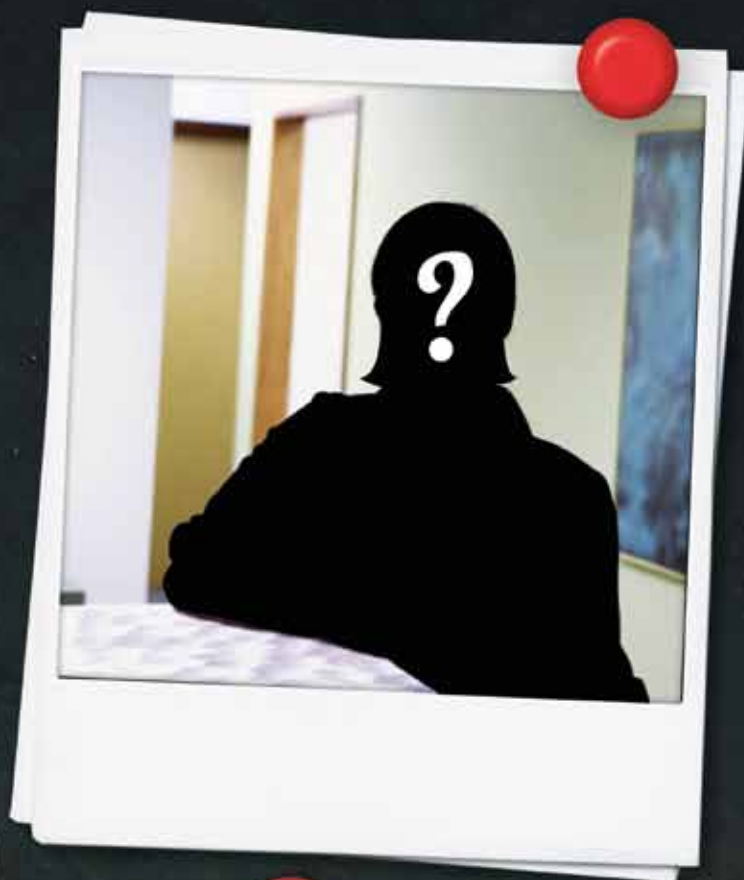




OUR UNSUNG HEROES

They work tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver the best service they can to teachers, students and external stakeholders. Salute the Executive and Administrative Staff and Allied Educators in your school or in HQ – send us photos of them with words of appreciation for their hard work. It's their turn to shine and winning entries stand a chance to win attractive prizes!

**Thank
You!**
You're a star!



INSTRUCTIONS

1. The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
2. The photo should be in JPEG format, A4 in size and have a resolution of at least 300 dpi.
3. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
4. Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, e-mail and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
5. Each participant is allowed only one entry.
6. Attach a caption (max 25 words), explaining how the photo reflects the theme.
7. The copyright of all entries shall remain with the photographer. However, *Contact* reserves the right to use and modify the selected entry as well as other suitable ones, with full acknowledgement to the copyright owners, for future use and publication.
8. The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity, and originality. The judges' decision is final.
9. Three winners will each receive an attractive prize. *Contact* reserves the right to change or replace the prize with another of equal or greater value should the featured prize become unavailable. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 2nd December 2011.

GIFT
VOUCHER

Connecting with YOU

*Education Minister Heng Swee Keat
shares his thoughts.*



CONTACT

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 04
OCTOBER 2011

The online principle

School leaders share tips on connecting with students via social media.

A new look at the world

Gain some fresh, international perspectives on education.

10 tell-tale signs that you are a teacher

Do you fit the stereotype?



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On the cover,
Minister Heng Swee Keat
at his photoshoot
with *Contact*.

Connecting with you

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IBC PHOTO INVITE

Winning entries for October

Thank you for sending us photos
of your staff lounge activities.
Here are the winners!



Lee Hong Leng

Editor-in-chief

Readers' comments on



I think *Contact* is an excellent magazine,
with interesting stories and colourful
pictures. A must read for every teacher!
The team behind *Contact* certainly
deserves a pat on the back!

Chua Shi Qian

Higher Education Division, MOE

Contact's new look is really funky! I am definitely
considering taking up some of the activities suggested
in the Lifestyle section of the July issue. I look forward
to reading more stories on the interesting things other
schools and teachers are doing or even eating! ;)

Gwen Ho Gui Vun

St Hilda's Secondary School

I really liked the sections on "Serving Customers 101" and "Teen Jargon" in the July issue. I learnt
some important tips on how to handle parents and am now also able to understand my students better!

Ian Ong

Hwa Chong Institution (College)

Contact is a very attractive
and appealing magazine. It is
colourful, well thought-out and
creatively put together. Certainly
one of the most professionally
done magazines around! The
stories featured are also relevant
and current, and I truly enjoyed
reading the articles. I really liked
the last page in the July issue on
"Teen Jargon". *Contact* should make
such light-hearted and humorous
features a mainstay on the last
page of every issue!

Peh Lee Chin

Schools Division, MOE

What do you think of *Contact*? Share it
with us at contact_online@moe.edu.sg



Connecting with you

A letter from the Minister to all teachers.

Dear colleagues,

In my five months with MOE, I have had the pleasure of interacting with many of our teachers, allied educators, executive and administrative staff and school leaders. I enjoyed my visits to our schools, and am heartened by your commitment.

A teacher's job is never easy because you are shaping lives. You juggle multiple roles – teach, counsel, administer, lead. Work can sometimes be stressful – when students do not behave, when parents are demanding, or when colleagues or leaders are not supportive.

But as many of you have told me, there are many more joyous moments – when students do their best; when parents show appreciation; when we work well as a team; when our leaders inspire.

Central to our work are three questions: what is a good education system? What is a good school? What is a good teacher? I tried to address the first two at our Work Plan Seminar. I hope you have had a chance to read about it.

