was initially clueless about primary school education. I am also impressed with how the students are able to explain their booths when the teachers are not around."

– Mdm Sherry Sarafina, 39

"I feel that the Q&A session should be longer because it was too short. It should be extended to about 15 minutes more, so there will be more questions."

– Mr Aric Leow, 35

"I find the seminar quite helpful especially the Q&A session. The booths give me exposure to the kind of activities the schools conduct."

– Mdm Anjali, 30

### TEACHERS/SCHOOL LEADERS

"We had a lot of support from MOE which made planning for this event easier. Each school showcases two niche programmes and we ensure that no two programmes are the same. This seminar is a good approach to reach out to parents."

– Mdm Vini D Sambwani,  
Principal of Corporation Primary School

"It took us a few months to collaborate with three different CCAs for the booths. I find that all the hard work is definitely worth it because it feels very satisfying to be able to reach out to parents."

– Mdm Nur Wani Yaacob,  
Teacher of Lakeside Primary School

"All the hard work was definitely worth it based on the positive response from parents."

– Mr Kwek Khiok Chai,  
HOD of CCA, Xingnan Primary School

"It's good that parents are able to see what their children will be exposed to in the schools."

– Miss Charlene Zheng,  
Teacher from Juying Primary School



Mdm Vini D Sambwani, Principal of Corporation Primary School, shared on the primary education system.



Principals from participating schools engaged parents in a Question and Answer (Q&A) session.



A parent using the opportunity to ask the panel of principals about primary school education.



Informational materials on primary education were given out to parents during the seminar.



Children enjoyed art activities in a classroom while their parents participated in the seminar.



Parents enjoyed performances by students of Corporation Primary School.



Parents were greeted by the graceful moves of pupils from Corporation Primary School's Chinese Dance group.

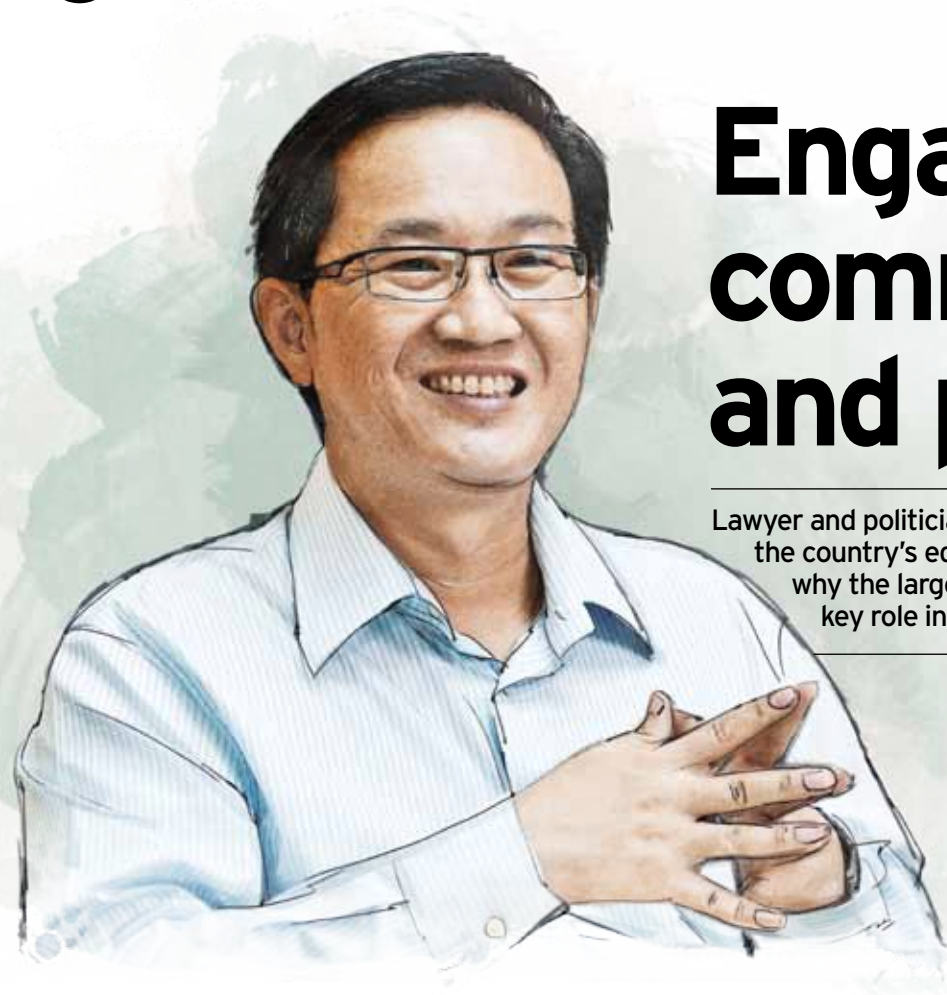


Corporation Primary pupils performed a drum piece with the theme "carnival".



