

CONTACT

The Teachers' Digest

GREAT TEACHING STARTS FROM LEARNING


Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching on the importance of training.

TAKING SHOTS AT LIFE

Art teachers offer a glimpse into their world through their photos.

OFF TO A GOOD START

What does it take to establish a school? Principals tell us.



Lift off to a great year ahead!

*Educators share their
exciting plans for students
and themselves in 2015*

*We have a new look!
See what else
has changed
inside!*

Contents

02



16 Feature

Off to a good start

Founding principals on how they pioneered their schools.

20 Lifestyle

Spruce up your desk

Smart solutions to organise your workspace.

Inside Back Cover Capture moments with *Contact*

Winning entries this issue

Next theme: Share your DIY ideas!

Outside Back Cover

SG50 Quiz

How much do you know about our education heritage?

Put your knowledge to the test and you may be a winner!

02 Cover Story

Lift off to a great year ahead!

Educators share what makes them excited about 2015.

06 Heart to Heart

Great teaching starts from learning

Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching, Deputy Director-General of Education (Professional Development) explains why.

08 My 2 Cents

Sparking a positive chain reaction

09 FYI

Improve yourself

Strategies to reach new heights in your career.

13 Feature

Taking shots at life

Art teachers show us their world through the camera lens.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We are launching 2015 with a brand new look!

The magazine's still packed with good features to share the goings-on of our fraternity of teachers, but we are taking on a cleaner, less fussy design for a more contemporary look and feel. Also, look out for our gift to you loyal readers – a calendar with fun stickers and Haikus!

In our first cover story for the year, we talk to individuals who have made a significant difference to the lives of their colleagues and students. They share what they would like to see in 2015, whether it's more professional development opportunities, better curricula or personal breakthroughs. We hope their resolve and zeal would inspire you as much as it did us.

Besides career progression, there is another reason why teachers should never stop learning, says Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching, Deputy Director-General of Education (Professional Development). Read our special Heart to Heart feature to find out her thoughts on what sets great teachers apart.

We also talk to founding principals on their adventures in starting a school. We can certainly learn a thing or two about resourcefulness and dedication from these pioneers.

And if you're more determined than ever to advance to the next stage of your career, our "Improve yourself" FYI pull-out guide is here to help. Packed with useful tips and examples



from around the world, be sure to pick up some pointers to kick-start your training.

Don't forget to check out our photo essay that features beautiful photos taken by talented Art teachers, and the Lifestyle section for creative, affordable ways to keep your workspace organised.

Finally, how familiar are you with Singapore's education heritage? Participate in the SG50 quiz – a special feature in our 2015 issues to commemorate the nation's Jubilee – and you may just be one of our three winners!

Enjoy!

The *Contact* Team

Readers' comments

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



What strikes me about *Contact* these days is that it fleshes out the energy and passion of teachers! Reading their real stories inspires me greatly and helps me see my profession from a bigger picture. Great job!

Ms Jeanie Lee
HOD/Aesthetics
Fuchun Primary School

I find that most themes chosen for *Contact* magazine in 2014 are great and highly relevant to us, especially when they are related to things close to our hearts, like honouring our pioneers. I really enjoy reading the articles. Keep up the good work, *Contact* team!

Ms Loh Ooi Wan
HOD/Mathematics
Poi Ching School

An enriching magazine with updated news in the education system. I am glad to learn how fellow educators overcome challenges to make a difference to the students' lives.

Mr Matthew Teo
HOD/
Mother Tongue Languages
Poi Ching School

Lift off to a **great** year ahead!

2015's here, and educators are raring to make it count.
Contact finds out what they look forward to in the months to come.



Ms Ho Peng

Director-General of Education

2015 is an extraordinary year – a young nation celebrates its Jubilee! Our schools have had an instrumental role in nation-building, in forging a cohesive, progressive society. Thousands of lives

have been touched and transformed through the care and commitment of our educators. Singapore is what it is today because of this. In this special year, I look forward especially to

the continued growth and learning of our teachers. I am confident our nation will grow from strength to strength because of the strong sense of mission and purpose of our educators.

**LEAD, CARE
AND INSPIRE**
– for the future of
our nation passes
through our hands!

01

Mr Frederick Yeo

Principal
Crest Secondary School

Each school must have a critical core of subject experts to lead newer teachers. I look forward to MOE continuing to invest in the professional development of teachers on the teaching track. For a while, postgraduate study awards and scholarships have been given mainly to those on the leadership track. I think that more of such opportunities can be made available to Senior Teachers on the teaching track, so that they can grow in subject mastery.



04

Mr Krishnan Aravinthan

Principal
Spectra Secondary School

We will do better in helping students to discover their strengths and talents. For example, if a child is interested in singing, we'll try our best to find opportunities in and outside the school to develop his passion. I also hope that teachers will continue to boldly share and act on their ideas and suggestions to improve lesson delivery.



05

Mdm Nuraina Bte Mohamed Sin

Subject Head, Malay Language
Fuhua Primary School
Winner of Arif Budiman Malay
Language Teachers' Award

We'll introduce Malay Literature activities for upper primary, high progress students – they will study literature text that will encourage them to think more creatively and hence, hopefully, improve in writing. There are also enrichment lessons on journalism for all upper primary students to enhance their oratorical skills. Meanwhile, their lower primary peers will go through Malay Literature-inspired enrichment programmes where they will be exposed to folk tales through speech and drama.



Ms Audrey Lee

Master Teacher
English Language Institute of Singapore

I can't wait to go back to the classroom as a consultant and co-teacher to apply what I've learnt! Last year, while studying for my Masters in Applied Linguistics, I have been refreshed by engaging in intellectual discussions on theories and how they relate to classroom practice. In the dynamic situation of the classroom, sometimes theories may not be uppermost in a teacher's mind. But it's always good to reflect on whether lesson ideas and plans are based on sound research.

