



This picture, taken at Cedar Primary, captures how teachers can bond with their students through a meaningful lesson that arouses their curiosity and spurs them to find out more.

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CAPTURE MOMENTS WITH CONTACT

Snap a picture which depicts the theme — “Strengthening the Teacher-Student Relationship” — and send it to us for 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 The photo entry must be original and unpublished.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. All winners will be notified by e-mail. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.

9. *Contact* reserves the right to replace the prize with another of equal or greater value should the featured prize become unavailable. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 13 May 2011.



CONTACT

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 02
APRIL 2011

Take charge and power up

Take your professional development into your own hands.

Office turn-offs

Tips on dealing with difficult co-workers.

Gorgeous (nearby) getaways

Visit these beautiful and affordable places in the region.

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Lee Hong Leng

Editor-in-chief

Readers' comments on



I like the article on "Are we going too soft on discipline?". It made me re-think how I want to discipline my pupils. I agree more with Mrs Gladys Lim from East Spring Primary School, that discipline should be correctional and the end-goal should be for pupils to realise their mistakes and move on. That is much more empowering and supportive than merely being hard for the sake of instilling a sense of fear in pupils. There is also more autonomy for the pupils.

Elaine Ho Weiting
Temasek Primary School

I love the new look. It makes me feel like I am looking at a fashion magazine! It catches my attention and the stories are fresh and captivating.

Suraya Mohamat Zin
Fengshan Primary School

Editor's note

Many of you will have watched the latest recruitment ad on TV titled "Mrs Chong." Based on a real-life encounter, the ad recounts how a student turned his life around because his teacher, Mrs Chong, did not waver in her belief that he could make something of his life. The story has a happy ending. It's an outcome that all teachers desire to see in their students.

Taking off from the touching story, this month's *Contact* explores one of the SERI recommendations on strengthening the teacher-student relationship in "The Balancing Act." Can teachers balance achieving academic objectives with providing social-emotional support for students? Three teachers share how they reach out to their students. In SPEAK, Director of Schools Wong Siew Hoong tells why the teacher-student relationship has to be forged deliberately and proactively. He also gives us a glimpse into his own experiences of building closer bonds with his students.

We also take a look at the mentoring relationship between teachers in "In learning you will teach and in teaching you will learn". We talk to teachers to find out how the senior teacher can make a vital difference in helping our beginning teachers become confident and effective educators.

But what if all's not fine and dandy in your interactions with your colleagues? Read our survival guide on dealing effectively with challenging personalities in the office. Or, just take a break from the pressures and stresses at work and whiz off to beautiful and affordable nearby getaways featured in our Lifestyle section.

And here's something that should appeal to all photography buffs. Well, even if you are not into photography, we invite you to send in photos illustrating the strengthening of the teacher-student relationship. The best entries will win prizes and be published in the next issue of *Contact*!

Cheers!



Nurturing good character and values in students begins with strengthening relationships between teachers and students. With greater emphasis being placed on student bonding, how can teachers effectively juggle their roles as educator, mentor and friend? By Ming Lee

He fell asleep in class, she woke him with a gentle pat. He failed his test because he was “tired”, she gave him remedial sessions and even cooked dinner for him. Even after he was arrested, she continued to remind him about his “dreams”. It took several years before Edwin fulfilled his promise to his teacher Mrs Chong, but the smile on her face showed that she did not mind the wait.

This heart-warming MOE TV commercial captures the compassion and care of a teacher for her student, but is it possible

for every teacher to give the same kind of attention to all her students?

Adolescence can be a period of insecurity and uncertainty, and teachers, while it is indeed not a stroll in the park, need to go the extra mile to help better prepare secondary school students not only for further learning but also for life.

And the Secondary Education Review and Implementation (SERI) Committee has rolled out a series of recommendations to enable educators to do so more effectively,

one of which emphasises the need for teachers to show more pastoral care to students.

Mr Wong Siew Hoong, Director of Schools and Chairman of SERI, says: “SERI recommendations are not additional but an integral part of the teaching experience. We want teachers to focus on the teacher-student relationship – and keep this in the back of their minds in daily interactions. We are not asking teachers to take on additional roles or go beyond current duties, but emphasise what already

exists. Your work as a teacher is premised on the relationship.”

KEEP HOPES UP

Bukit Panjang Government High School has been adopting a holistic approach to reach out to students in its one Normal Technical (N[T]) and two Normal Academic (N[A]) classes – there are six other Special and Express classes. Mr Tan Suan Tien, who’s taught at the school since 1995, is one of its most avid advocates.

“Many of our N(T) students come from single families or broken homes, and are not as academically inclined. They often feel inferior or are defiant because they don’t believe that they can succeed within the school system. To help them overcome such negative attitudes, it requires teachers to not only understand what they lack, but also how to fill these holes,” he says.

Here, form teachers and co-form teachers remain with the N(T) class for four years. They are also subject teachers for the same class. This allows teachers to get to know and follow up with their students better. Knowing the abilities and interests of the students, they can adopt the best approach in organising lessons and activities.

MULTIPLE WAYS TO BUILD RAPPORT

Schools are also employing different methods to enable teachers to spend time fruitfully with students. In addition to an hour of Contact Time every week, Dunman Secondary School (DSS) allocates the first period from Tuesday to Thursday for various activities ranging from reading to journal-writing.

Ms Angelina Tang, who has taught at DSS for eight years, says: “The journal reflection is useful when students share their ambitions, passions and worries, or even their take on current affairs. It becomes a tool for teachers to understand prevailing values or challenges.

“Most importantly, it enables me to decide whether I have to intervene

“Care is about establishing a relationship that is meaningful for both the teacher and student, and encouraging the development of the latter’s talents even after they graduate.”

and counsel a student, or to be more sensitive to the issues that I explore during class. This is wonderful especially if a student is more reticent about sharing during an open conversation.”