Principals from participating schools showed their appreciation of the performances.





# Engaging the community and parents

Lawyer and politician Lim Biow Chuan has a stake in the country's education system and he explains why the larger community and parents play a key role in shaping it. By Wong Sher Maine

When Lim Biow Chuan, 48, entered politics in 2006, the lawyer was quick to talk about something close to his heart in Parliament: The importance of imbuing life values in children.

Five years on, when new Education Minister Heng Swee Keat recently spoke about values and character education taking centrestage at the ministry's annual workplan seminar, Mr Lim was heartened. "I was terribly happy about that," he candidly admits. "I have always believed that children can be the brightest, but simply being bright is not enough. One also needs values like loyalty, humility and selflessness."

Mr Lim counts Mr Heng's speech on values as one of the high points of his role as chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee (Education), which he had volunteered to join straight after he entered politics.

Mr Lim, who is also a member of COMPASS (COMMunity and PARENTs in Support of Schools), says: "I have a stake in what happens in the educational arena." He clearly wants to make his roles – in COMPASS and the GPC – count.

## REACHING OUT

The GPC provides feedback to the government on education policies and over the years, the 11 members of parliament which make up the

GPC (Education) have asked pointed questions on a variety of issues, from the mother tongue policy to pre-school education.

The GPC is a committee of sorts, he says, to "raise the concerns of (parents) and members of the public." MOE meets with GPC members several times a year to brief them on key MOE policies, and to hear from the GPC members on ground sentiment.

*I have always believed that children can be the brightest, BUT SIMPLY BEING BRIGHT IS NOT ENOUGH. One also needs values like loyalty, humility and selflessness.*

On the GPC's radar are issues ranging from increasing admissions in the local universities to stress in the school system, and what he calls the "inordinate amount of tuition" that parents subject their children to.

Many of these issues are gleaned by GPC members when they meet parents. And Mr Lim is very much in the know as his role as COMPASS member sees him regularly getting together with parents to talk and discuss issues.

In his chats with parents, he finds that many are concerned with stress in the education system, and related issues like tuition. While he empathises, he is quick to point out that communication is a two-way process and he sometimes takes the opportunity to put forth MOE's key messages.


"COMPASS is not a complaints forum," explains Mr Lim. "For instance, parents sometimes give feedback about tuition stress and I find that I have to share the perspective that stress comes from parents rather than MOE. We have to give a balanced view," he said.

In addition to organising regular dialogue sessions, COMPASS holds an annual convention where MOE provides information to attending parents on issues like cyber wellness. COMPASS members also visit schools where they can meet parents, and learn more about what each school is doing to reach out to even more parents.

Mr Lim also mentions the Partners Award, which is presented by COMPASS and which recognises efforts made by schools in promoting and strengthening collaborative partnerships with their stakeholders.

He says: "It is important that schools do not exist in isolation, but involve the wider community and parents in teaching the children."

Efforts to engage more parents in education are working. He notes: "At some school-based events I attended, it is heartening to see that there were many parents, not always from the Parent Support Groups, who turned up."

As the parent of two girls aged 10 and 12, he is involved in their school's Parent Support Group as the legal advisor. "As a parent myself, it's very important to me how the educational system develops." 