03

Mr Rahmat Bin Subadah

Master Teacher
Malay Language Centre of Singapore (MLCS)

I'd like to see more effort by schools to remind students that our achievements are possible through the sacrifices of our pioneers. I also believe I cannot do everything alone. I have my colleagues in MLCS, and other Malay Language teachers and Senior Teachers to thank for empowering our teachers, enabling our students, and enriching our curriculum. May we continue to be guided by Arif Budiman's Malay Language vision – to be a learned person who contributes to society.



06

Mrs Subramaniam TamilarasiMaster Teacher
Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre (UPTLC)

There will be new opportunities for Tamil Language (TL) educators and practitioners to deepen their professional and personal growth. For example, the Professional Development Wing at UPTLC has several programmes coming up during the Learning Festival for TL Teachers. The event features teaching and learning approaches adopted by schools, sharing of best practices and more.



07

Mrs Christine KongPrincipal
Catholic Junior College (CJC)

CJC will be celebrating its 40th anniversary. It is a great opportunity to interact with pioneer teachers and alumni of the college at various anniversary events planned for the year. We look forward to meeting former principals Sister Deirdre O Loan, fondly remembered by pioneer students for her pastoral care; Sister Maria Lau, known for her creative approach to the college upgrading programme; and Brother Paul Rogers, who connected with students well.

10

Dr Charles ChewPrincipal Master Teacher (Physics)
Academy of Singapore Teachers

I hope to see a growing fraternity of mentors who can develop their mentees to be caring and inspiring teachers who don't just teach the subject but teach students the subject. There is a subtle but significant difference. This is because the starting point for any quality teaching that leads to improved student outcomes is first understanding each student's unique SPIN - Strengths, Prior knowledge, Interests and Needs.



09

Mdm Mischa Leigh PereiraHead of Department
(English Language and Literature)
Bedok View Secondary School
Winner of Inspiring Teacher of English Language Award 2014

Educators here do not just teach to the textbook or syllabus, but also prepare students for life by equipping them with 21st Century Competencies and teaching them to be grounded in values. This is because we believe they can be citizens who have a deep love for Singapore. We also hope to expand our repertoire in the area of Differentiated Instruction to engage and meet the varied needs of our students.



I want to challenge myself in the following: read *The Da Vinci Code* (my 15-year-old son, a fan, bought the book for me), change my hairstyle of 20 years and try a new teaching method! I want to use my talent in Art in my Chinese classes. For example, when I teach a new word "苹果" (apple in Chinese), students can create the shape of the fruit using origami and paper cutting. This helps them remember the word better.

08

Mdm Dong YanSenior Teacher
Bukit Timah Primary School
Winner of Inspiring Chinese Language Teacher Award 2014

12

Mr Mohan SuppiahTamil Language Teacher
Blangah Rise Primary School
Winner of Most Inspiring Tamil Teacher Award 2014

I am really happy to be part of my school's SG50 team that will be designing a trail around Telok Blangah Hill Park, leading to Mount Faber. This will be our gift to Singapore on her 50th birthday. The trail will infuse different elements of teaching and learning. For instance, students will practise descriptive writing when observing the floral and fauna in the park. They can also exercise their narrative writing skills as they share their experiences on the trail.



11

Mr Hanif Abdul RahmanMaster Teacher
Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy

2016 will see the implementation of the final phase of the new Physical Education (PE) syllabus, and teachers will receive information on it in 2015. With that, they can get a more complete picture of how the new syllabus will develop the psychomotor skills and 21st Century Competencies of students from primary to junior college levels. Moreover, by attending Cluster PE Support Group meetings and conducting lesson observations, I hope to discover and mentor more PE teacher leaders.

14

Mr Thirumaran ThangarajuHead of Department (Mother Tongue Languages)
Woodlands Secondary School
Winner of Most Inspiring Tamil Teacher Award 2014

Last year I collaborated with nine schools to organise a Learning and Writing Symposium, where seven local authors conducted a writing workshop for the students. Since then, the students have written short stories of their own and selected ones will be collated and published into a book. During the Tamil Language Festival in April this year, the book will be launched and the students will share their experiences at a one-day forum entitled 'Our Budding Writers'.



13


Mdm Lim Chwee LianHead of Department (English Language)
Seng Kang Primary School
Winner of Inspiring Teacher of English Language Award 2014

I'd like to see schools create more platforms for students to hone their communication skills, with less emphasis on pen-and-paper assessments. Language skills are learnt through social contexts, and activities such as role-play, show-and-tell and dramatisation are so much more enjoyable and meaningful. I also applaud MOE's move towards subject specialisation in primary schools. This allows teachers to gain mastery of the subjects they teach and improve their skills.



15

Mdm Victoria LoyMaster Teacher
Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR)

Pablo Picasso once said every child is an artist. This I agree with, but only if children are given the platform to explore a variety if not all mediums and eventually find their niche. That's why I'm excited about STAR releasing its art teacher resource, the *Let's Talk Art Kit*, as well as the publication of its second monograph *Serious Play: Perspectives on Art Education* and *50 Art Lesson Ideas* to celebrate SG50. 

Great teaching starts from learning

Mrs Chua-Lim Yen Ching, Deputy Director-General of Education (Professional Development) and Executive Director of the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST), on how professional development makes a good teacher great.



Mrs Chua-Lim at AST's library. She believes that learning sets great teachers apart.

DEAR TEACHERS,

In my 26 years in education, I've always believed that if my students have not learnt well, I have not taught them well.

Years ago, I had a group of students whom I found difficult to connect with. The lessons I spent much time preparing were not well-received by them. Realising the need to be more effective in the classroom, I attended a 240-hour course on pastoral care and career counselling at the National Institute of Education (NIE). Through the course, I understood how students' social-emotional state could affect their learning and performance in the classroom.

Teaching is a skill and we need to constantly hone our craft. At the 2014 Work Plan Seminar, Minister of Education Heng Swee Keat shared his thoughts on "growing the Singapore teacher". He made a good point on providing better professional development for educators. If we are not moving forward as a learner, we will be moving backward as a teacher.

KEEP WANTING TO DO BETTER

I am very impressed by the 13 teachers who participated in the 240-hour Advanced Diploma in Teaching Early Primary School Years last year. These teachers have 15-20 years of experience on average. Yet, they have the passion and humility to want to do better at their jobs.