A good school is not one whose students score straight As. Rather, it is one that takes students as they are when they enter the school, and works hard to bring out the best in each one, making each student a confident learner.

As a system, we should not have “neighbourhood schools” almost as an apology. Instead, we must strive to ensure that all schools – in every neighbourhood – are good schools. Every teacher, regardless of which school you teach at, must have the belief that you can make a difference to the lives of the students.

Let me say a few words about a good teacher. It's about the heart – caring for our students, as individuals and as learners. It's about the head – acquiring a mastery of the subjects you teach and perfecting the craft of teaching.

Above all, it's about the spirit – of imparting values, nurturing character and inspiring lives, so that our young may realise their potential, and become active, confident and responsible citizens. In short, a good teacher leads, cares and inspires.

We have a good education system, with good schools and good teachers. It is very exciting and important for us to build on this as we embark on the next stage of our education journey – values-driven and student-centric. Values education develops the values and character of our students. A student-centric education develops the whole person and brings out the best in each child. Competencies for the 21st century such as creativity, communications, collaboration and a broad outlook will enable our young to thrive in a more complex, globalised world.

Certainly, this means that all of us, including myself, have more to learn. Borrowing Stephen Covey's words, we need to “sharpen the saw” – take time out to learn new things and to recharge. We are committed to your growth, and I hope you will make full use of the range of development opportunities and sharing at the Academy of Singapore Teachers.

As teachers, you are always giving, so the energy and inspiration can dry up. One way to recharge, which I learnt from a British teacher in her 60s, is to ensure that each week, you have one, two or three hours of ‘personal, guilt-free’ time when you do what you enjoy most other than teaching and attending to other responsibilities.

This is a hectic period with the year-end examinations. I hope you will take some time during the holidays to spend time with your loved ones and recharge. Thank you for another year of good work, and I wish you a joyous time at year's end, and a fulfilling new year!

Yours sincerely,

Heng Swee Keat
Education Minister





Getting the TENSION right

In Education Minister Heng Swee Keat's first interview with *Contact*, he speaks about the need for flexibility in a diverse school system.



A classical music fan, Mr Heng Swee Keat counts famous composers Ludwig Beethoven and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart among his favourites.

Perhaps that is why, when sharing his plans for the ministry at the Work Plan Seminar earlier this year, the music lover compares the education system to a violin string that needs fine-tuning to achieve perfect tension.

The man in charge of education in the country says: "With multiple pathways in our education system, and our emphasis on holistic education, we can have a better-tuned system, with less tension relating to examinations."

Mr Heng advocates a values-driven, student-centric education. Values education and the pursuit of excellence in the academics are not "either/or" options; when done well they should reinforce each other. For instance, the development of a rugged and resilient character lays the foundation for success.

Getting the balance of emphasis right is the key, says the Minister. He cautions against swinging to the other extreme of laxity and of banishing competition. "Applying effort, trying hard and striving to do well are all essential to effective learning."

Still, he acknowledges that there are challenges to implementing holistic education, such as the need to address



"I envisage networks of schools as centres of innovation. Schools with similar areas of focus and strength can work together to solve common challenges, produce innovative ideas and diffuse them across our schools."

parents' concerns about examination results. "Many schools have good programmes to develop their students. However, the most common question that principals get from parents is 'What's your average PSLE score or cut-off point?'"

Mr Heng feels that parents can have hopes and dreams for their children and even put on the pressure a little. But ultimately, we must let the children develop in areas which they are good in and in their own time, says the parent of two.

MORE POWER TO SCHOOLS

Schools are already stepping up to cater to students of different abilities and needs.

"Some schools have been successful in motivating less academically-inclined students, and helping them to excel in particular areas. Some have been successful in motivating high achievers to reach new peaks of excellence. Others have excelled in values education and character development, national education, the use of ICT for learning or in other niche areas," says Mr Heng, who views these as

innovative approaches by schools and hopes to see more.

"I envisage networks of schools as centres of innovation. Schools with similar areas of focus and strength can work together to solve common challenges, produce innovative ideas and diffuse them across our schools. That way, we can raise the standards of our entire system further, and not just in a few schools... The rich insights of our educators can be shared and discussed, so that we can take these to the next level."

Greater ground ownership also calls for great people. "The key to the success of any system is having really good people on the ground who believe in what they do, and, who exercise imagination and diligence to get things done."

With 356 schools in total, ranging from primary schools to junior colleges and vastly different in missions, philosophies, administration and needs, MOE can help schools get the tension right by allowing them more flexibility and power to make judgment calls.

"The challenge is to design and implement a system with sufficient accountability and flexibility," says Mr Heng. "There is no one-size-fits-all. It is important to tailor the approach and the programmes according to the needs of the students in the schools."

NO SURPRISE INSPECTIONS

Mr Heng speaks with the authority of someone who has seen how things are run on the ground. In his five months on the job, he has visited schools to talk to principals and teachers, continuing a practice started more than a decade ago in MOE.

He sees the value of such visits from his experience in his past job as a police officer on the streets: that not all policies made at HQ translate properly when they are cascaded to the frontline.

"How things are really done at the frontline and how officers view policies are critical to success," says Mr Heng, who clearly has no intention of sitting in an ivory tower.



"Several people urged me on my Facebook to visit schools unannounced. But surprise visits are not effective in the long-run because they generate a lack of trust."



"A good education system is not just about getting the policies right. We need to fully support our frontline, making sure that they have the capacity to get their work done. A policy is only as good as its implementation."

However, surprise inspections are out.

"Several people urged me on my Facebook to visit schools unannounced. But surprise visits are not effective in the long-run because they generate a lack of trust," says Mr Heng, who had experienced similar checks from the higher-ups when he was a police officer. "We may catch the small minority who have a problem, but end up demoralising the other 99 percent who want to do a good job."