## ABOUT COMPASS

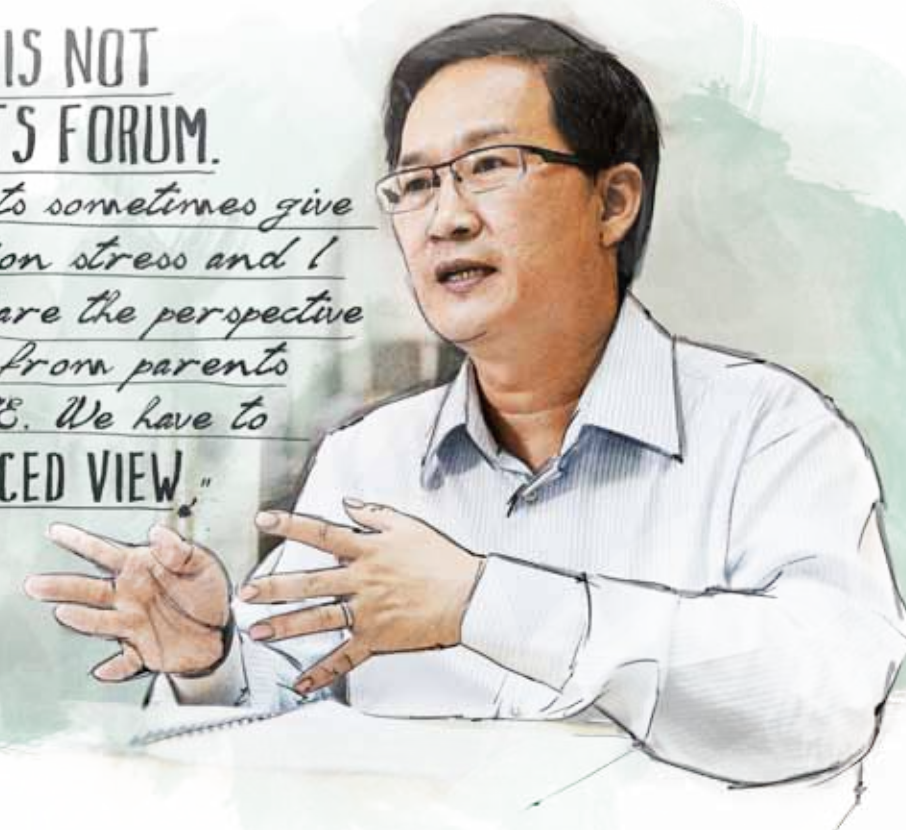
COMPASS (COMMunity and PARENTs in Support of Schools) was established in December 1998 to advise MOE on ways to strengthen and promote home-school-community collaborations.

It draws its members from the various stakeholders representing parents, self-help groups, alumni and the business community.

## ABOUT GPC (EDUCATION)

Government Parliamentary Committees (GPCs) were established in 1987 to examine the policies, programmes and proposed legislation of a particular government ministry, provide the ministry with feedback and suggestions, and is consulted by the ministry on issues of public interest.

**"COMPASS IS NOT A COMPLAINTS FORUM."**  
*For instance, parents sometimes give feedback about tuition stress and I find that I have to share the perspective that stress comes from parents rather than MOE. We have to GIVE A BALANCED VIEW."*





# Inspiring ideas for 2012

If your New Year resolution is to be an even better teacher, then tap into the expertise and experiences of these award-winning teachers as they share their strategies for building rapport with students, teaching more effectively and juggling multiple responsibilities. By Nur'Ain Zainuddin and Nazurah Sa'ad



## Creating AN INSPIRING classroom environment

### THE STRATEGIST

Mr Syed Faisal, a Humanities teacher at Greendale Secondary School, was awarded the Outstanding Youth in Education Award. His motto: "One student, one strategy, one change at a time."

### HOW HE DOES IT

#### 1. Know your students' attitudes towards subjects

A strategy may work in one class but fail in another. Mr Syed surveys his classes to find out students' attitudes towards Humanities subjects. He then devises strategies based on the survey findings.

#### 2. Encourage peer teaching

Get students to do pair work so that they can discuss what has been taught in class and support each other in their learning. Mr Syed usually pairs the academically weaker students with their stronger peers.

#### 3. Get students to own their learning

Assign students to put up presentations and try their hand at peer-teaching, which motivates students to make the extra effort to deepen their understanding of the content.

#### 4. Remember the human touch

Be there for your students. For instance, during the O-level period, even late into the night, Mr Syed will still try to respond to his students' text messages asking for help in their revision.

## STRENGTHENING the student-teacher rapport

### THE STRATEGIST

Mdm Salha Bte Mohamed Hussain is the Head of Department of Malay Language at Regent Secondary School. A teacher for 22 years, she won the Arif Budiman Teacher Award (Role Model) in 2011.

### HOW SHE DOES IT

#### 1. Step into the students' comfort zone

There is no better way to stay in touch with students than through text messages and Facebook. Mdm Salha says: "Students express themselves better through these communication modes."

#### 2. Respect them

Let them know your expectations of them and, in exchange, listen to their opinions. Respect your students and they, in turn, will respect you.

#### 3. Encourage questions

Create a classroom environment where students are not afraid to voice their views and air their doubts. You may consider the Cooperative and Collaborative Learning method which Mdm Salha adopts in her lessons.

#### 4. Know your students

In the first weeks of school, chat with students to know them better. This can help you develop different teaching strategies suited to each student, reducing off-task classroom behaviour which might disrupt the learning process.

## JUGGLING multiple roles

### THE STRATEGIST

Mr Chong Jack Sheng is a Biology teacher and the Head of Department of Character & Citizenship Education at Woodlands Ring Secondary School. He is also the Lower Secondary Academic Head and supervises untrained and Beginning Teachers. The recipient of the President's Award for Teachers believes that leading, caring and inspiring others are essential components of teaching – one cannot do without the other.