The NIE lecturer who conducted the course was also impressed by the enthusiasm these teachers had displayed. They were able to internalise what they had learnt and apply the theories in practice. In turn, the teachers shared with me that they found the module useful in helping them design a conducive environment for young learners.

Professional learning can take many forms. Within the schools, we have the Professional Learning Communities or PLCs – colleagues from the same department pick up pointers from and share ideas with each other. Beyond the schools we have the Network Learning Communities (NLCs) – educators who teach the same subjects, or share common interests or roles, come together to learn.

Last year, I was happy to see that for the first time, some individuals from the Normal Course NLC conducted a half-day session for first-time

If we are not moving forward as a learner, we will be moving backward as a teacher.

teachers. The response was so overwhelming that they had to do a second run.

Indeed, we have many in our midst who are hungry to learn. The ministry will do more to provide training for them.

In 2015, we will be working with NIE to conduct content-upgrading courses for English, Maths and Science at the primary level. Teachers with content mastery will be able to use the most appropriate pedagogy for different types of learners. They will also be trained in assessment literacy.


HELP ONE ANOTHER ALONG

Besides equipping ourselves, let's lend each other a hand too. Mentoring is one way to do that.

Last year, I had an opportunity to meet 2,000 Beginning Teachers at a symposium. Many of them shared how much they had benefited from the guidance of teacher leaders such as their Senior Teachers, Lead Teachers and experienced colleagues.

What we need is to grow this pool of teacher leaders to coach and mentor younger teachers. To date, we have trained Instructional Mentors (IMs) in 90 schools. In 2015, we will train IMs in another 60 schools. These IMs will be relieved of some responsibilities to give them more structured time to mentor younger teachers.

Master Teachers from the AST and the other academies will be supporting teachers through co-teaching, demo lessons and consultancy services to schools. This support is available not only to individuals teaching academic subjects, but also to those in non-academic domains like Physical Education, Music and Art.

Because we have the important task of touching lives, we ought to be serious about learning to do it well. Only then can we live up to the "great teacher" in this quote by author William Arthur Ward: "The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates and the great teacher inspires." 

Sparking a positive chain reaction

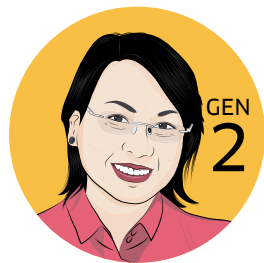
Here are a couple of mentor-mentee chains in our fraternity that track the impact of mentors over generations. Do they remind you of the influencers in your own life?

MENTORING CHAIN 1



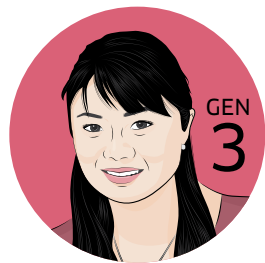
Mrs Tan Guat Kim
Retired, former Principal,
Ang Mo Kio Secondary School

Mrs Tan saw Mdm Tong Wai Han's potential and appointed her Head of Department (HOD), Science, in the early 1990s.



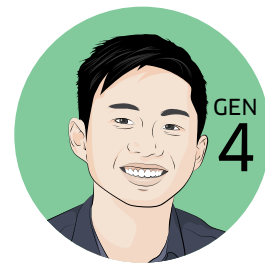
Mdm Tong Wai Han
Vice-principal
Ang Mo Kio Secondary School

Mdm Tong groomed Mdm Jessica Lew, then a Beginning Teacher in 2003, to be a Subject Head in Physics.



Mdm Jessica Lew
Acting HOD, Science
Ang Mo Kio Secondary School

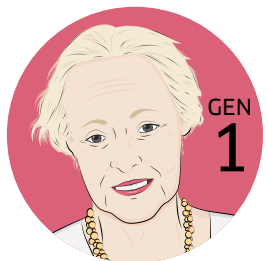
Mdm Lew mentored Mr Tan Shao Xun, an MOE Teaching Scholarship awardee, when he started teaching in June 2014.



Mr Tan Shao Xun
Beginning Teacher, Physics
Ang Mo Kio Secondary School

As a student at the same school, Mr Tan was inspired by Mdm Tong to become a teacher.

MENTORING CHAIN 2



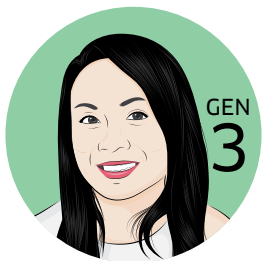
Mrs Claudette Poulrier
Retired, former sport secretary
Paya Labar Methodist Girls' School

Mrs Poulrier taught Mrs Glory Barnabas in 1955. She noticed the latter's talent in running and sent her to participate in track and field events.



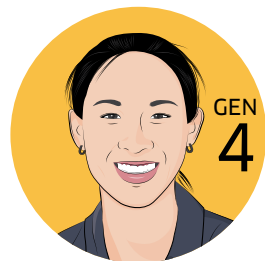
Mrs Glory Barnabas
Physical Education (PE) teacher
Springfield Secondary School

Mrs Barnabas began teaching in 1961. When she was HOD, PE at Tampines Junior College in 1994, she influenced a student, Mdm Emily Huang, to pursue her passion in sports.



Mdm Emily Huang
HOD, PE
Yishun Town Secondary School

Mdm Huang, a national triathlete, took on teaching in 2000. At CHIJ Katong Convent, she encouraged her student, Ms Dinah Chan, to join cross country races.



Ms Dinah Chan
PE teacher

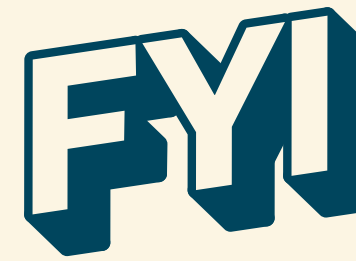
Ms Chan joined the education arena in 2010 and won Singapore's first gold medal in cycling at the 2013 Southeast Asian Games. Now she's training for the 2015 Games.