Meanwhile, he underscores the need for a system of accountability to ensure good outcomes and take action on those who do not perform. He also believes that the best outcomes are achieved when teachers and school leaders share a deep sense of ownership and conviction.

This is why he keeps his visits low-key and urges educators to speak candidly. "My belief is that people want to do a good job. Our role as leaders is to inspire and enable them to do their best."

LEADING FROM EXPERIENCE

The man who has been touted as a core member of Singapore's fourth generation

leadership, has proven that he is a leader who listens. He takes note of comments from the public on his Facebook page and responds to emails by teachers. Mr Heng is also no stranger to Education, having served as MOE's first Director of Higher Education in 1996. Serving in the Ministry of Education again is, to him, "a relished homecoming".

In his 27 years in the public service, he had held various appointments. He once served as the Commander of the Jurong Police Division. After his stint at MOE, he became the Principal Private Secretary to then Senior Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He then moved on to become the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry where he oversaw the negotiation of free trade agreements and was the Chief Negotiator with India.

Most recently, in his last job as Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, Mr Heng led a team of over 1,000 officers to steer the financial system successfully through its worst financial crisis in 70 years in 2008 and 2009.

CURIOUS BY NATURE

At home, Mr Heng's interests are quiet and simple.

Besides classical music, the self-confessed bookworm loves to read. Museums of every type – art, science, history – are also close to his heart and are something

special that he shares with his wife and children on excursions to museums locally and overseas.

He also likes long quiet walks, something he picked up as an Economics undergraduate at the Cambridge University where he spent time traipsing around the English countryside.

Many do not know this but Mr Heng enjoys the great outdoors and cites a hiking holiday in New Zealand some years ago as his favourite holiday to date. In Singapore, you just may spot him trekking in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve or simply taking a stroll along the Botanic Gardens trails in the evenings.

When asked if there's a common theme to his interests, Mr Heng says: "I guess I am curious – about people, cultures, history and societies; and I hope I retain this sense of wonder about civilisations and the universe." He adds: "I find nature beautiful. It is a special feeling to be at one with nature."

And in what is perhaps the most personal revelation in the interview, Mr Heng adds: "That's part of my problem. There are just so many things that I want to do and learn, but there's so little time. But that does not mean I should give up doing them!" 🐼



The online principle

Contact chats with three school leaders who harness social media to engage students, and finds a common guiding principle in their efforts – be real and keep to a consistent persona both on and offline. By Abigail Kang

Home / New Post

Andrew Tan

Principal of
Monfort Secondary School



Purpose of blog

Provide a personal perspective of happenings in school



Andrew's Favourite Quote

"Social media is just another step in this direction of flattening organisations – seeing organisations more as networks, not hierarchies, and for me, this means that there must be a relationship."

Photos of Andrew Tan



Contact Why did you choose to blog?



Andrew Tan I wanted to tell a story about the school, to whoever was interested in an insider's look into our school beyond the official website and newsletter. Initially, I wanted to call my blog "The Principal and his iPhone" because it was really about that – I would walk around with the iPhone and if I saw something interesting I would take a picture and upload it.



Contact Do you plan to use other social media platforms to reach out to students?



Andrew Tan I have two Facebook accounts, a personal one and one as the principal. Many students have "added" me as a friend on the latter. I've also started to dabble in Twitter and 'follow' some of my students. It gives me some insight into the issues they face as teenagers. If I suspect from their Tweets or blog posts that the kids are doing anything dangerous, I will approach them and counsel them.



Contact Do they know you follow their Tweets?



Andrew Tan I think some of them do. In fact, some even blocked me. It's nothing personal and I understand that this is their personal space.



Contact Do you think social media has changed your role as a principal?



Andrew Tan I think that has been changing, with or without social media. Social media is just another step in this direction of flattening organisations – seeing organisations more as networks, not hierarchies, and for me, this means that there must be a relationship. It is about understanding and responding to the needs of students and teachers.



Contact Do you think there's a right way for educators to use social media?



Andrew Tan When we blog we must be clear about who we are. For me, I'm blogging as a principal and my objective is to share what goes on in school with my staff, students, parents, alumni and whoever else is interested.



Contact With the benefits of social media, is there still a need for offline engagement?



Andrew Tan Yes. Social media is just another channel to share information and it should not replace face-to-face interaction.



- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- 31 Events

Purpose of FB page

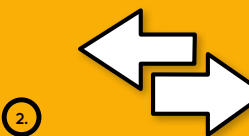
Discuss relevant issues with students on their home turf

ZACH'S THREE TIPS ON EFFECTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA



1.

You need to be consistent. You can't be two different persons online and off.



2.

Engagement is key. You cannot think of Facebook as pushing things out – it's not a one-way street. You must be willing to listen to students.



3.

Facilitate (online discussions) with a light touch – once you have too many constraints, students will be turned off.

Zach Ong Kong Hong

Principal of **Teck Whye Secondary School**

Share: Post Add photos



Contact How did your Facebook page, *'TWSS Principal's Desk'*, come about?



Zach Ong Kong Hong I felt there was a need for me to know the students better. I thought the fastest way was to meet with them on their home turf, so that's why I went online. I want to engage my students on issues that I may not have the time or space to talk about in school. Social media is the best space to talk about these issues, instead of having to schedule sessions or talk to students in a very hot school hall for an hour. It is direct, easily accessible and not to mention hip!



Contact Do you get more engaged and honest responses online?



Zach Ong Kong Hong Yes. Students are more honest online. Social media is a very useful and convenient tool because kids can access it anytime, anywhere, and they're very comfortable in this space.



Contact How has your Facebook page been useful to your school?



Zach Ong Kong Hong It encourages the students to own the school a little bit more when they give feedback. Instead of simply hearing students complain about the poor state of the toilets, I can use my Facebook page to actively engage my students on ways to improve our toilets.