### HOW HE DOES IT

#### 1. Know why you do what you do

Juggling various roles can be challenging, but you need to know and believe in their value to other people. Mr Chong makes it a point to reflect constantly by setting aside some "me-time" at the beginning and end of a day, either by taking a walk or jogging.

#### 2. Set clear goals

Determine your targets for the day, week, or that project. Stick to your goals.

#### 3. Build good relationships with colleagues

In today's workplace, it is almost impossible to do an excellent job without collaboration.

#### 4. Find a confidante

When the going gets tough, talk to a mentor or a trusted friend. In Mr Chong's case, that would be his wife.

#### 5. Believe that things will work out

Even if they do not, failure may not be a bad thing if it helps you learn lessons that will enhance your experience as a teacher, says Mr Chong.



## Teaching MTL effectively

### THE STRATEGISTS

Mr Abdul Nasser Ahmed Mitten, a senior teacher at Millennia Institute, won the Most Inspiring Tamil Teacher Award while Inspiring Chinese Language Teacher Award recipient Chong Lay Khim has been teaching Chinese Language at Raffles Girls' Primary for three years, and is known for using games and technology to help her students learn better.

### HOW THEY DO IT

#### 1. Take advantage of students' love for games

Ms Chong plays the following game in her Primary 5 class:

- Whenever she starts a new passage, she gets her class to read it and remember words they do not know.
- Later, she flashes sentences from the passage but with missing words (usually the words are those that are unfamiliar to students) on a PowerPoint presentation.
- Students are required to write the missing words on white boards. The first few who get the right answers win a prize.

#### 2. Adopt the 'PEEL' framework

'PEEL' stands for Point, Elaboration, Evidence and Linking Back, and is a useful guideline to help students develop their MTL essays. Expose students to different genres of essay writing (narrative, argumentative) and ensure they get sufficient practice before the examinations.

#### 3. Mind the vocabulary

Vocabulary building is a major area of concern in MTL. It is not just about knowing the meaning of the words but also knowing the context in which they are used. Mr Nasser and his Tamil teachers wrote Tamil articles where key words were identified for students to find the contextual meanings.

#### 4. Make use of technology

Ms Chong records her students' descriptions of line drawings in Mandarin to help them improve in the oral component of the CL examination. She believes that the audio files allow students to listen to themselves speak and help them learn from their weaknesses.

## Seek TO BE inspired

### THE STRATEGIST

Ms Anna Matthew teaches at Si Ling Secondary School. In her four-and-a-half years as an educator, she has won several awards like the NIE-Exxon Mobil Caring Teacher Award. She is also the recipient of the Inspiring Teacher of English Award in 2011. How does she keep herself motivated and inspired?

### HOW SHE DOES IT

#### 1. Find meaning in teaching

What gives you a sense of purpose as a teacher? Ms Matthew found that in her Christian faith.



#### 2. Find your cheerleader

When the going gets tough Ms Matthew turns to her father. When her students are being difficult, he never fails to remind her that students are after all children and should be treated with care and kindness.

#### 3. Learn from former teachers

Our teachers always leave an impression on us. Ms Matthew learnt the importance of investing time and effort in students from her teacher, Ms Tan Lee Choo. She also picks up pointers from Mrs Ong, her English Teacher, who made lessons fun and engaging by sharing humorous anecdotes and personal experiences.

#### 4. Share resources with fellow teachers

Get help from your colleagues, especially the more experienced ones, who can also give you invaluable advice and support.

#### 5. Find inspiration in your students

Teachers can be motivated by their students too. Knowing how her students struggle to overcome many difficulties from a tender age spurs Ms Matthew to work even harder to teach them well.







# New discoveries

Work attachments offer opportunities to broaden perspectives and enrich your professional development. Three colleagues stepped out of their comfort zones during their attachments and share what they learnt.

By Ming Lee

**SHIREEN LEE**  
allied educator (counseling)  
Hong Wen School

Mdm Shireen Lee is a participant in the TWA customised art programme, co-organised by W4 Art Project Team and Academy of Singapore Teachers. She may have lacked confidence in her artistic ability but that did not stop her desire to learn how Art is used in counselling work in the Arts in Therapy module.

"I enjoyed the Art in Therapy module," Mdm Lee says. "I liked the hands-on session and the sharing by the participants on their art pieces. The debriefing and explanation by the facilitators gave me a deeper understanding and confidence in

"TWA was an enriching and fulfilling experience because I got out of my comfort zone to explore areas in the arts and digital worlds...I learnt and discovered new things at my own pace."

exploring and using music, drawing and painting in my counselling work."