Next Issue

FORGET THE STRESS BALL

Share with us your unique way of beating the pressure at work. It can be belting out a song, chanting a personal motto, talking to your cactus... anything that works for you!

Please send your submission to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 16 February 2015. Submissions should be no more than 150 words, and these might be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school and contact number. The best sharing will be published in the April 2015 issue.



Improve yourself

Gain experience points and propel your career to the next level with these tips.

REINVENT LEARNING

Growing professionally requires one to keep up with trends. Find out how technology fuels change in and out of the classroom.

BEAT OBESITY WITH TECH

As many as 50 overweight students from a high school in Florida, USA are wearing wristbands that monitor their physical activity. The wristbands are also linked to an app that tracks their diet. These students will receive a Twitter or text message with tips on eating healthily or exercising when their activity levels drop. Instead of focusing solely on weight loss, researchers aim to inculcate healthy habits in students to reduce their risk of developing diabetes, heart diseases or other obesity-related diseases in the future.

► bit.ly/wristobese

TAI CHI WITH ROBOTS

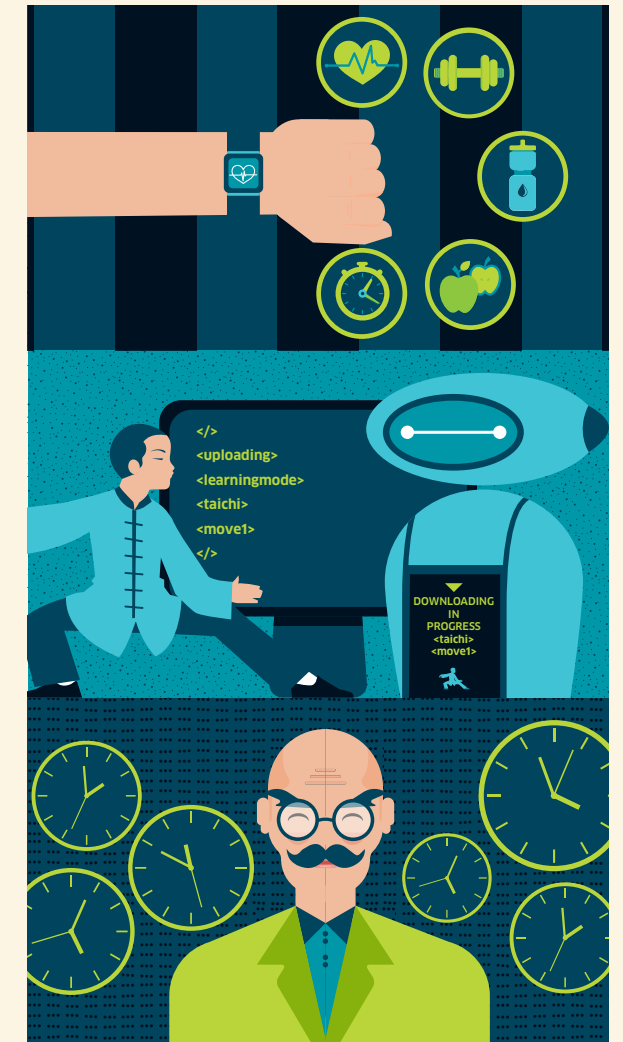
These robots can also dance to Michael Jackson songs with you at a library in Connecticut, USA, but you'd have to join their coding classes first. As part of Westport Library's plan to draw more people to venture into programming, two knee-high robots have been planted in their coding workshops and participants will be trained to 'teach' them some tricks. Need a soccer buddy? There's a code for that. Need a universal translator that can say "where's the loo?" in 19 languages? There's a code for that too. The point of it all? To make coding relevant, accessible and fun for everyone.

► bit.ly/robotlib

TAKE YOUR TIME TO BE A MASTER

Want to ace a subject at your own pace without pesky deadlines or going through lessons you already know? That's possible with competency-based learning – an approach that allows learners to decide when they want to complete a course based on their level of proficiency. What this means is that within the same time frame, a learner can take his time to master one subject, while his quicker counterpart can clear more than one course. This learner-centric method often takes place online. Whenever students feel like they have understood what they are required to know, they can take a test or work on a project to prove their competency.

► bit.ly/compLearn



CHOOSE WISELY

Here are five steps to help you pick the most suitable learning method.



Share with your Reporting Officer (RO) the competencies you are interested to hone.



Determine your strengths and the areas you wish to improve. Focus on no more than three competencies.



Discuss with your RO how these competencies can enable you to achieve your work targets.

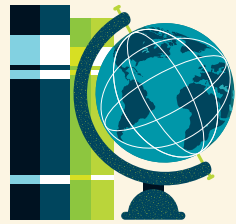


As you consider the methods to build your expertise, be bold to diversify your skills and learn something new.



Ask good questions: "What do you want to achieve?" and "How will you know if you've reached your goal?"

► Read more: bit.ly/rightpd, bit.ly/rightpd2



CHANGE HOW YOU LEARN

Lessons from initiatives around the globe.

Singapore



SHARE RESOURCES AT KOPITIAM

At Coral Secondary School, the word *kopitiam* means a lot more than coffee and toast.

What it is An online portal that enables teachers to share resources with one another.

How it works *Kopitiam* gives teachers convenient access to a common repository of documents any time. Some information shared during meetings, such as plans for school events, could be easily distributed through documents or presentation slides.

Why it's good Teachers now meet just once every month instead of twice monthly.



Canada



EVERYONE PLAYS A PART

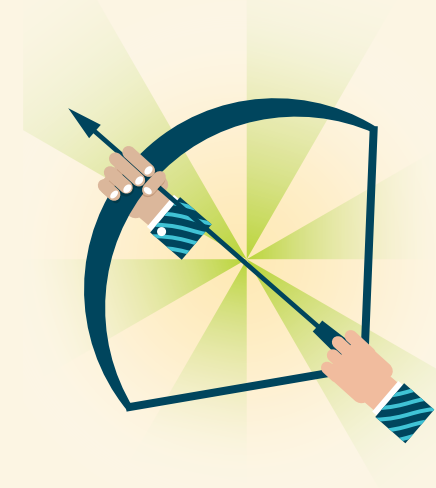
The Toronto District School Board has a way to involve more than teachers when it comes to training.