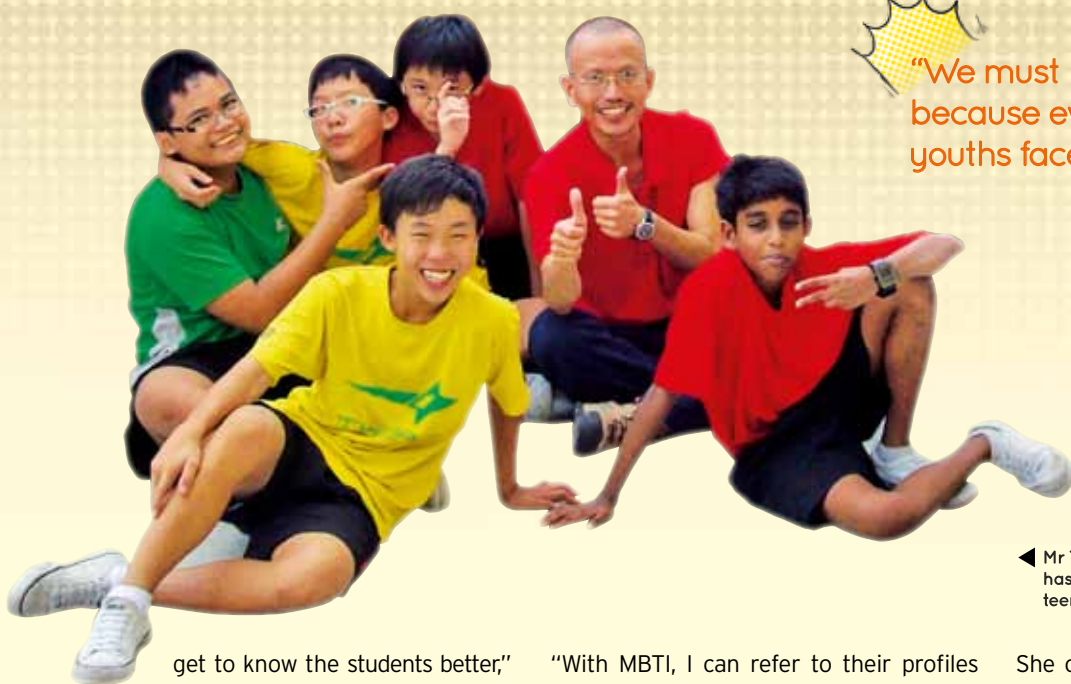
DSS has incorporated the 21st Century skills into its curriculum too. It provides opportunities for teachers like Ms Tang, who is from the English Language and Literature department, to help build confidence in students. The school also has a programme for lower secondary classes, where students explore creative movement in a setting

that integrates Music, Dance, Drama and English Language oral communication skill. Students have to produce and present a creative project. Ms Tang says it offers opportunities for more interaction between teachers and students, and an insight into students’ personalities and abilities.

For Ms Tang, the main challenge is being able to spend enough time with every student. “This can be overcome by working closely with my colleagues who have taught my students before and colleagues who are teaching my class. I rely on this partnership to

Ms Tang tries to know each of her students better with help from colleagues who are teaching or have taught them before. ▶





"We must move with the times, because every generation of youths faces different challenges."

◀ Mr Tan's experience in social work has helped him to reach out to his teenage students.

get to know the students better," she adds.

Another challenge she faces is working with students facing changes in family circumstances. "For example, if the parents are going through a divorce, the student will be affected emotionally. As a teacher I can counsel him or her, but some students can be more reserved while others can share more comfortably. So I also speak with his or her peers and parents, in order to understand the student better."

DIFFERENT FOLKS, DIFFERENT STROKES

Using personality profiling tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), meanwhile, allows teachers at schools like Ngee Ann Secondary to identify differences in personalities and reduce misunderstanding and miscommunication. It not only allows students to understand their own preferences and inclinations so they can chart their own desired careers, but also helps parents better understand their children too.

Mdm Nora Osman, a Humanities & English Language teacher with the school, finds it especially useful for resolving conflict. "I used to encounter difficulty managing different levels of commitment by students in completing group assignments. There were often complaints about some who, due to various reasons, did not contribute to the project," she shares.

"With MBTI, I can refer to their profiles to ensure that each group comprises different personality types so students complement one another's strengths and weaknesses."

FIRM BUT FRIENDLY

While teachers agree that a closer relationship with students allows them to guide the latter, all interviewed here strike a balance between being firm and being friendly.

Ms Tang says it is important to let students know that teachers are ready to lend a listening ear and get involved in things important to them: "I had a student who was diagnosed with lupus. When she participated in an art exhibition, I attended it. I wanted to show her that she mattered to me."

"Care is about establishing a relationship that is meaningful for both the teacher and student, and encouraging the development of the latter's talents even after they graduate," she says. For instance, she also attended a play in February at the invitation of an ex-student who was acting in it.

Mdm Nora says she looks out for students who appear troubled and behave unlike their usual selves: "This is an indirect way of 'scanning the crowd' to identify students who may need my help. Not all students actively seek help, so it helps if we are observant."

She cites an example: "Recently I had a very busy day at school. The class had just finished a test, but as I was leaving, I noticed a student at her table, looking sad.

"I approached her, and she burst into tears. She was extremely worried she would fail the test. I explained that everyone makes mistakes, and it is more important to learn from and not repeat them. I reminded her that although grades are important, it is more crucial to manage our expectations in order not to be overly stressed by them. I think it helped reassure her that it wasn't

the end of the world. I certainly didn't think that my time was wasted."

There are no hard and fast rules when dealing with students; some students require a friendly approach while others an authoritative one. So it is important to set out clearly when they must be serious (in class) and when they can be casual (a chat in the canteen).

Mdm Nora draws the line between work and personal space, so she comes across as approachable yet professional. "I listen to them and offer advice regarding issues of serious concern, such as stress management and conflict resolution. For example, one of my students excelled in English Language but was very shy. To encourage him to speak up, we had online class discussions. He became more confident and started contributing during class," she shares.

"But I do not exchange personal opinion about other students and teachers. I also don't spend time with students outside school unless it's an official school event or activity."

REACHING OUT

While teachers appreciate the structures already in place, some feel more could be done to assist them to interact

"Dealing with teenagers can be frustrating at times but patience reaps benefits. After all, we were once teenagers too. We must appreciate that this is an important time of discovery and development for our students."

Ms Tang interacting with her students.





more closely with students. Sharing and exchanging sessions could be organised among schools so each can evaluate its programmes or learn from others. Also, profiling exercises could be done for pupils at various developmental milestones, with reports centralised on an e-platform and made accessible to teachers.