Zach Ong Kong Hong added 15 new photos to the album Mobile Uploads



Contact Have students ever abused your page?



Zach Ong Kong Hong Well, occasionally it happens, but less often than in the first few months. There are two simple ground rules – no vulgarities and no personal attacks. That's all. I occasionally delete posts, but first, I get back to that person (who posted that comment) directly. After a couple of months, students became more mature. For instance, if certain students want to comment on a particular teacher, other students would come in and say: "No, you're not being fair to her" and balance the discussion.

Zach's Favourite Quote

"Facebook is a very convenient platform for us to capitalise on teachable moments, which are not always easy to create in a classroom setting without sounding like a preaching."



- Wall
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- 31 Events

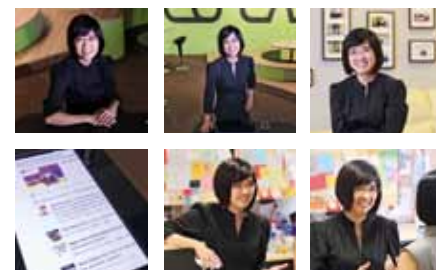
Purpose of FB page

Build school affiliation and pride

Ke-Xin's Favourite Quote

"This Facebook page has become a family page where people come together to affirm each other."

Photos of Tan Ke-Xin



Contact What advice do you have for teachers wishing to engage students using social media?



Zach Ong Kong Hong Facebook is a very convenient platform for us to capitalise on teachable moments, which are not always easy to create in a classroom setting without sounding like a preaching. So like the NTU Valedictorian incident, I just left the link to the Youtube video of the incident on my Facebook "wall", and asked: "Is this (use of an expletive at a formal event) okay?" I didn't say anything until students commented.

Tan Ke-Xin

Vice-principal of **Ngee Ann Secondary School**

Share: Post Add photos



Contact How did Ngee Ann's Facebook page come about?



Tan Ke-Xin It was actually started by a group of media club students. However, after they graduated, a few teachers and I took charge of it.



Contact Why did you still go on Facebook, when you already have traditional outreach channels like the school magazine?



Tan Ke-Xin We do put up announcements on the official school website and magazine, but the magazine only comes out every half a year and uploading announcements on the website requires some time. With Facebook I can put up announcements almost instantly, with just one click of the button.



Contact How else has the Facebook page been useful?



Tan Ke-Xin This Facebook page has become a family page where people come together to affirm each other. For example, one Head of Department received a commendation medal on National Day and an ex-principal (Mr Bob Koh) posted: "Alice, you truly deserve this." Current and ex-students then came on board and "liked" it. The Facebook postings helped this teacher realise that many students actually appreciated her.



Contact What advice do you have for teachers using social media?



Tan Ke-Xin I think as a teacher you have a certain professional image to maintain. Hence, I do not befriend current students on my personal Facebook page. I maintain this professional distance and will only "add" them after they have graduated from the school. 📧

Hear ye, hear me!

You want to keep up with the latest developments in MOE and voice your ideas and opinions on hot-button issues. Whatever your communication needs, there is a network of channels to tap into.

Contact: The Teachers' Digest

Want to keep abreast of the latest in professional development and curriculum change in MOE? Read stories on issues that are close to the hearts of teachers in *Contact*, a quarterly digest for teachers. Read your personal copy or the digitised version at <http://bit.ly/moecontact>

Message Of The Day

This short, four to five-slide presentation greets you every morning when you turn on your computer giving you quick updates on the education fraternity.

Intranet

"Spotlight" features the latest announcements and events in MOE. Here, you can also access frequently-used applications such as HRMS (Human Resource Management System), Pac@Gov, and PRAISE (Promotion Ranking and Appraisal System).

ICONnect

Check your email for the latest MOE news before it appears in the newspapers. You will also receive e-newsletters monthly such as the MOE Librarian (latest happenings in the MOE library), MOE I-deal (hottest innovation trends in education locally and abroad) and the MOE Academy (regular updates on programmes by the Academy of Singapore Teachers).

Human Resource (HR) Online

Troubled by personnel matters? Go to this one-stop platform for professional advice, HR-related policies, circulars, procedures and application forms. http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/hr_online/



Have something to say about developments in MOE? Start a discussion thread, join the conversation, or write to senior management at My Forum - our very own online forum! Look out for the most recent discussion threads in the RSS feeds on the log-in page of ICONnect!

MOE Ideas Bank

Have a ground-breaking idea to improve your work? Share your suggestions and be rewarded for your innovative ideas! Go to <http://ideas.moe.gov.sg/>

School visits

Share your take on the ministry's policies and initiatives when a member of MOE's senior management or a political head from MOE visits your school. The visit is usually once a year in each school, so check when is the next one to your school!

EXCO (Executive Committee) dialogue sessions

If you are an HQ officer, this is your chance to speak to senior management on your division's work, and the working environment and culture at MOE HQ. Every division has at least one session annually.

Townhall meetings

Want to know more about MOE's initiatives and dialogue with Senior Management? All HQ staff are invited to attend our biannual Townhall meetings in March and October! Find out more at <http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/townhall/>

HEAR ME
I have something to say.

TELL ME
What's going on?

For a list of more MOE communication channels, log on to <http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/ccd/internal-comms/channels.htm>



A new look at the world

Two American Fulbright Awardees, seeking new ways to help students understand the past and empower them for the future, share what they observed of the education system here. By Siti Maziah Masramli

While journalism and history teacher Charles 'Pete' Hammer wants to make the past relevant to students today, Mr Lance Boyd wishes to change how environmental literacy is taught in the future.

Both are recipients of the Fulbright Distinguished Award for teaching, which recognises excellent primary and secondary teachers in the US and other countries. US award recipients are sent abroad to teach in overseas schools and study in research centres or universities of the host countries.