What it is The Board promotes systematic learning across three levels – Schools, Family of Schools and Districts.

How it works Development at each level focuses on global education (exploring issues of worldwide significance), metacognition (learning how to be creative) and promoting a culture of caring for students' holistic development.

Why it's good Teachers aren't the only ones to benefit. Support staff also have opportunities to grow professionally and develop leadership skills.

► bit.ly/tdsbpd



USA



TAKE CHARGE, TAKE AIM

Summit Public Schools in California have a strategy to make self-directed learners out of teachers.

What it is Teachers set their own self-improvement goals and plan how to work towards them.

How it works Four times a year, teachers are given two weeks off to meet their goals. They can learn from peers within and beyond their schools at workshops. Their goals are also open for each other to see.

Why it's good Being open with goals motivates teachers to meet their targets and urge those with similar objectives to collaborate.

► bit.ly/summitself



Cuba



CLOCK UP LEARNING MOMENTS

A policy in Cuba ensures there's always room for development.

What it is At least once every week, teachers in Cuba set aside time to upgrade themselves.

How it works Mandatory work sessions, held at the municipal level once every two weeks, see teachers honing their skills together. Courses for further education are also available.

Why it's good Further studies are not compulsory, but many choose to go for a Master's degree or other courses. Some would attempt to address their school's needs through their Master's thesis.

► bit.ly/cubateach



REAL LIFE DRAMA

After seeing how students enjoyed voice exercises in drama workshops conducted by vendors, English teachers at Bukit View Primary decided to use a similar approach to liven up the curriculum. This spurred them to attend drama training courses on their own accord. Now they apply vocal techniques (voice projection, pronunciation and tone) to develop students in language skills. "Learning is fun and engaging, and it happens in a non-threatening environment so pupils now experience more love for learning," says teacher Rose Aizashira.

"If I had to state a simple mission statement that underpins almost everything I do, it would be 'There has to be a better way' [of] constantly reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for teaching and learning."

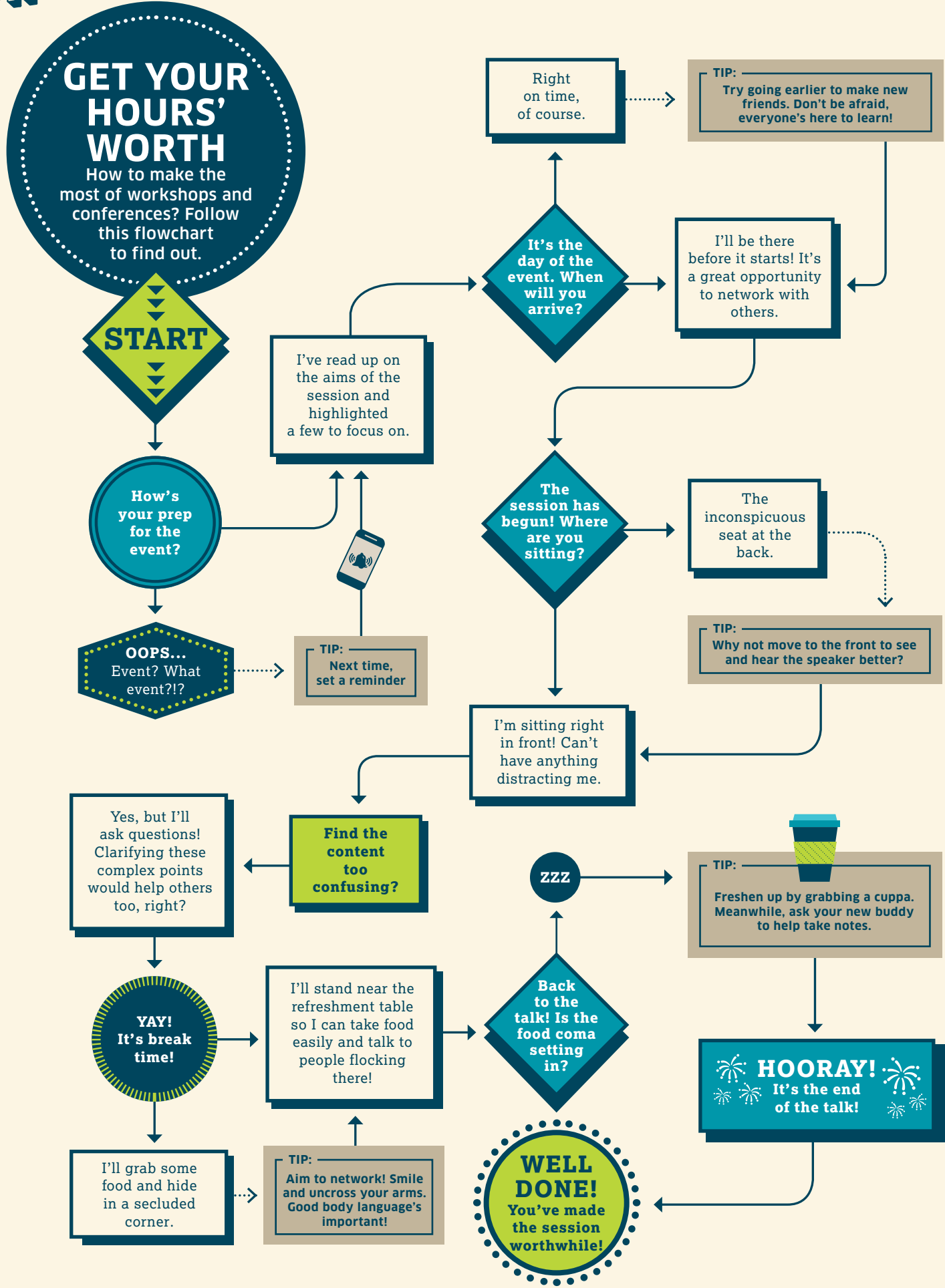
– Simon Smith, British Science teacher, Academy of Singapore Teachers' Outstanding-Educator-in-Residence (2013)

TRIVIA

Turn ignorance into strength

Teachers, don't be afraid to say "I don't know" when your students ask you questions. Use the phrase as a trigger to encourage the class to search for answers instead of depending on you to feed them all the facts. Think of it this way – you're empowering them to take charge of their learning and find out the answers for themselves.