Mr Tan, who volunteers at a halfway house in his free time, believes that social work experience can go a long way in helping teachers take on the challenges outlined by the SERI recommendations. "We must move with the times, because every generation of youths faces different challenges. Volunteer work exposes us to these risks, and inspires us to find ways to steer our students in a positive direction," he adds.

Nonetheless, initiatives can be carried out successfully only when teachers are patient and persevering. Mdm Nora sums it up aptly: "Dealing with teenagers can be frustrating at times but patience reaps benefits. After all, we were once teenagers too. We must appreciate that this is an important time of discovery and development for our students. And teachers who are understanding and helpful will certainly make a student's stay in school meaningful, enjoyable and memorable."

"As a teacher juggling many responsibilities, my time is always stretched. However, I believe that if students really need help, all teachers are willing to sacrifice some of their time to listen and offer advice or assistance. It is our duty to not only teach, but also to care for our students."



Mdm Nora readily makes time to listen to and counsel her students in school, but she draws the line at spending time with them outside school unless it is a school event.



Take charge and power up

Are you looking for fresh ideas to improve your teaching or eager to share your creative teaching methods with your counterparts? You can now do that at four recently established academies for teachers. By Natasha Hong

It has been well documented and proven in research studies that collaborative learning among peers is more effective and productive as it fosters greater confidence among participants.

It is not a new concept among teachers – they often share ideas, educational practice and solutions to problems with each other, which in turn benefit the students they teach.

Now, the four academies set up by the Ministry aim to bring collaborative learning to a new level. The academies will act as facilitators and catalysts to empower

"The Training and Development Division of the MOE was the forerunner of a teacher-led culture reaching out through the Teachers Network. What is being given greater emphasis is the philosophy of teachers taking ownership of their own professional development."

teachers to take their professional development into their own hands, mainly by sharing information and learning from each other. The creation of communities of motivated sharers and learners will be at the crux of these academies' success.

TEACHERS, LEAD THE WAY

Launched in September 2010, the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) aspires to enhance teaching professionalism in Singapore, and provide support and research for teacher practitioners.

"We're not starting from ground zero," says Mr Manogaran Suppiah, AST's Executive Director. "The Training and Development Division of the MOE was the forerunner of a teacher-led culture reaching out through the Teachers Network. What is being given greater emphasis is the philosophy of teachers taking ownership of their own professional development."

*Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy
(PESTA)
Mr Tan Teck Hock, Principal*





The AST is facilitating the formation of Subject Chapters, which will see Master Teachers helping with the growth of teachers through programmes like Teacher Leader Summits, master classes, workshops on lesson study and providing mentorship and guidance to aspiring teacher leaders in schools. There is also strong support for Professional Learning Communities where teachers teaching the same subject or same level meet regularly to discuss and plan effective strategies to improve classroom instruction.

"We are happy to note that teachers are coming forward because they want to share. Teachers are more confident and are willing

to share at various learning platforms at the cluster, at the Academy and at national teachers' conferences," says Mr Manogaran. "[AST] wants to give these teachers greater publicity, greater leverage, codify some of these practices and publish their work."

PERHAPS YOU HAVE THE ANSWER?

Also taking the ground-up approach is the English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS), helmed by Mrs Wai Yin Pryke.

ELIS aims to enhance the teaching and learning of the English Language, and to enhance the proficiency level of all English-medium teachers here. One way of doing



"It's a system-wide mentoring network we're trying to develop — teachers leading teachers, teachers for teachers and teachers developing other teachers."

Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR)
Mrs Teo Khin Hiang, Principal

The Principal hopes teachers will begin to take charge of their own professional growth: "Get involved, join in, be part of our vibrant learning community. Because this is really for the teachers — we hope to evolve to the state where 'Conversations' and other activities mounted are by teachers, for teachers and with teachers."

BACK TO HOME BASE

At the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA), Physical Education (PE) teachers can look forward to having what its Principal Mr Tan Teck Hock dubs a 'home base'.

"Like in a softball or baseball game, you need to come back to the home base to advance the cause of your team — it's always about coming home, keeping in touch, strengthening your ties within the fraternity," says Mr Tan. "It's a system-wide mentoring network we're trying to develop — teachers leading teachers, teachers for teachers and teachers developing other teachers."

The Academy has commissioned a group of PESTA Champions, selected by cluster superintendents, to reach out to PE teachers on the ground. These highly skilled and experienced individuals, who are heads of departments in schools, will impart their knowledge in enhancing PE lessons to junior teachers. Furthermore, they are given an array of developmental opportunities by PESTA.

PESTA has also just sent 28 key PE personnel — its largest contingent to date — to the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance's yearly National Convention and Exposition in San Diego to learn from their fellow practitioners from all around the world.

LEARNING TO BE STARS

Art and Music teachers will also gain mentorship and specialised professional advancement with the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR), as the Academy gears towards enhancing pedagogy in Art and Music education.

Similar to ELIS, STAR has reached out to teachers via MyForum threads to get them to share their needs and to give feedback on how they would like to develop professionally.

"The discussion has been very encouraging so far, as I can sense that the teachers have put in a lot of thought to giving their input and recommending things for their

development," says Mrs Teo Khin Hiang, the Principal.

STAR also sent a group of teachers to Seattle to attend the National Art Education Association National Convention and an overseas trip is in the works for Music teachers.

Mrs Teo shares: "We're looking at working with the National Arts Council to bring in our Cultural Medallion Winners to conduct a lecture series for our Art and Music teachers."

On top of that, STAR has invited established practitioners in art and music from countries like the United States, Canada and Hungary to share their skills and pedagogical knowledge with teachers here. ➤

so is to focus research on the teaching and learning of English in a multicultural setting: in our complex sociolinguistic environment, it is important for our students to have good role models of spoken English and for teachers to find out best ways for them to learn the language.

Mrs Pryke emphasises: "We don't pretend to be the font of all knowledge. We don't have all the answers but we want to get everybody to come on board and share their ideas [for teaching]."

ELIS has been actively gathering relevant stakeholders who are involved in English Language teaching to create a community of peer learners at their Conversations@ELIS Ning.com social website (<http://elis-singapore.ning.com>).

"The Ning site is really their space. It's a professional conversation space to ask for or render help and share information," says Mrs Pryke. Structured like a forum, a teacher who needs help in planning a lesson, for example, can pose questions on this site and any teacher can respond to the questions and share what works from experience.