For 2012, she is planning and conducting a workshop for the School Family Education programmes. Known as "Art for Bonding", it aims to improve bonding between pupils and their parents.

Mdm Lee is collaborating with LASALLE College of the Arts for Hong Wen's Career Guidance Week – she has already invited

a professional artist and senior lecturer at LASALLE's Faculty of Fine Arts to speak to graduating pupils. In the pipeline too, is a Learning Journey to the institution for students who are interested in pursuing a career in performing and fine arts.

Mdm Lee says: "TWA was an enriching and fulfilling experience because I got out of my comfort zone to explore the arts and digital worlds...I learnt and discovered new things at my own pace."



**NORZALINA BTE BOHARI**  
teacher  
Coral Secondary School

After 20 years as an educator, Ms Norzalina knew she wanted to try something new so she decided to participate in the Teachers' Work Attachment (TWA).

For 10 weeks from July to September, she took Enhanced Professional Development leave, and attended a customised art programme that comprised the following:

- Art in Therapy and TWA at KK Women's and Children's Hospital
- Information & Communications Technology and TWA at Microsoft and Singapore Technology Innovation Centre
- Arts Experiments – Digital Art: Film Production, Basic Photography and Editing & Photoshop
- Arts Appreciation through TWA at Arts Institutes and Centres – Yuan Ching Secondary School (Recycled Art), LASALLE College of the Arts and art museum visits
- Sharing and Reflection – presentation to other teachers who want to sign up for the same TWA



One of Ms Norzalina's most memorable moments during her stint at KK Women's and Children's Hospital was being a part of its Ward Entertainment team to befriend young patients.

"It was a very rewarding experience because I could bring some cheer to others. I met a 10-year-old girl who was warded for a few days. She shared with me about her school and family. I felt very touched when she told me she was very happy that I had been there with her," she recalls.

"It was a very rewarding experience because I could bring some cheer to others."

Meeting like-minded teachers – and becoming good friends with them – also made TWA especially enjoyable for Ms Norzalina. Without having to worry about deadlines for lesson plans, everyone could focus on learning, she adds. And as soon as she can, she plans to introduce film production and photography as part of a digital art module for her students.

**CLARABELLE CHU**  
administration manager  
CHIJ Our Lady of the Nativity

The term "whistle blowing" took on a new meaning for Ms Clarabelle Chu during her work attachment at the Centre of Educational Development (CED) at Republic Polytechnic (RP).

"The CED is an official online avenue for staff to report misconduct of colleagues. But it doesn't require the whistle blower to meet face-to-face with his superiors, unless more information is needed," she shares.

"People may think that whistle blowing will get them into trouble with their superiors but I feel that this helps to make the school a fair, safe and honest environment to work in."

Ms Chu's three-week stint, from mid June to early July, also coincided with the publicity preparations for the 3rd International Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Symposium in 2012. Apart from designing the web page, collating and updating the contact database and identifying potential



"People may think that whistle blowing will get them into trouble with their superiors but I feel that this helps to make the school a fair, safe and honest environment to work in."

sponsors, she had the opportunity to experience the concept of problem-based learning, the key teaching pedagogy at RP.

She was also especially impressed by the paperless environment and its "laptop-

on-the-go" culture: "You can check emails wherever you are. Staff at RP use MediaRing in school so calls are directed to their mobile phone."

She concedes that going totally paperless at schools may not be possible due to various constraints, but she already has a few ideas.

"The Human Resource Management System is a good platform to start. Staff can submit leave applications/medical certificates to the principal online. Information is stored electronically and efficiently. We can also tap on Google in Outlook Access or Icon to share documents and calendars online to reduce the costs and hassle of printing."



# Are parents or teachers responsible for the child's character building?

## •TEACHERS•

**Tham Hanrong**  
Teacher  
National Junior College

With a rise in the standard of living over the past decades, an unhealthy spirit of materialism has crept into our society. It comes as no surprise that many have complained about the lack of morals, character and values in impressionable youngsters. Many parents lament that they are unable to communicate with their children and that their children are often spending long hours in front of the computer doing school work, on social networking sites, or immersed in computer games.

While I do acknowledge that it takes a whole village to raise a child, much has been said about the crucial role that teachers play in developing a child's character. As an educator, I know full well that I can never replace the role of a parent. Character development ideally is a shared responsibility between the parents, school and society. Many parents may not realise that children are intuitive and that they can pick up negative attitudes from parents' daily actions and conversations.