► bit.ly/idkinternet



Taking shots at life

In June 2014, Art teachers attended a photography workshop organised by the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts and MOE's Design Branch. *Contact* invites two teachers to share their works.



01



02



03

A TRIBUTE TO THE UNSUNG HEROES

BY MR RAZALI PUASA
CHIJ ST. NICHOLAS GIRLS' SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

"[They] inspire the students. They are also the ones who work behind the scenes and ensure that the school runs smoothly without anyone realising their contributions and sacrifices."

- 01 Auntie Fanny, a bookshop vendor, often recommends good and affordable stationery to students.
- 02 School receptionist Janice Lim Soh Leng comforts a primary school student who is crying upon arrival at the school.
- 03 Operations support officers and siblings V. Poonaram (centre) and V. Thanaraj (far right) ensure students' safety on the roads.



04



05

04 The stall of Auntie Tan Siew Wah, a canteen vendor for more than 10 years, is known as the 7-Eleven of the school. Her food's ready early in the morning and she closes the stall late in the evening.

05 School cleaner Lim Ah Kim may have difficulty with walking, but that doesn't stop her from performing her duties.

06 Jie Jie (sister in Chinese) Elaine (centre), a parent volunteer, helps organise school events.



06



07

AT THAT MOMENT

BY MR CHAN GUANG HUI
WOODLANDS SECONDARY SCHOOL

"Teaching, like any profession, involves a lot of work. In our daily grind, each moment can be fraught with tension, anxiety or laughter. These photos capture particular moments in my daily work as a teacher... It is only on hindsight that that moment becomes a precious moment."

07 Md Noraiqal B Herman, 13, sticks clay pieces onto the glass bottle as part of his ceramics bottle artwork.

08 The school before assembly at around 7am.

09 Secondary 1 students at a Food & Consumer Education lesson.

10 Students Or Hai Swee, 14 (left), and Cheong Zheng Nam, 16, practise their dribbling skills during a Physical Education lesson.

11 Md Nur Hakeem, 14, cleans up at the end of an Art class.



08



09



10



11

Off to a good start

Principals share their experiences on building a school from scratch.

When it comes to setting up a new school, convincing parents to enrol their children is one task that concerns school leaders the most. After all, it demands parents to place their faith in a school with no track record (and, in some cases, no buildings) to show for.

However, when Riverside Primary School and Westwood Primary School were opened for registration in July 2012, both were oversubscribed.

A fluke? Hardly. It was a result of the groundwork their principals – Mrs Sharon Siew from Riverside and Mr Ng Yeow Ling from Westwood – had put in, months in advance, with the support of their staff.

SPREADING THE NEWS

Weeks before the registration day, the vice-principals met nearby kindergarten administrators, who agreed to distribute brochures about the schools' values, mission and programmes to families.

With teachers yet to be hired, the vice-principals were their own publicity teams. They walked the ground – hanging posters at housing estates and banners on their school fences – to drum up awareness.



01

The principals held introductory receptions for interested parents at neighbourhood venues, as their school buildings weren't ready. Both spoke to packed audiences.

Mrs Siew recalls sharing about the new Programme for Active Learning (PAL). It allows students to take part in weekly activities designed to engage the whole child. The PAL experiences range from sports and visual arts to design education.

She also presented PlayWorks, a play-and-design module using Lego to foster creative thinking and problem-solving skills. "The Lego idea really caught on," says Mrs Siew with a laugh. "When school started, parents asked me right away, 'What about the Lego?'"

01 Mrs Sharon Siew (above) at Riverside's library. The school draws parents by offering programmes that develop students holistically.

"The Lego idea really caught on," says Mrs Siew with a laugh. "When school started, parents asked me right away, 'What about the Lego?'"

With the help of her vice-principal, Mrs Siew came up with 'SPARKLE' to represent strength of character, perseverance, adaptability, responsibility, kindness, leadership, enthusiasm and sincerity. "We imagined together the school we wanted to create, and we built a value system around those ideas," she says.

For example, Riverside teachers encourage students to participate in class by pointing to the 'e' in SPARKLE to advocate showing enthusiasm.

Mrs Siew also asked her staff to develop stories and rhymes to express the SPARKLE values. A few were then added onto a wall mural. One teacher, Mdm Rohaidah Mohd Taib, says: "I used Aesop's Fable *The Ant and the Dove* to discuss kindness."

CREATING A UNIQUE IDENTITY

In the same year, Mr Ng was entrusted to start Westwood Primary School in Jurong. He sought to create a caring, connected community that would prepare children for a fast-paced, changing world. His vision became the school's mission, as depicted in its crest.

The six stylised trees pointing upwards represent the six primary levels. The light green trees at the bottom signify community, while the medium-green trees indicate resilience and gratitude. The single, darkest green tree at the top symbolises confidence in the future.

Being part of a united community, having a heart of gratitude and developing a resilient mindset are ideals the school stands for, explains Mr Ng.

Social media played a role in recruiting students, too. The schools' websites became their signposts, while their Facebook pages allowed for dynamic communication with parents. Parents were asking questions on Westwood's Facebook page, as the school did not have a landline then, Mr Ng says.

DEFINING VALUES

The publicity, outreach sessions and social media interactions attracted parents and students, but this was underscored by a solid foundation, particularly the values, first laid by the school leaders.

When Riverside's Mrs Siew was appointed in 2012 to set up the school, her first task was to define its values.



02

02 Mr Ng Yeow Ling sitting outside Book-tique, Westwood's library. Its vibrant design stands out, attracting students.

03 Students of Westwood in their school uniform. Its colours represent the school crest and it is made from a material that absorbs sweat.