Mr Hammer was posted to Hwa Chong Institution (HCI), where he taught New Media

Journalism and Contemporary American Culture for HCI's sabbatical programme. Mr Boyd was attached to Commonwealth Secondary School (CSS), the West Zone Centre of Excellence for Environmental Education.

One thing they admired about Singapore's education system: there are multiple educational pathways for students after secondary school – junior colleges, polytechnics, specialised schools and ITE – to develop students with different abilities and interests.

In contrast, the policy in the US is to prepare all students for college after high school. However, "30-40% of the population is not

going to college, and yet they will leave high school with some vague preparation for college that they will never use... There is no real strong alternative route that could make them constructive members of society and contributors of economic and social growth," shares Mr Boyd.

"So the polytechnic route (in Singapore), especially the fact that it is possible that you can go from polytechnics to the universities...(is) a way of offering students a real choice without closing their futures completely. I am truly impressed by the multitude of options Singapore gives its students," says Mr Hammer.

RELOOKING HISTORY

Mr Hammer, 61, "nearly fell off [his] chair" when he heard teaching jargon like "think-pair-share" and "gallery walk" (see sidebar) being used regularly by local teachers. Both these terms are student-centred teaching strategies from the US, heavily promoted but not yet widely practised there, he says. He was impressed by how well teachers in Singapore implement these methods and use them in the right contexts.

Here to research on designing Chinese History lessons for his students in California, Mr Hammer chose Singapore for the education systems "windows to both the English Western world and the Chinese world".

The teacher from San Francisco wants American students to study "Chinese history through Chinese eyes". Lessons for

12-year-olds, for example, will have a cross-cultural comparison of dragons – these creatures are seen as evil monsters in European traditions, but are revered in Chinese culture because they symbolise the emperor.

At HCI and other schools that he visited during his five-month teaching stint here, he observed Chinese History lessons and noted the greater emphasis on contemporary issues. "HCI has a course bringing US and Chinese economic dynamics together, comparing the global economy from those two perspectives," says Mr Hammer. "We're not doing that at all in the US!"

Though students here are taught less Chinese History, Mr Hammer thinks that students benefit from learning about more contemporary issues as they "are more interested in it and there are more direct connections to their lives."

CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Teaching in Singapore was a strange experience for Mr Boyd, 40.

The Geography and Global Issues teacher, who taught at the Academy of The Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii, was used to having attentive students along with bored students sitting in the back, throwing spitballs. In contrast, his Secondary 3 express stream class here was "one of the weirdest classes" he ever taught.

"Weird in a sense that they were engaged, they were diligent, and nobody questioned what I was doing, nobody spoke out and said: 'This is not something I want to be doing!' It throws me off to teach such well-behaved classes."

Still, Mr Boyd admires the balance Singapore's education system has found between a "highly organised system – top-down mandated syllabi and streaming – and the ability to constantly transform and experiment". Case in point: he expected to find unconventional teaching practised island-wide. Instead, he found "consistent pockets of experimentation and innovation", pointing out specialised schools like the School of The Arts, and the

"I want to focus on students making a positive impact."

Postcard



▲ Purely reading about possible futures can be quite dull for students. Hence Mr Boyd presented postcards depicting imagined scenarios of Hawaii, and in the process, engaged students to envision the future of Singapore.

Problem-Based Learning curriculum at the Republic Polytechnic, which worked their curriculum to fit the specific needs of their students.

So were Singapore schools really flawless? Mr Boyd feels that more can be done in environmental education. "The way it is practised unfortunately has a lot of doom and gloom," says Mr Boyd, who attended the annual Just One Earth seminar (where educators shared best practices in environmental education) and organised a concurrent student-run seminar at the Science Centre for student 'green leaders' to imagine possible futures for Singapore.

He wants students to gain environmental literacy in "more empowering and less fear-inducing" ways – students can be taught to design solutions to existing problems, instead of just being told to reduce their environmental impact. "I don't want to teach about waste management problems or the consequences of fossil fuels. I want to focus on students making a positive impact."

To advance environmental literacy here, Mr Boyd suggests having a specialised school

for environmental studies. "Understanding effective environmental management is essential to Singapore, so why not invest in it? Why not become a hub for environmental studies, like you're a hub for so many other things? I wouldn't mind helping start a programme here," adds Mr Boyd cheekily. ☺

STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING STRATEGIES

THINK-PAIR-SHARE:
Students are paired or grouped to discuss answers to a question and then continue the discussion by sharing their thoughts with the rest of the class.

GALLERY WALK:
Students are grouped and are tasked to write their group's ideas on chart paper. All the charts are put up on a wall so that students can comment on other students' ideas, for example, by sticking Post-Its with their own responses onto other students' charts.

One topic Mr Hammer teaches in his classes in the US is the voyages of Zheng He, a fleet admiral and explorer in the Ming dynasty. It is a popular topic, he says.



Journey to the west

In August 2010, three Master Teachers, recipients of the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching scholarship, took to the US for four months of craft-honing. They share with *Contact* their key takeaways. By Chen Jingting

COMMUNICATE MORE

M&Ms are more than just candies; they can be an innovative tool to teach chemistry. Mdm Yau Li Heong, a Master Teacher for Chemistry, was interested in how US teachers assess students while teaching.

One teacher used the colourful sweets to represent electrons, protons and neutrons of an atom, and instructed the students to calculate the atomic mass numbers. Through the activity, the teacher could tell immediately which students had trouble understanding the concept. Seeing this as an easy and quick way to gauge a student's understanding, Mdm Yau hopes to introduce this as an alternative form of assessment here. Active peer teaching was also in place as the students were able to clearly articulate the calculation method to each other by the end of the lesson.