Schools offer a safe and controlled environment for teachers to model correct behaviour and values. It also provides many platforms such as CCAs and school activities for students to practice and discover the importance of values such as team work, mutual respect and resilience. While teachers cannot control the negative influences that our students are exposed to everyday, we certainly are in full control over how we interact with our own students. For some students, in a society that is constantly bombarded with negative influences from the internet, mass media and popular culture, the school may be the only opportunity where positive values and attitudes may be transferred to them.



## •PARENTS•

**Nafisah bte Md Ma'mun Suheimi**  
MOE Parent Ambassador

It's often been said that parents are a child's first teacher. As parents, we have a key role in forming the attitudes of our children. Parents are key influencers whose actions help children understand that everything we do impacts others.

In daily interactions with our children, we give them their first glimpses of values such as honesty, generosity, fairness, respect and courage by virtue of our actions. The most powerful and lasting lessons about character are taught when the price of doing the right thing is high. Building character and inculcating positive values is not an academic undertaking and needs to be relevant to the lives and experiences of our children.

Character development should be active and involve children in real decision-making that has real consequences, such as teaching responsibility through taking care of a pet or budgeting and managing an allowance. These are 'teachable' moments which come alive in our daily interactions with our children.

When we give our children love, affirmation, moral guidance and have the courage to discipline them, children see a world that makes sense, feel secure and the bonds of trust grow strong. Shaping attitudes and influencing character are lifelong and conscious processes that have to begin at home.

# Developments in the year ahead

The Ministry of Education re-organises the professional wing and introduces a new initiative to improve the delivery of holistic and values-driven education, and encourage the deepening of professional expertise amongst teachers.

## STUDENT DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM DIVISION (SDCD)



- Opportunities to co-create a new Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum with SDCD, comprising a core national curriculum and complemented by school-specific curriculum and experiential programmes
- Enhanced guidance for physical and sports education
- Enhanced guidance for arts education

## NEW DIVISION

## NEW OFFICES

## PROGRAMME COORDINATION OFFICE (PCO)



Enhance the coordination and integration of initiatives within MOE, and maintain oversight of school policies and governance



Greater support from PCO in prioritisation and pacing of initiatives within MOE for schools' implementation

## PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION OFFICE (PEO)



Enhance constructive engagement of parents and consultation on education issues



Greater support from the PEO in parent engagement efforts and establishing community networks

## NEW INITIATIVE

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (CCE) CURRICULUM



Inculcate values and build competencies in our pupils to develop them into good individuals and useful citizens



- The hardcopy of the CCE toolkit, which aims to guide school leaders, heads of department and teachers in the planning and delivery of CCE in schools. It includes the CCE Learning Outcomes (LOs); the "Values, Knowledge and Skills" needed to achieve the LOs; key considerations, strategies and resources for effective implementation of CCE in the school, as well as good practices of some schools in implementing CCE.

- Support from CCE Branch, which will include consultancy and guidance on using the CCE Toolkit for the planning and delivery of the CCE in schools
- The new CCE Syllabus at the end of 2012. It will emphasise the core values, social and emotional as well as 21st Century competencies and skills that are critical for character and citizenship development of our pupils.
- New instructional materials to support the syllabus, which will be introduced to schools in phases from 2014 onwards





# Daily occupational hazards

Ignore them at your own risk.

By Nur'Ain Zainuddin



## 1. HEAR ME ROAR

Do you often raise your voice or cough loudly to get your students' attention? Caution: you are at risk of mechanical laryngitis – a condition where your vocal chords become strained and inflamed.

### TIPS

- Instead of raising your voice to get the attention of your students, use a clapper or a whistle.
- Use visual cues such as a traffic light flip chart. For instance, green represents "talk", yellow stands for "whisper" and red means "stop talking".



## 2. TOUGH TO STOMACH

Skipping meals on a regular basis results in excessive stomach acid that could lead to gastric pains. These symptoms may follow – abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting or a burning feeling in the upper abdomen.

### TIPS

- Set an alarm as a reminder to tear yourself away from work and head to the canteen.
- Eat breakfast, even if it is just a slice of bread with jam. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.
- Pack lunch from home or keep some healthy snacks for a quick bite. This stops your stomach from churning nasty acids.



## 3. UNHAPPY FEET

Teachers are always walking briskly between classes and the staff room, and climbing up and down stairs, thus subjecting their feet to much physical pressure and stress. Standing for a long time could also develop varicose veins – swollen, twisted and painful veins filled with an abnormal amount of blood. Ill-fitting shoes can also compound the pressure and stress on your feet.

### TIPS

- Get orthopaedic footwear or insoles (retailing at shoe shops for about S\$25).
- Before each class, stretch your feet and wriggle your toes to relax muscles and joints.
- Soak your feet in warm water with a dash of peppermint oil or bath salts, or massage your feet with a refreshing foot cream.