04 Mrs Daisie Yip stands before Greenridge Primary, where she played a major role in its transformation from a school with an "unpleasant learning environment" to one that teachers, parents and students are proud to be part of today.

"And confidence in the future is another way of saying, 'the future is exciting. Be ready.'"

For her part, Mrs Siew wanted the Riverside crest to reflect its name. Hence its design has three blue lines flowing like a river to represent purpose, people and programmes that develop students holistically. The blue also symbolises water, while the yellow stars speak to the SPARKLE values and the white background stands for purity.

"The school crest is an important symbol of belonging," says Mrs Siew. "It helps bind our school community."

So does the school song, launched at Riverside's recent end-of-year ceremony. The song includes three stanzas that progressively enfold students first in the school as learners, and then as Riverside students within their community, and finally, in the world. "We wanted the concepts of learning, character and citizenship to come to life in the lyrics," says Mrs Siew.

The principals also envisioned uniforms as attire that would be easy to wear, namely loose shirts over pants and skirts.



Photo from Westwood Primary School

03

"I couldn't have known every aspect of how to launch and run a school... You can only learn all of that with the help of colleagues and experts, and by doing."

Mr Ng chose to maintain just one uniform for both classroom sessions and Physical Education lessons. He invited 10 parents, whose children were already enrolled, to a café in Jurong Point shopping mall to review the designs. They chose teal and brown to represent the trees in the school crest and a custom tartan. They also selected a thin material that wicks away perspiration.

"And we needed a photo of our children in uniform for the school handbook," Mr Ng says, "[So] one set of parents opened up their apartment on a Saturday morning for a photo session."

He involved his teachers in the planning process in September 2012, way before the school had even started. Although the new hires continued in their previous jobs until the term ended in December 2012, the pioneering team of 14 teachers and two administrative staff met on their own time to prepare for the coming year at the new school. "Everyone was very high-spirited and excited to effect something new," says Mr Ng.

THROWING THE DOORS OPEN

On their opening day, Riverside and Westwood were buzzing. Children took tours and orientation sessions in their classrooms. Nearby, parents attended welcome talks and observed their children at recess in the first week of school.

At Westwood, Mr Ng organised a family photo corner with a mosaic background for parents and children to commemorate the occasion. Visitors to the school were greeted by Book-tique, a cheery library painted with colourful characters. Wall murals lined the canteen and motivational quotes adorned the indoor sports hall. There was also an eco-garden to pique the interests of students in nature.

Today, the schools' Facebook pages remain an active portal to connect with parents and teachers. On Riverside's public page, Mrs Siew posts the school calendar, information and events as well as photos and videos.

"I go to the page every day... It gives me a peek into what kids are doing in the classroom and what's coming up," says Mrs Oh Soon Lan, a parent.

Both schools also hold kindergarten visitation days twice a year to attract new students.

Kindergarteners spend the morning in a Primary 1 classroom. While the child is immersed in the experience of studying in the school, which includes a healthy snack in the canteen, parents attend a presentation given by administrators and a tour.

Moreover, the schools plan to hold an open house for prospective students every July to give their parents information on the curriculum.

From their experiences, the principals learnt one thing – opening a school requires the belief that you can make a difference. From there, accepting the support and ideas of others becomes critical.

"I couldn't have known every aspect of how to launch and run a school," Mr Ng says, "You can only learn all of that with the help of colleagues and experts, and by doing." ■



04

PIONEERING EFFORTS

When Mrs Daisie Yip (now retired) was made principal of Greenridge Primary in 1996, she asked stakeholders what they wanted for the school. While parents and teachers hoped that Greenridge would become known for its academic excellence, the Primary 1 students had something else in mind.

"They told me, 'We want our school to be famous [for its CCA]!'" recalls Mrs Yip, who then made a commitment to balance both aspirations.

In particular, the students wanted to excel in a dancing school band. With no money in the coffers, Mrs Yip approached other schools for their unused musical instruments. As the band progressed, the students began to dream bigger. They said they wanted to play at Disneyland and at the World Cup.

Their wish wasn't as far-fetched as it sounded. The 1998 World Cup was held in Paris, where there was a Disneyland. The Cup's organisers were also selecting children's bands from around the world to perform in its opening ceremony at the amusement park.

Against all odds, the Greenridge band, which practised slavishly, was picked as the only band from Asia.

This win was no mean feat, considering how far Greenridge had come. Back in 1995, classes had been conducted in eight shipping containers housed on two separate

campuses. When Mrs Yip joined in 1996, she had to hold staff meetings at a nearby McDonald's. "My office was my little car. Our building site was a big piece of flat mud."

The number of students enrolled also exceeded the school's capacity, creating an unpleasant learning environment, she says. Morale among parents and teachers was low.

Nevertheless, Mrs Yip rallied them on, asking them to contribute ideas for Greenridge's uniform. They sent in photographs from other schools (both local and overseas), clippings and drawings. Mrs Yip and her teachers then finalised three designs and asked students to vote for their favourite. The teachers also designed the school crest, which embodies the school's values.

Greenridge finally had its own building in 1997. But Mrs Yip did not stop working to make her staff proud of being part of the school. One teacher had a passion for rugby, so she encouraged him to start a school team. Another teacher was an avid rock climber who began a climbing programme for students.

She believes that success in pioneering a school lies in believing fervently that one can make a difference, and forming a team where communication is clear and strong.

"Share the leadership. [You] cannot do it alone."

Spruce Up Your desk

Make your workspace neat and smart with these unusual 'stationery' items. (Psst, you can probably find most of these at home!)



1. Plastic can holder

Try this holder for four cans, available from Daiso. Repurpose used drink cans to hold your pens and other stationery by wrapping the cans with coloured paper and slotting them into the gadget.

2. Dish drainer

Find your files, papers and books easily by arranging them in the slots on a dish rack. Dish drainer from Howards Storage World.

3. Cooling rack

Need to cool your laptop? Placing it on the baking cooling rack from your kitchen will do the trick.

4. Muffin tray

Keep track of little items or knick-knacks with this common baking tool. Store the tray in a drawer when you're not using it to clear some table space.