Mdm Yau also had a personal breakthrough in communication: the teacher of 28 years grew more confident after interacting with high-flying academics during her Fulbright stint. "I used to think that highly acclaimed academics were in some supernatural realm of intelligence. However, after mingling with them, I realised that they were really nice individuals who, just like me, are educators who want to give children a better tomorrow."

INQUIRE ACTIVELY

"Does the foreign talent policy make people in Singapore feel underappreciated?" "Will global talents further eradicate ethnic cultures in Singapore?"

Such insightful questions were raised by a class of 17 to 18-year-old students in a school in Maryland, when Mrs Lee Hwa Phaik engaged students in an inquiry about the cultural identity of Singapore during their Geography lesson. "When students ask questions, they are taking ownership of

"We need to embrace each other's cultures and be more sensitive."

Mrs Subramaniam had plenty of time to learn from and have fun with her US counterparts.



Mdm Yau visited US classrooms and observed that students are quick to articulate what they learn.



Mrs Lee was impressed by the inquisitive questions posed by US students in a discussion.

their learning," says the Master Teacher for Geography, who visited US schools to find out how inquiry – learning with the use of questions – could benefit geography students. The perceptive questions posed by these American students made Mrs Lee think of exciting new ways for human geography to be taught in Singapore.

She became an inquirer herself when attending a module on curriculum at an American university, where she was puzzled by the policy on different curriculums for black and white students.

APPEAL TO STUDENTS' INTERESTS

Mrs Tamilarasi Subramaniam wants to get students excited about learning their mother tongue. The Master Teacher for Tamil Language was never sure how to achieve this until her stint in the US where she learnt the strategy of grouping and teaching students according to their interests.

Mrs Subramaniam studied how US teachers teach non-native English speakers reading and comprehension in English. In one elementary classroom, the teacher used differentiated instruction where students could choose and complete tasks based on their interests – read a storybook, do a listening exercise or revise spelling – at the beginning of the reading lesson. With all students engaged, the teacher could concentrate on helping the weaker ones.

Mrs Subramaniam, who has been teaching for 30 years, now tries to get Tamil Language teachers to apply differentiated instruction. She not only trains them, she visits schools to observe how they implement it during lessons. "I'm willing to guide them and even co-teach to demonstrate how differentiated instruction can be done."

"I asked the lecturer: 'Why is there a division?' The lecturer looked pained and I felt terrible," says Mrs Lee, who attended the module with Fulbright awardees from other countries. But her question sparked a lively class discussion on the thorny topic of racial sensitivities in teaching.

The incident gave the teacher of more than 30 years food for thought on engaging students from diverse cultures. "We need to embrace each other's cultures and be more sensitive and Singapore is a perfect place to put these lessons into action!"

Overseas trips: boon or bane?



IT IS A BOON

Nalini Moorthi
Teacher
Pei Hwa Secondary School

SG → KL | BOARDING 15:00

SEAT 8C | GATE 21A | FLIGHT JB106

Overseas trips strengthen the student-teacher relationship by giving both an invaluable opportunity to bond and to learn more about each other outside the classroom.

I remember the first time I led a group of students in my dance team to their first overseas competition. I had been teaching for less than three years, and felt honoured to be given such an important task. I was really excited and spent the months preceding the trip organising a comprehensive dance schedule, liaising with the travel agents, holding briefing sessions with the parents of the students and even picking out a brand new suitcase.

Although it was quite nerve-wrecking to be responsible for 30 students on the crazy streets of Kuala Lumpur, the trip gave me an invaluable opportunity to get to know my students' personal lives,

the struggles they faced, how they felt and what was important to them. The camaraderie I developed with them could never have been fostered to the same extent in the classroom or through weekly CCA sessions.

My students also saw me in a different light; that despite being firm and decisive with them, I really cared and they began to open up to me. I am now closer than ever to the members in my dance team. Surprisingly, this experience has also made me a much better teacher as I could now pitch my lessons in a way that would relate directly to my students.

I am a firm believer in the value of overseas trips. They can be a hassle to prepare for but they are the best investment you could ever make in your students' educational experience.

A teacher and his pupils wait in line at San Francisco's Pier 41 to purchase tickets for a sightseeing tour to the Alcatraz Prison. The pupils are fidgety, whiny and making a huge ruckus. The frazzled teacher reprimands them to no avail. Could he send them on a one way trip to Alcatraz?

The above is merely one of the many episodes I have had in my experience chaperoning overseas trips. Just last year, my colleague and I took five Primary Three boys to the Global Finals of Destination Imagination, a creative problem-solving competition. It was no simple task leading the over-excited boys on a 30-hour flight, with three plane changes, to Tennessee, USA. At several points, I wondered if it was worth the effort. We had to be vigilant at all times. Our duties included doing a headcount every hour, checking on passports, doing night patrols along the

university hostel corridors. We were the last to sleep and the first to rise.

But all that hassle was outweighed by what I observed in the boys. Being part of a team taught them to respect and celebrate each other's talents, and to realise that when people combine their efforts and exercise their creativity, anything is possible. They now appreciate the power of teamwork; that their combined effort has an exponential effect on the world, making it a better place to live in.

Organising overseas trips for pupils is not just about taking them to a destination and back. It's part of a learning journey to build confidence in them as self-directed learners, concerned citizens and active contributors. Overseas trips present opportunities to develop soft skills, problem-solving and organisational skills and acquire multi-cultural literacy.

IT CAN BE A BANE

PASSENGER

Morgan Zhou
HOD
Anglo-Chinese School (Junior)

SEAT 12A | BOARDING 12:00 | GATE 5E
SG → USA



The secret of the bond

Two schools reveal what makes their staff bonding initiatives so successful. By Sean Lee

Kampungs may be a thing of the past, but at St Margaret's Secondary School, the *kampung* spirit lives on.