## 4. SLEEPLESS IN SINGAPORE

If you often burn the midnight oil, your brain may not function optimally or you may experience blurred vision. To stay in top form, you can start making changes to your sleeping routine by sleeping for at least seven hours every night, and try to be asleep by about the same time each night.

### TIPS

- Sticking to a fixed bedtime is good for children and teachers too! Set the alarm on your phone to remind you that it's time to get some beauty sleep.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.



## 5. THAT'S A STRETCH

If you feel a sharp stab of pain in your shoulder joints or upper arms when you stretch to write on the whiteboard or to reach for objects on high shelves, you could be suffering from a strained shoulder.

### TIPS

- Massage your upper arms and shoulders whenever you have time to spare.
- Offering to knead your colleague's shoulders to ease the aches and pains is also a great way to promote staff bonding!



## 6. HEAVYWEIGHT WOES

Sitting in the same position for hours marking homework could leave you with a throbbing headache at best or a lower back pain at worse. Carrying heavy items like laptops can cause lower back pain too. In serious cases, you may even injure your spine and nerves.

### TIPS

- When lifting heavy objects from the ground, bend your knees and not your back. Make sure your feet are a shoulder-width apart. As you lower yourself to the ground and come up again, keep your back straight by looking upwards.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes twice a week and work in stretches for your back muscles.





# Food to stay in the pink

Anytime you feel unable to perform at your peak is frustrating, and it is worse when you have a packed schedule. *Contact* puts together the "Essential Food Kit" that will keep you perky and stave off common ailments. By Nazurah Sa'ad

## SOY BEAN

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

Soy products are high in protein which helps to keep muscles and joints healthy.

### EAT IF...

You are bothered by muscle aches.

### GET IT FROM...

Soy products are everywhere. Down a packet of soya milk between classes, or have a bowl of smooth beancurd for breakfast.

## MUSHROOM

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

Mushrooms are a rich source of the nutrient, riboflavin.

### EAT IF...

You suffer from migraine. Riboflavin increases the energy reserves in brain cells helping to relieve and prevent migraines.

### CREATIVE WAYS TO EAT ...

Add sliced shiitake mushrooms to an omelette, prepare a portobello mushroom sandwich for lunch or have a bowl of creamy mushroom soup.

## HONEY LEMON DRINK

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

Lemon, a citrus fruit, is high in vitamin C, while honey has anti-bacterial properties and is full of anti-oxidants.

### EAT IF...

You have a sore throat. Lemons help to reduce the mucus in the throat while honey fights the irritating "ahems".

### HOW TO PREPARE...

Place two tablespoons of honey and one-and-a-half tablespoons of lemon juice into a large mug. Pour boiling water into the mug and mix well.

## AVOCADO

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

Avocado is rich in several nutrients including monounsaturated fat.

### EAT IF...

You suffer frequent memory lapses. The monounsaturated fat in avocados helps to maintain high levels of blood flow to the brain and thus, improves and preserves your memory.

### CREATIVE WAYS TO EAT IT...

Avocados are delicious enough to eat on their own. But if you would like more variety, mash ripe avocado to make a yummy avocado spread or prepare an avocado milkshake by scooping out the flesh of the fruit into a blender and adding milk and honey. Drink it chilled.

## STRAWBERRY

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

Strawberries are high in vitamin C and because they are just so delicious.

### EAT IF...

You dread getting the flu. Vitamin C shortens the duration of the common flu and strengthens your immune system.

### CREATIVE WAYS TO EAT IT...

Add strawberries to other citrus fruits such as oranges and kiwis to make a refreshing fruit salad. Or, substitute a meal with strawberry milkshake.