5. Lego figures

Deploy an army of Lego characters to tame tangled cables. Use Blu-tack to stick the blocks to any surface and let the figures' tiny hands do their work.

Winning entries
this issue



What's a party without involving the entire school community? JWSS celebrates National Day 2014 and marks the occasion with a whole school selfie!

Sarabjeet Singh
Teacher
Jurong West
Secondary School

Our school is merging with another for a better future. Many changes are happening, but one thing will never change – we will love one another forever. All the best, friends!

Ms Han Lay Bee
Senior Teacher
Damai Primary School



We are more than just colleagues! After leading students on a gruelling climb up Mount Syue, we are comforted knowing we are there to cheer one another on.

Jeff Chua
Teacher
Nan Chiau High School

**Thank you for
sharing photos
of you and your
favourite colleagues!
Each published
photo wins a \$30
voucher!**



NEXT ISSUE

**SHARE YOUR
DIY IDEAS!**

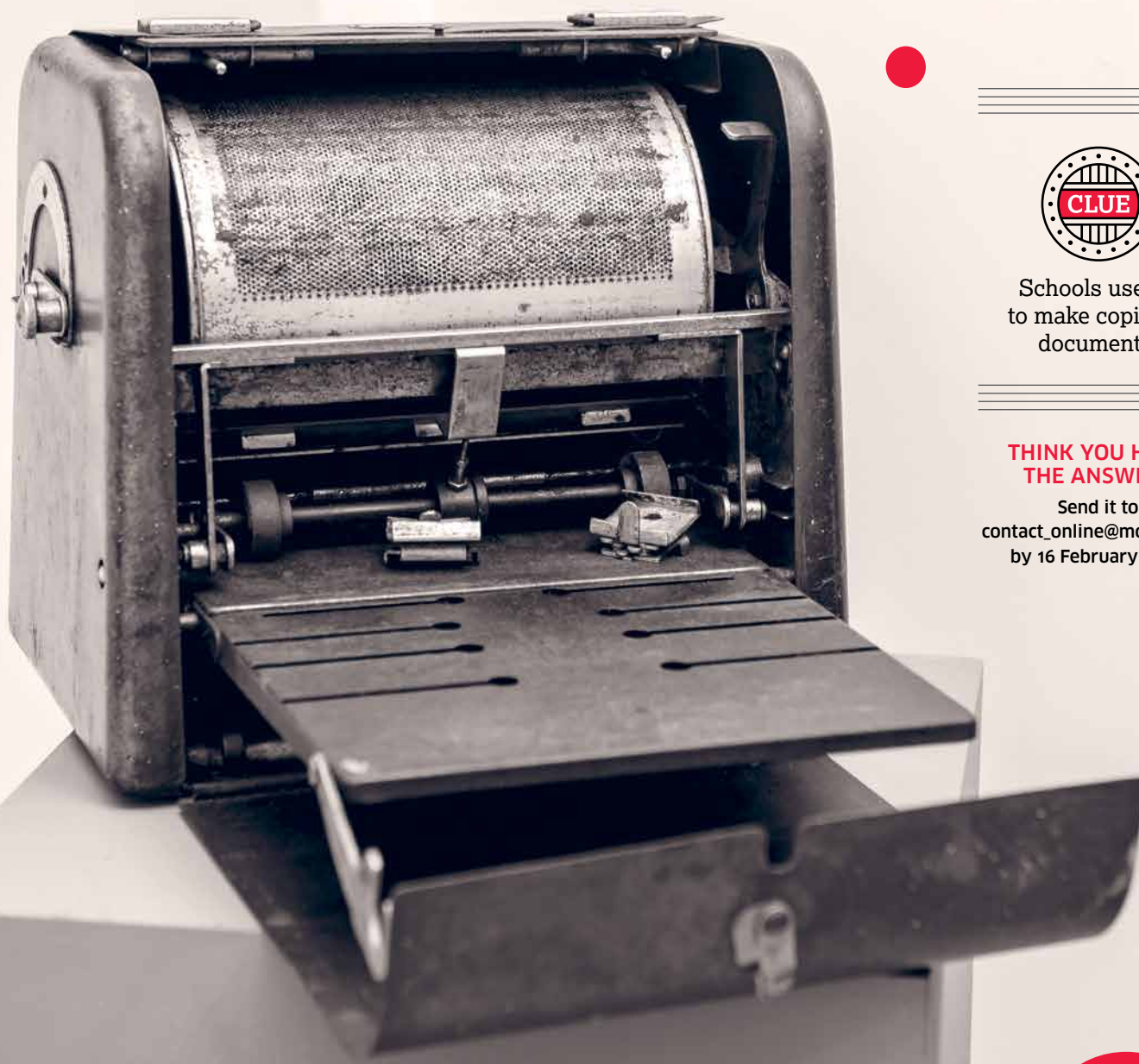
Have you been using your "crafty" skills to reinvent your desk or cheer up the classroom decor? Show us how you have been a creative maker at work!

- The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
- Each participant is allowed only one entry. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
- The photo should preferably be in JPEG format and have a resolution of at least 300 dpi.
- Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, e-mail and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
- Provide a caption (max 25 words), explaining what the photo is about and how it reflects the theme. Captions will be edited for length, flow and clarity.
- Send both photo and caption to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 16 February 2015.
- The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity and originality. The judges' decision is final.
- 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.
- All winners will be notified by email. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
- 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.

GUESS & WIN!

How much do you know about our **education heritage?**

Find out with our SG50 quiz! Each issue, we feature a school artefact used in the past. The first three readers who correctly guess what it is win an attractive prize each!



Schools used it
to make copies of
documents.

**THINK YOU HAVE
THE ANSWER?**

Send it to
contact_online@moe.edu.sg
by 16 February 2015.

MOE Celebrates SG50 with our Pioneers and Seniors at Gardens by the Bay

Join us at The Meadow on 4 April 2015 (Saturday) to honour and appreciate the contributions of our pioneers and seniors. On that day, they will enjoy an array of fun-filled activities. Spread the word to pioneers you may know and invite them to register for the event at bit.ly/moesg50.

**SG
50**