"We don't pretend to be the font of all knowledge. We don't have all the answers but we want to get everybody to come on board and share their ideas [for teaching]."

English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS)
Mrs Wai Yin Pryke, Principal



Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST)
Mr Manogaran Supiah, Executive Director

Matters of the heart and mind

We all know how emotionally challenging the adolescent years can be. So how can we give our teenage students stronger social and emotional support while ensuring that they are academically prepared for the future? Here are the key recommendations made by the Secondary Education Review and Implementation Committee that will help teachers achieve that aim.

Illustration by Ng Shi Wei and Huang Weiming

Prepare Students for Learning & Life



Strengthen Teacher-Student Relationship

- Encourage good school practices eg weekly Form Teacher periods
- Training for teachers in pastoral care
- Appointment of Year Heads to lead teachers in pastoral work



Provide greater Social-Emotional support & Career Guidance

- Enhance Education & Career Guidance portal
- Promote overseas learning journeys
- Establish Student Centres
- Hold regular dialogue between secondary schools and post-secondary institutions

Leverage Information & Communication Technology (ICT) to Support Learning

Study the possibility of every student having access to or owning one computing device



Holistic Development of Adolescents

To help secondary students maximise their potential and manage the challenges of adolescence, SERI aims to develop them holistically with a variety of measures that equip students with skills and values they need for life, prepare students for education at post-secondary level and enhance their social-emotional well-being.

Strengthen Ability-Based Education



MOE to provide support to enhance English Language & Mathematical skills

- MOE to work with commercial publishers in producing better quality teaching materials
- Dedicated allied educators to aid EL and Mathematics teachers of N(T) and N(A) students in classroom management and administrative duties

Facilitate students' advancement to post-secondary education

Review emphasis on EL and Mathematics for lateral transfers between courses

EXPAND

subject options to give upper secondary students more exposure to applied learning

"Step Curriculum" for N(T) students

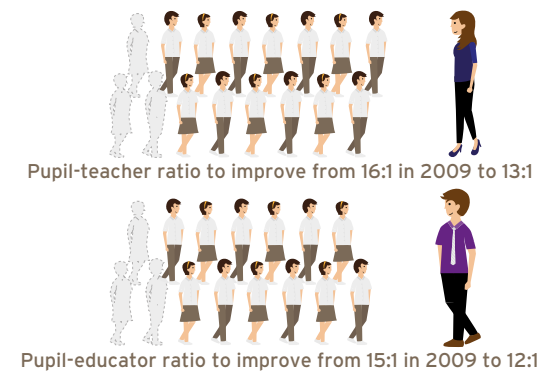
4th step	Ensure applied learning and pre-vocational exposure at upper sec
3rd step	Implement broad-based learning at lower sec
2nd step	Build foundational literacy and numeracy
1st step	Address personal and social issues such as self-worth and life aspirations

Provide More Resources

More manpower for each secondary school by end 2015

average of
3
more teachers

6
more key personnel



Enhance infrastructure for students' learning and improve working environments for teachers & staff

Enhance Character, Citizenship & Values Development

Implement Character & Citizenship Education



Increase student participation in sports and games through inter-school (recreational) sports competitions

Enhance learning through Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs)



Incorporate Community Involvement Programme in CCAs



Maximise student engagement and learning in Uniformed Groups



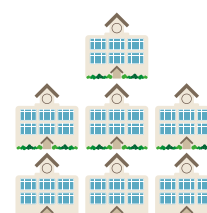
Students can explore optional CCAs with different levels of specialisation



Implement process-based award structure for CCA Sustained Achievement Awards

Create Multiple Pathways for Success

Expand the Integrated Programme to seven more schools



Establish specialised schools for N(T) students

A four-year customised programme to prepare students for ITE or employment

- Dedicated programme for Personal and Social Learning
- Industry-focused modules
- Strong focus on interactive, practice-oriented teaching methods
- Higher teacher-to-student ratio
- Industry experience/exposure for upper secondary students

Introduce new and enhance existing programmes to polytechnics for N(A) students

• Double number of Direct Entry Scheme (DES) places to
1000
students from 2013 onwards

• Introduce
Polytechnic Foundation Programme
for Secondary 4N(A) students

Building relationships the irreverent way

As a teacher, he built bonds by encouraging students to “talk nonsense”. Now Director of Schools Wong Siew Hoong explains to Sheralyn Tay why building strong teacher-student relationships can give youths a more holistic, broad-based educational experience.

When Mr Wong was teaching at MacPherson Secondary School, he used to take a few minutes out of class time to get his students to “talk nonsense”.

“I let them share about something that interests them, or talk about a fun topic,” he says. Topics were often something irreverent or quirky, such as ‘The day I turned into a frog’. “This was a fun exercise that also helped build communication skills,

stimulated their imagination and generated some interest,” Mr Wong says.

It also helped him to understand his students better. “I could learn about their interests and personality; see which student was more outgoing, which one was open in sharing personal details, and who were the reserved ones who needed some guidance.”

These two to three minutes at the start of each class illustrate how building bonds with students is not a time-consuming or tedious process. The Ministry also recognises how positive teacher-student relationships can give students the social and emotional support they need as they grapple with the challenges of adolescence.

This is why building good teacher-student relationships lies at the heart of the recently announced Secondary Education Review and Implementation (SERI) recommendations.

Mr Wong, who is Chair of the SERI committee, says: “We want our students to become better learners, better citizens and strong moral beings; to achieve all these, we need to support them socially and emotionally.” A sustained and strong relationship will go a long way towards nurturing better adjusted individuals with character, clearer career goals and a moral compass.

“[Hence], my message to teachers is that the teach-

“I let them share about something that interests them, or talk about a fun topic... such as ‘The day I turned into a frog.’”

er-student relationship has to be forged consciously, deliberately and proactively.”

JUST IN TIME

The need for teachers to lend emotional and social support to students is an age-old concept, but it may well have been understated as teachers juggle the heavy demands of teaching and other responsibilities. This is why SERI’s recommendations, though not new, could not come at a better time, says Mr Wong.

SERI “clarifies and emphasises the role of schools and teachers at a stage where students are facing profound social, physical and psychological changes,” he tells *Contact*. “As a system, we are not always totally cognisant of this. We forget the challenges that adolescence can bring. What SERI does is re-articulate these goals and bring them to greater professional consciousness.”