## BANANA

### IT'S GOOD BECAUSE...

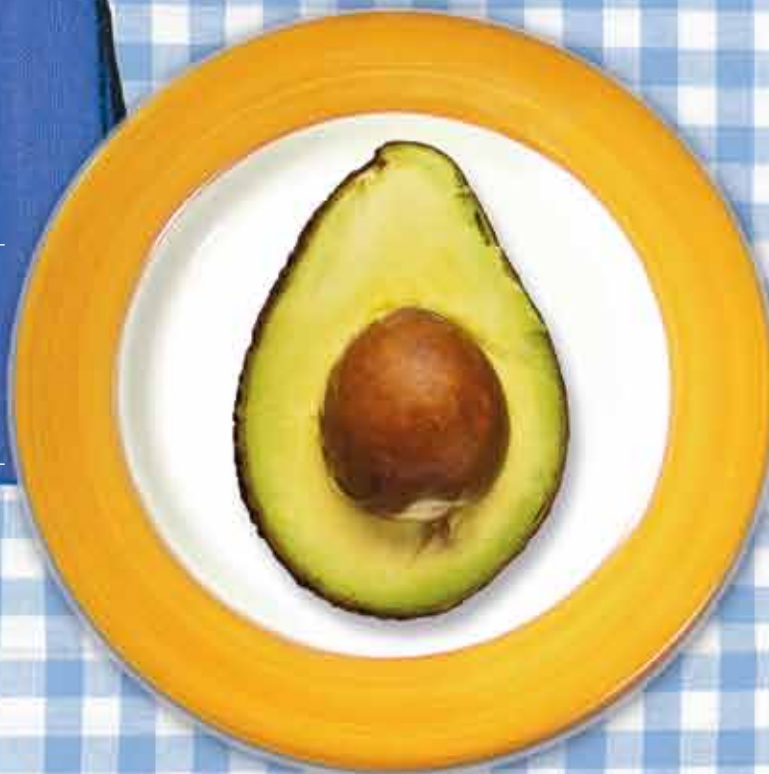
Bananas contain vitamin B and tryptophan which produces serotonin, a neuro-transmitter that influences mood, behaviour, memory and learning, among other things.

### EAT IF...

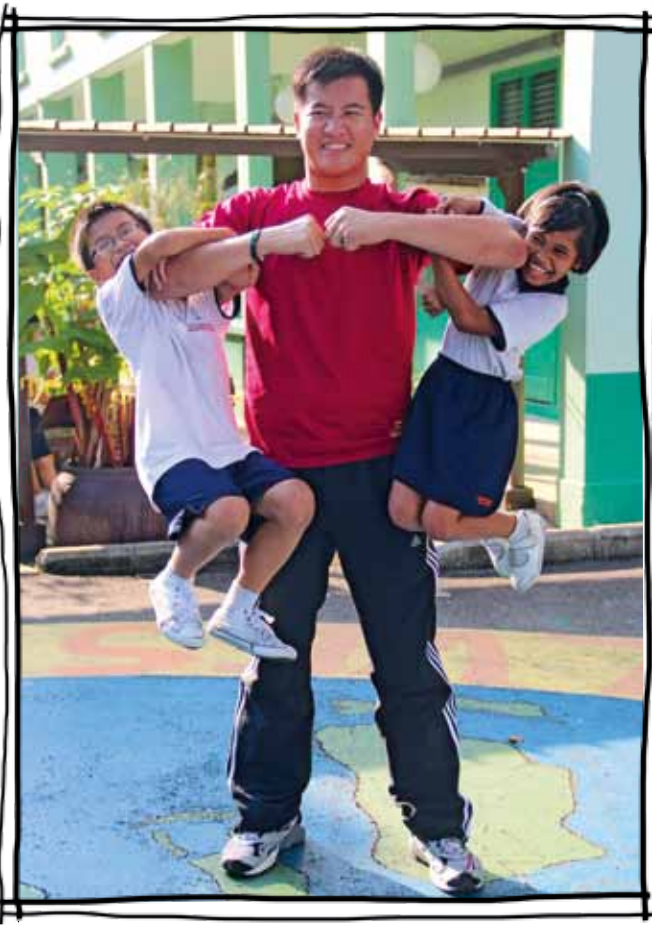
You are under stress or feeling low. Serotonin helps the body to cope with anxiety and stress, and enhances your mood.

### CREATIVE WAYS TO EAT IT...

Add banana slices to your bowl of cereal, or eat it on its own as a healthy snack.







**CONTRIBUTOR:**  
**Miss Agnes Chow,**  
HOD PE/CCA, Cantonment Primary School

Thank you Mr Jonah Ang [AED (LBS)] for ensuring that our pupils reach new heights!



## NEXT THEME: "QUIRKY WORK STATIONS"

*Contact* is on the lookout for quirky or simply glamorous work stations that love basking in the limelight. Whether it's your own or your colleague's, snap a picture of the proud owner and work station, send it to us and stand a chance to win attractive prizes!

### INSTRUCTIONS

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



## "OUR UNSUNG HEROES"

### WINNING ENTRIES FOR OCTOBER

Thank you for sending us photos of your heroes.  
Winners get to enjoy \$30 worth of CapitaVouchers.



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Our OSOs, Mdm Chiang and Uncle Nasir, always ready to lend a helping hand.

**CONTRIBUTOR:**  
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EAS, Naval Base Secondary School

Thank you to our team of EAS and AED staff for working hand in hand and standing by one another!



Ministry of Education  
SINGAPORE