In the staffroom, cubicles are divided into clusters or "*kampungs*" as the school calls them, and neighbouring colleagues are usually not from the same department. A staff member in the cluster is appointed the "*kampung* chief".

This promotes cross-departmental interaction on a daily basis. It also enables the quick dissemination and collection of information – "*kampung* dwellers" will inform each other of updates such as a change in

meeting times or even collate orders for an impromptu lunch.

Also, a little friendly rivalry is injected every term when the school's Staff Welfare Committee organises inter-*kampung* games, such as salad making competitions or sports days. Says Mrs Rosalind Khoo, the staff welfare co-ordinator: "As in a real *kampung*, we look out for one another."

TEAM CHEMISTRY

A healthy and friendly work environment does not just make staff feel good, it also fosters team chemistry which is essential for schools to be efficient, says Mrs Cheryl

Lim, principal of Rulang Primary School. The school has, since 2007, scored higher than the national average in the biennial School Climate Survey.

When united as a team, teachers can work on tasks quickly without spending too much time arguing or trying to understand how each other works, says Mrs Lim.

Rulang also believes in encouraging teachers. Besides nominating them for national awards given by the Ministry of Education, the school also introduced the Rulang Excellence Award in 2007.



Health enthusiasts enjoy staff bonding activities such as yoga classes at Rulang Primary (left) and a tennis session during St Margaret's Secondary's Recreation Day (above)

This award is "by the staff, for the staff and helps staff members get a sense that their work is appreciated by their colleagues," says Mrs Lim. They nominate and vote for colleagues in categories such as "Fostering Community" to honour those who make Rulang a pleasant place to work in, and "Heroes Behind the Scenes" to remember dedicated and unassuming workers.

THE SECRET BEHIND THE SUCCESS

It is not surprising then that both St Margaret's Secondary and Rulang Primary have been recipients of the Best Practice Award for Staff Wellbeing for the past three years.

When it comes to planning successful staff bonding programmes, the most important factor is not the allocation of a large budget or fantastic activities, but knowing what appeals to the staff, says Ms Lum Ying Lee, who is in charge of staff welfare at St Margaret's.

For example, as most of the staff at St Margaret's love to travel, the school organises annual overseas retreats to destinations like Cambodia, Vietnam and Hong Kong.

St Margaret's also ensures that they organise something exciting for their staff every term during Recreation Day. Staff takes part in after-school activities, such as scrapbooking and cooking classes, as well as badminton and tennis games.

Both St Margaret's and Rulang conduct surveys at the end of each year to know what their staff members like and dislike. Rulang adopts an open-door policy, where staff's views are always sought after every activity. For instance, because staff members were not keen on sports like Captain's Ball, the school started yoga and kickboxing classes for health enthusiasts. The teachers have even taken the initiative to organise their own sports activities, such as badminton sessions every Tuesday.

"When staff begins to love spending time with one another, you become family, not simply colleagues."

With a plethora of programmes, both schools are also careful not to over-tax staff with activities. For instance, Rulang usually organises a yearly fundraising carnival for its adopted charity World Vision. This year, however, the event was put on hold as the school was already involved in major events such as a performance at the Asian School Games.

Mrs Lim concludes that staff bonding activities should also not take teachers away from their personal and family life; otherwise it runs afoul of the objective of taking care of their social and emotional well-being. "When staff begins to love spending time with one another, you become family, not simply colleagues," shares Mrs Lim. 📌

See how some readers bond in their staff lounges - turn to the inner back cover and find out!

MORE SECRETS ON STRENGTHENING THE BOND

CHIJ PRIMARY (TOA PAYOH)

Examples of staff bonding initiatives:

- Parenting talks and workshops for staff with young children are conducted about three times a year.
- All staff members get to vote on proposed changes in the school.
- All staff members participate in the Walk for Hope annually in support of the Breast Cancer Foundation.

TIPS FROM MS CHRISTINA MICHAEL, VICE-PRINCIPAL:

- Encourage open and honest communication. First, engage staff in professional discourse. With a healthy professional climate, they are more likely to interact on a social or personal level.
- Do something new for each activity. For Teachers' Day celebrations every year, the school organises lunches with different themes. Last year, they went to an agro-farm and learnt to make organic soaps.
- Ensure that participants have plenty of time to interact before and after an activity, for example, by providing two-way transport or a makan session afterwards.

NANYANG JUNIOR COLLEGE (NYJC)

Examples of staff bonding initiatives:

- The college seeds staff interest groups, such as the gardening group and games circles, with start-up funds at \$10 per head.
- Any staff who has contributed to the college are acknowledged through announcements at meetings, assemblies and emails.
- The school's new PLEASE! Framework of rewards and recognition encourages service excellence among Executive and Administrative Staff (EAS).

TIPS FROM MS AMY CHIEW, STAFF WELFARE HEAD:

- Give teachers the space and autonomy to decide on the programmes they want. This increases their sense of ownership.
- Be prepared to tweak programmes so as to be relevant to all staff, as new teachers and EAS join the school every year.



Teachers from St Margaret's Secondary got into a sticky (and fun) situation while making sushi during the school's Recreation Day.



Not just any desk

Rise to the top of the "cool" ladder with these quirky and functional stationery items. By Ang Swan Yee

1.

Spectacles holder

You'll always know where your glasses are with this psychedelic spectacles stand. Available in assorted designs.

\$ S\$23.90

📍 The Wright Gift, #04-02, ION Orchard

2.

Staple-less stapler

This device cuts tiny flaps in the paper and folds them together for a secure binding, without the use of a staple. Available in pink, green and black.

\$ S\$12.90

📍 Kinokuniya at Liang Court and Ngee Ann City

3.

iPhone holder and receiver

Use this chic phone holder that works as a desk phone too. Now, you can take calls with the handset and check your mail or SMS on the iPhone at the same time! Available in blue, pink, yellow and black.