The “hardware” – various character development and bonding programmes – is already in place and SERI gives schools the autonomy to roll out programmes that address the various goals, notes Mr Wong. These take several forms. Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs), for instance, help build personal development, leadership and engagement. Other school programmes

can contribute to that too. At St Joseph’s Convent, for example, level camps held in the first week of the school year give teachers the opportunity to bond with their students. At Jurong West Secondary School, a trial was held to allow students to try out other CCAs for a term so as to broaden their horizons and encourage student leadership.

“These are aimed at helping to stimulate interest, channel energies, offer solutions, model positive attitudes and establish healthy identities,” Mr Wong says, adding, “but it is only with good teacher-student relationship that a teacher will understand a student’s aptitude and how best to identify the experiences that are suited to their interests and can maximise their potential.”

“My message to teachers is that the teacher-student relationship has to be forged consciously, deliberately and proactively.”

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

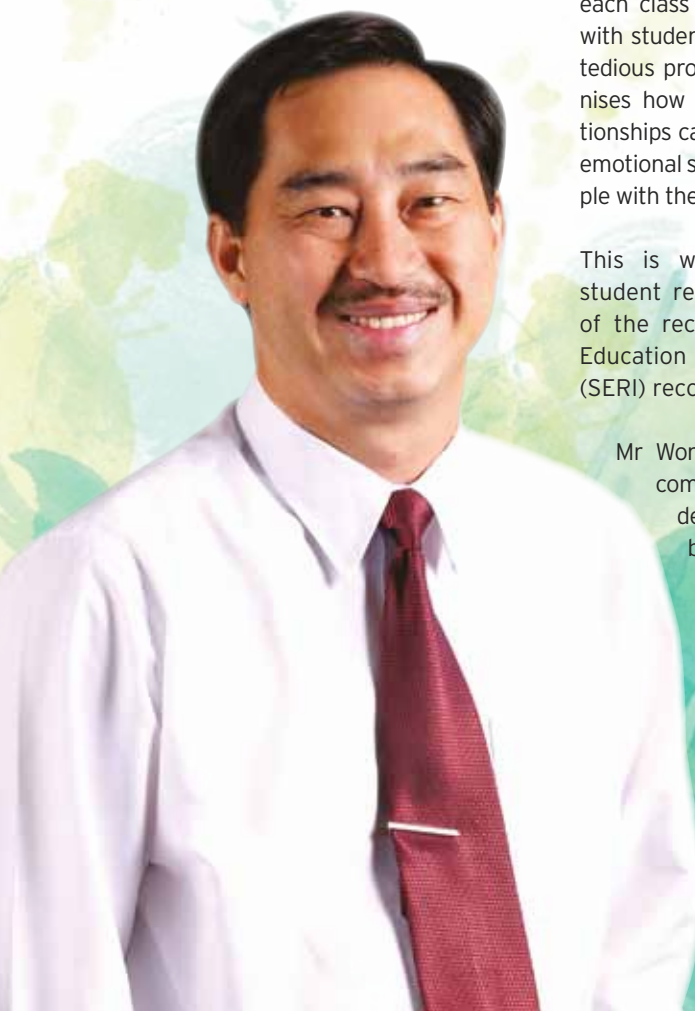
Besides emphasising the need to build strong relationships, SERI also recommends ways for schools to lay a solid academic foundation which at the same time prepares students for life beyond secondary school.

“This approach is to emphasise that secondary school, the ‘O’-levels and the ‘N’-levels are not terminal points, but launch pads for post-secondary education and beyond,” says Mr Wong. Rather than mere ‘exam subjects’, core knowledge and skills in Mathematics and English Language (EL) set the scene for strong competencies to support their future education, Mr Wong points out.

For example, the strong emphasis on Maths at the secondary-school level “lays the foundation” for studies in junior college, polytechnic and ITE. “A strong grasp of Maths is important in Singapore because a lot of our industries are based on science and technology.” Similarly with EL, a strong command of it is integral in a knowledge-based economy. This is why SERI emphasises the need to build strength in the two foundational areas of Maths and English.

Ultimately, strong academic fundamentals must go hand-in-hand with positive social-emotional competencies and sound moral values to develop successful, future-ready students. Using an analogy from team building, Mr Wong says: “How successful a team is, apart from the technical ability of the coach or any individual member, is largely contingent on the coach’s relationship with his team and the team’s dynamics with each other. Anyone can gather a group of people together and work on a task. But it takes a certain kind of magic to make them a great team.”

▼
Mr Wong interacts with students and teachers on a visit to Bukit Panjang Government High School.





▲ Mr Khoo and Ms Chang learn from each other on improving teaching methods.

"In learning you will **teach** and in teaching you will **learn**"

This line from a Phil Collins song neatly sums up what mentoring is about: a sharing of knowledge where those who give and those who receive are both richly rewarded. Siddiqua Ovais talks to teachers in the Structured Mentoring Programme to find out how mentoring has made a difference to their personal and professional lives.

You could call Ms Chang Shu Ning a mere infant – in the context of her teaching career, that is. The 25-year-old who is just a year into teaching Economics at Pioneer Junior College (PJC), says her mentor, Mr Khoo Gee Hwee, has helped to broaden her perspective of what makes a good teacher.

She says: "Young teachers have a lot of drive and passion when they first start teaching. We want to strive for our students to ensure that they score the grades to go into a university. Hence we forget how to slow down and also to take time to reflect on what we do."

She attributes this awareness to Mr Khoo, a senior teacher from PJC, who believes mentoring is about empowering new teachers "to become independent and

reflective practitioners who are able to balance the demands of achieving good academic results and at the same time prepare our students for life."

Under his guidance Ms Chang has learnt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is his "patience and willingness to share his experiences and resources" that made the new teacher experience less intimidating, she adds. From practical tips on class management and student motivation to experimenting with different teaching methodologies and providing effective feedback to students, Mr Khoo's

SOCIAL BUDDIES

Mdm Neo is also a social mentor or buddy for another teacher at Anderson Secondary. These 'social buddies' provide emotional support and guidance to new teachers and act independently of subject mentors. This is especially helpful for new teachers who are unused to the stress and may feel overwhelmed and less efficient than more experienced teachers.

invaluable advice has helped to improve her teaching.

So even though Ms Chang may be teaching the same content, she is constantly learning and trying out new methods. "We are no longer just teachers who interpret syllabus and deliver the content but we also learn from one another and try to find the best methods to teach students."

ONE NEVER STOPS LEARNING

In his 15 years of teaching and six years of mentoring new teachers, Mr Khoo, 45, has found that the mentoring process helps him to "recharge and renew". It is an opportunity to "try out new and innovative teaching strategies", he says.

Mentoring has helped Mr Khoo to become an able communicator and active listener who has learnt to build trust in his mentees and to forge strong interpersonal relationships.

But above all, he comes to the humbling realisation that, "sometimes I may not have all the answers and solutions to the students' problems." And with this understanding he becomes more open to his mentees' suggestions in solving these problems and recognises that teaching is in fact a journey of learning.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

Just as a nurturing environment in the classroom makes for confident students; a caring environment in the staffroom leads to dedicated teachers. Mdm Neo Lay Kheng, a senior Geography teacher from Anderson Secondary, who has 15 years of experience, would attest to this.

Now a mentor, the 39-year-old had once benefited from guidance years ago when she first started teaching. Her mentor, Mrs Theresa Lim, inspired many new teachers with her energy, enthusiasm and lively lessons.

"Doing my turn I feel I should carry on that tradition, keep the fire burning," says Mdm Neo.

These days Mdm Neo is imparting her wisdom to Mr Mohamad Fadzly Bin Samsuri, 29, who joined the teaching force three years ago.

At Anderson, the mentor – matched to the mentee by subject – guides and provides assistance with the teaching of the subject matter.

Mdm Neo adds that there is transparency and openness between mentor and mentee. "Because you can be honest with each other, you are not afraid this person will judge you because they know your weaknesses."

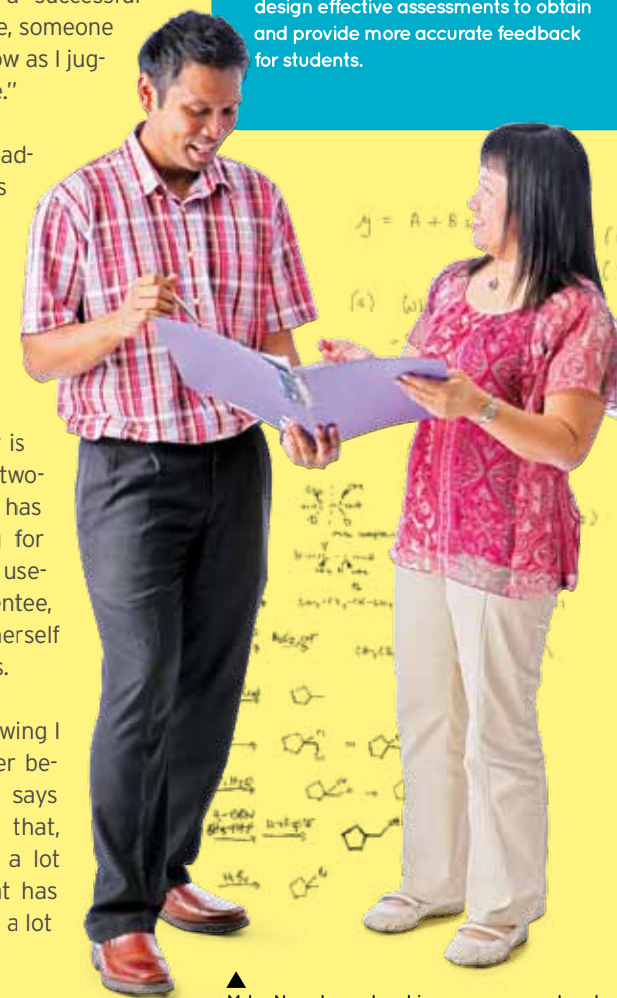
This is why Mr Fadzly has been so open with Mdm Neo. New to his profession, Mr Fadzly was faced with a slew of challenges ranging from tutorial planning, classroom management, setting of examination papers, event organisation to taking charge of co-curricular activities. At this juncture, Mdm Neo stepped in, generously sharing teaching resources and pedagogies, vetting examination papers and assisting Mr Fadzly in prioritising tasks.

Mr Fadzly says Mdm Neo is a role model who inspires him to achieve work-life harmony. "My mentor is a successful teacher, mother and wife, someone I can look up to and follow as I juggle career and family life."

He says an important advice from Mdm Neo has been to see "teaching... like running a marathon. Forget to pace yourself and you will burn out".

It is obvious the collaboration between this pair is not a top-down but a two-way relationship that has proven to be enriching for both. Besides picking up useful IT skills from her mentee, Mdm Neo also sees herself benefiting in other areas.

"The rewards are in knowing I have helped a newcomer become a good teacher," says Mdm Neo, but beyond that, "in mentoring there is a lot of communication... that has helped me to open up to a lot more people." 📌



▲ Mdm Neo shares teaching resources and pedagogies with Mr Fadzly, while the latter teaches her IT skills.

SUCCESSFUL MENTORING THE PJC WAY

MODELLING BY EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

Through observing lessons conducted by experienced teachers, the new teachers are able to witness for themselves how the experienced teachers manage the classroom and motivate their students to learn.

COACHING BY THE MENTORS

Through pre-lesson conference, lesson observation and post-lesson conference, the mentor leads his/her mentees to reflect on their lesson planning and teaching, helping them become independent and reflective practitioners.

DEVELOPING SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCIES SUCH AS SKILL OF ASSESSMENT

Through sharing and giving feedback, the mentor helps the new teachers to design effective assessments to obtain and provide more accurate feedback for students.



Keeping mother tongue languages alive

"When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It's like dropping a bomb on a museum, the Louvre," said the late Kenneth Hale, a professor of linguistics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Also recognising the importance of preserving Mother Tongue Languages (MTL), the MTL Review Committee here has come up with recommendations in encouraging students to be active learners and proficient users of their MTL.

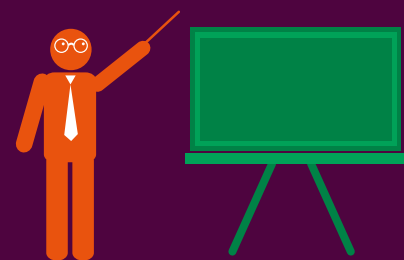
MTL BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Schools get funding from the MOE to:

- Organise annual MTL Fortnights where students learn to use MTL in novel ways through activities. Schools may look forward to greater partnership with parents, alumni and community partners.