\$ S\$49.90

📍 Kinokuniya at Liang Court and Ngee Ann City

2.

4.

5.

6.

7.

3.

4.

iPhone memo pad and Band-aid sticky notes

Plaster your wall with these innovative sticky notes and keep track of important information and dates!

\$ S\$10 each

📍 NBC, #B1-22, Raffles City Shopping Centre

5.

Mr. P dustbin

Feed this hungry one with all the rubbish on your desk and voila – your table has never looked neater!

\$ S\$19.95

📍 Ameba, #B1-29, Parkway Parade

6.

Octopus hub

You will never run out of USB ports again with this four-tentacle octopus friend. Available in black and green.

\$ S\$19.95

📍 Smiggle, #B1-02, Plaza Singapura

7.

Self-inkling Like/Dislike stamps

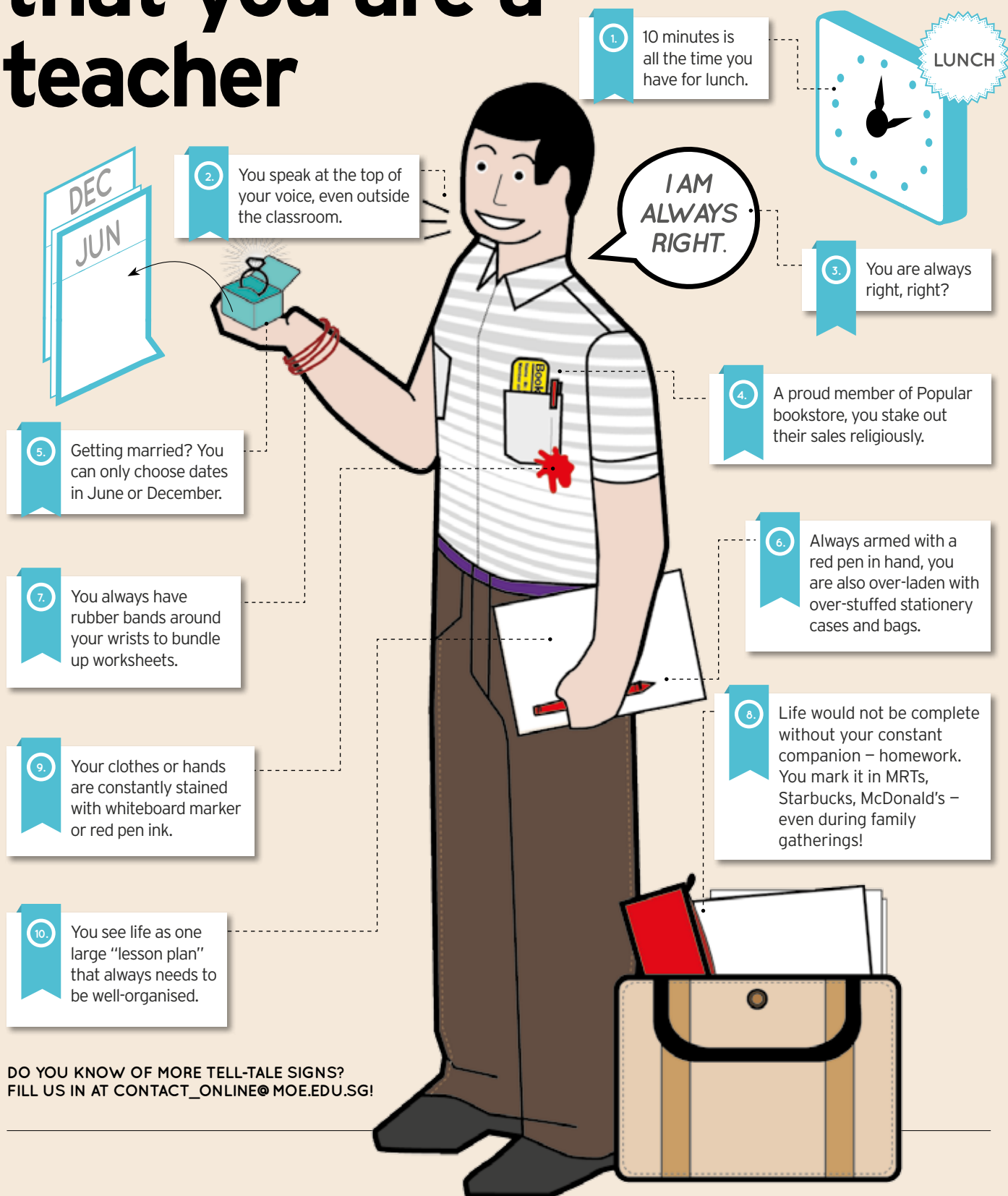
Earn street cred with your students by stamping their homework with these. Thumbs up to the hippest teacher around! 🐙

\$ USD13

📍 www.bit.ly/likedislikestamps, with a delivery charge of USD8 to Singapore



10 tell-tale signs that you are a teacher



DO YOU KNOW OF MORE TELL-TALE SIGNS?
FILL US IN AT CONTACT_ONLINE@MOE.EDU.SG!



CAPTURE MOMENTS WITH CONTACT

WINNING ENTRIES FOR OCTOBER

Thank you for sending us photos of activities in your staff lounge! Winners get to enjoy \$30 worth of CapitaVouchers.

Click!



Goh Choon Siong
Teacher, East Spring Primary School

We, the staff of East Spring Primary, pledge, as united 'Springians', to always 'lo hei' together every year.

Say Cheese!



Sherry Chuang Ping Tyng
Music Co-ordinator, Naval Base Primary School

We are intent on bonding with our hands, head and heart!



Chan Sook Yee
Corporate Support Officer, Woodgrove Primary School

“民以食为天”
Colleagues that eat together, stay together.