- Conduct structured reading programmes to cultivate the habit of reading MTL books.

POWER TO THE TEACHERS



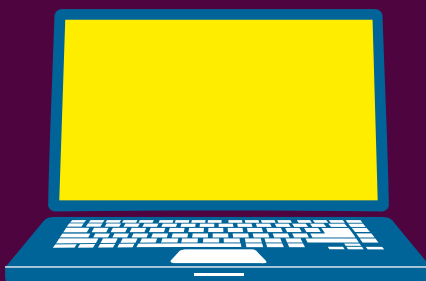
- By 2015, schools will have 500 more MTL teachers.

- Professional development and training of MTL teachers will be strengthened.

- Teachers will be given a set of lesson sequences and proficiency descriptors to plan teaching strategies and assess students' progress.

- Teachers will be given resources to help them develop interaction skills among students in ICT or non-ICT mode.

PROFICIENCY IN THE REAL WORLD



- The first step to learning a language is to speak it. MTL teachers can help to strengthen the oracy foundation of students by using teaching methods such as group work to promote interaction, and songs, rhymes and drama to make lessons more engaging.

- To promote the use of ICT in learning languages, computer-based writing, common in workplace and social communication, will be introduced in the MTL curriculum for secondary schools and junior colleges.

- Examinations on language use will be carried out in more realistic contexts. For instance, video clips, instead of line drawings, will be used as stimuli in oral exams. To ensure good communication skills among Higher MTL students, oral assessment will be part of the 'O'-level HMTL exams from 2016.

Higher Chinese

- Nan Chiau High School will be the 11th SAP secondary school from 2012.

- More funding for overseas immersion programmes for Chinese Language Elective Programme (CLEP) students.

- A new JC1 insertion point will be introduced to the Bicultural Studies Programme (Chinese) [BSP(C)] from 2012.

- A new 'A'-level subject - Chinese Linguistics and Translation - will be introduced in selected schools from 2015.

Higher Malay

- From 2012, Anderson Secondary School will be the 3rd school to offer the Elective Programme in Malay Language for Secondary Schools (EMAS), and Pioneer Junior College will be the 3rd Malay Language Elective Programme (MLEP) centre.

- More funding for overseas immersion programmes for MLEP students.

- More MLEP scholarships will be awarded.

Higher Tamil

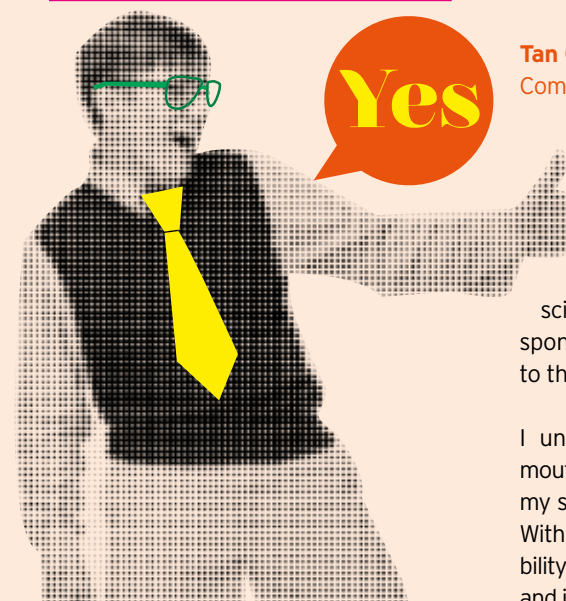
- The Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre will anchor a new National Elective Tamil Language Programme (NETP) for secondary school and JC students from 2012.

- MOE will introduce a new scholarship scheme for NETP JC students from 2012. ➤



Should teachers be on model behaviour 24/7?

Two teachers speak their minds.



Tan Guan Rui Jacob, 25
Commonwealth Secondary School

I believe teaching goes beyond the classroom and even the school. Being a Biology teacher, I do not only help my students learn about the things around them through a scientific approach, I also have the responsibility to impart the correct values to them.

I understand that the words from my mouth hold weight – they can either heal my students' hearts or kill their inner man. With such authority comes great responsibility for me to live my life as an example and inspiration for my students.

Madam Meenachi Balasundaram, 45
Paya Lebar Methodist Girls' (Primary)

I have been teaching for 20 years and am married with three children.

Teachers are and will always be role models. While we are conscious of being a role model in the way we act and dress in school or in public, there should be some freedom for us to "let our hair down" during our personal time (time spent with friends and family when we are not with our students). For instance, I live very near the school and I meet parents and pupils when I go to the market or coffee shop. There are times when I am dressed in my T-shirt, shorts and slippers. Some parents I bump into have commented that I dress shabbily. But I feel my dressing is appropriate for running errands in the neighbourhood.

It would be unnecessarily stressful for teachers to have to be mindful of all that they say and do 24/7. We need greater understanding from the public.

To be sure, teachers should avoid indulging in activities that can be detrimental to the image of the profession. As a parent, I wouldn't want to see my children's teacher misbehaving in public. Personally I am very conscious of how I conduct myself in public but that has not stopped me from having fun with my friends and family.

We are not saints but, as long as our behaviour is guided by our moral compass, I think we will be okay in the eyes of the public. ➤





Office turn-offs

Ever met colleagues who drain your patience or kill your optimism? Here are seven of these challenging personality types and tips to deal with them. By Desmond Chan



1.

The Office Rat

Beware of the rat pack that lurks in your immediate vicinity. These colleagues are experts at sniffing out rumours and often, these gossip and speculations can spread quickly and tarnish your image.

TIP: Confront the office rat in front of other colleagues. Be calm and factual by asking questions such as "Do you really mean what you say? What do the rest of you think?"



2.

The Vuvuzela

They do their best to make pointless noises that deteriorate our quality of life. Their inconsideration comes in the form of loud private phone calls, deafening ringtones and their booming laughter. We can kiss goodbye to completing our marking in peace.

TIP: Talk to them tactfully about the problem. If that does not work, request to change your work space. Otherwise, invest in a good pair of noise-cancelling headphones.



5.

The Procrastinator

Of course, who can forget those who do not observe deadlines? It is a constant chore to work with them when they slow everyone else down with their "last minute" attitude. Good luck working with them in school examination committees.

TIP: Some people procrastinate because they lack confidence. Encourage them by working with them to achieve the goal. Help them to set realistic deadlines too.



6.

The Backstabbers

Some make running a rat race their passion and are always looking for opportunities to prove that they are better than the rest – even to the point of backstabbing. They love to demean others by exposing their flaws and weaknesses before an audience.

TIP: Do your best at work. The sweetest revenge is when you outshine the backstabber. It shows everyone that what he says about you is not true.



3.

The Boot-lickers

They enjoy buttering up the boss and boast about their workload whenever the boss passes by. They spring treats and surprises on their bosses to get into their good books.

TIP: They are annoying, but mostly harmless. But if you find your boss falling for their charms and ignoring you, talk to your boss more and make sure he knows how hard you work.



7.

The Skivers

These colleagues will find a way out of their tasks if they can. And no matter how urgent the work is, their answer is always "No" or "Maybe later". They hate taking initiative and put in minimal effort for their team.

TIP: If you can, ask to change teams. Otherwise, confront the slacker's behaviour directly but tactfully. And if all else fails, let your boss know. It's not tattling if you handle it professionally.



4.

The Prophet of Doom

This is the quintessential pessimist whose common quips include: "This is bound to go wrong", "Your proposal has zero chance of going through", "This idea will not work out", "You are wasting your time on this project". It is hard to feel encouraged with the prophet of doom around.

TIP: Stay away to avoid absorbing the negative vibes. But if you can't, tap on their ability to think critically by asking them to anticipate potential problems and then press them to provide solutions.

FOR MORE TIPS:
Go to the Teacher Support
Network at
<http://bit.ly/difficultpeople>



Gorgeous (nearby) getaways

For as little as under S\$500, you can make the best of your long weekends and school breaks to explore our beautiful regions. Just don't forget your camera!

By Siti Maziah Masramli

Travel tips

More info

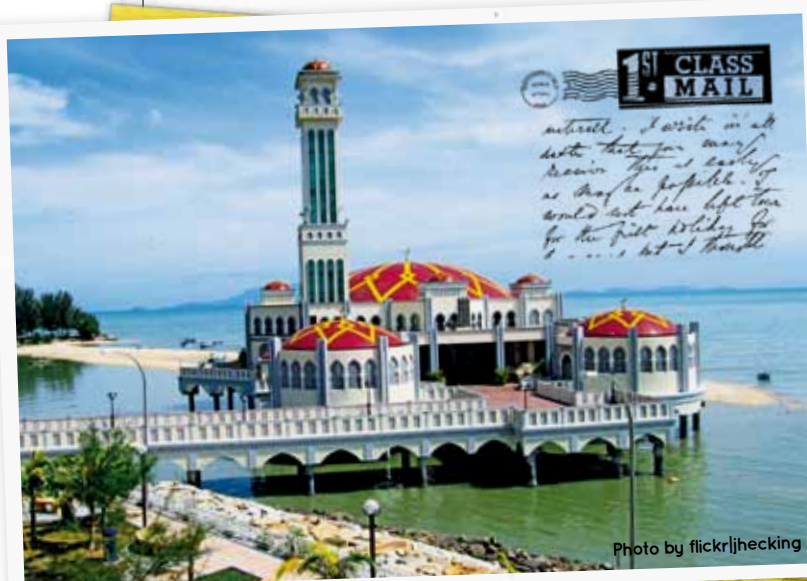
Tanjung Bungah, Penang, Malaysia

About S\$300 for two nights, budget return-flight inclusive

A small Penang suburb once overlooked, it is now a place of rapid development. Thankfully it still offers low-priced hotels. Attractions include an old Chinese temple and Malaysia's first floating mosque to be built in the sea, constructed to replace a mosque damaged by the 2004 tsunami. There is also a Toy Museum showcasing more than 100,000 toys and collectibles. A vibrant night market is open weekly. Water activities enthusiasts can have their go at the beach or at the Penang Water Sports Centre.

Tanjung Bungah is a short drive from capital Georgetown.

www.penang.ws/areas/tanjung-bungah.htm



Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) Homestays

From S\$195 to S\$435, train ticket prices inclusive

Discover rural destinations on Malaysia's KTM homestay programme before the Tanjong Pagar KTM station ceases operations in July. A three-day, two-night trip with Homestay Banghunis, Sepang in Selangor includes a tour to the Sepang Gold Coast, a dragonfruit farm, and factories producing local delicacies as well as a coffee factory.

Save on a S\$15 train surcharge by avoiding peak periods.

go2homestay.com



Kuching, Sarawak

About S\$350 for two nights, budget return-flight inclusive

Learn about Sarawak tribes at the Sarawak Cultural Village, where you can see longhouses and buy handicrafts. Continue shopping for antiques and handicrafts at Kuching's oldest street, Main Bazaar, where 19th-century Chinese shophouses line the river. In the evening, cruise down Sarawak River made golden by the sunset in a tambang. Feast on famous Sarawak cuisine such as laksa, popiah, beef noodles and dumplings at the open air market.

Save by flying from Johor instead of Singapore to Kuching.

www.sarawaktourism.com



Bintan, Riau Islands, Indonesia

About S\$150 for two nights, ferry return-ticket inclusive

Though its beaches are popular, the local and cultural side of Bintan at its capital Tanjung Pinang is certainly not to be missed. The cultural centre offers music and dance performances. Take a boat ride around the harbour to see the Masjid Raya and its ruins at Penyengat Island, and temples with 40-armed statues. A newly built temple houses the largest sitting Goddess of Mercy figure in South-east Asia. At night, indulge in the freshest seafood at low prices.

Take taxis from the main road and bargain for affordable prices.

www.welcometobintan.com



Koh Lanta, Krabi, Thailand

About S\$350 for two nights, budget return-flight inclusive

Deserted, powder-white beaches with spectacular views of untouched rainforests and the sea, dotted with colourful 'long tails' – local fishing boats. That is what the islands of Koh Lanta offer, minus the tourist crowds of other Thai islands. With caves, jungles and national parks to explore, perhaps on the back of an elephant, there are activities for the whole family. For a break away from the northern coast's resorts, bars and restaurants, make a trip to the mangroves and river islets on the eastern side by kayak or bicycle.

Take a Tiger Airways flight to Krabi Airport.

www.krabi.com/lanta.htm