



It Runs in Their Families

Teachers share how they were inspired to follow in their parents' footsteps.



contact

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 16 • OCTOBER 2014

How I helped my students enjoy what they learn

An OYEA finalist shares her ideas

FYI: The unusual edition

Open your mind to uncommon teaching methods

Can you change your belief system?

ASPIRE offers a new take on learning and deepening skills

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Winning entries from July.

This issue...

What inspired or influenced you to teach? For the two teachers featured in our cover story, their families play a significant role in their journey as educators. Their stories illustrate how the love for teaching flows from one generation to the next.

Motivation to excel can come from others as well. This year's winners and finalists of the President's Award for Teachers and Outstanding Youth in Education Award speak of their heartfelt appreciation for mentors and colleagues who have motivated them to give of their best.

If you're on the hunt for ways to spice up lessons, look no further than "The unusual edition" of FYI for uncommon subjects and programmes adopted by schools around the world. The approaches to teaching are as creative as they are effective.

We also celebrated the dedication of teachers at the recent Work Plan Seminar (WPS), where a band of 11 educators got together to perform for the first time a song composed by teachers. Mr Lennie Chua, Programme Manager (Music), Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRTs, shares with *Contact* the challenges and rewards of the experience.



From left: Pamela, Zi Rui, Sharon, Tsuey Ling & Paul

Keep the love flowing by submitting photos of your favourite colleagues for our photo competition! There's nothing like some well-deserved praise to end 2014 on a happy note and cheer each other on for the year ahead.

Happy reading!

The Contact Team

Readers' comments



I read *Contact* magazine during the morning assembly period. We have a time allocated for the pupils to read storybooks, so we teachers engage in reading as well. I love *Contact* for the informative stories and easy-to-understand visuals and pictorials. I also like to see the photos sent in by teachers. Overall, I enjoy the magazine.

Mr Suneshkumar Mahalingam
Zhenghua Primary

I especially enjoyed reading the article, "The lessons my students taught me", in the July issue highlighting how Mdm Maznah Bte Yusak persevered to reach out to students in difficult situations. Her story inspires me to reach out to my students who are in similar situations, especially those with special needs. I hope to make a difference to their lives, and forge strong relationships with them and their families.

Ms Mahendran Rudrarani
CHIJ (Katong) Primary

I look forward to receiving and reading the *Contact* magazine because it is simple in layout yet rich in sharing by fellow educators. The articles are interesting and creative. It never fails to provide learning opportunities for me to be a more informed and passionate educator.

Mrs Annie Ang
Queensway Secondary

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



Three generations of teachers: Granddad Mr Abdul Manaf (seated, left) revisit memories of his teaching days with son Mr Dzul (standing) and grandsons Mr Hafizh and Mr Azhari.

It Runs in Their Families

Teachers share how they were inspired to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Text by Kelly Ng Photography by Chuck Tham

Ask Mr Mohammad Azhari Bin Dzul kifli why he wants to teach, and he'll simply say: "I would love to inspire and motivate others," says the Science teacher at Gongshang Primary School. "Being a teacher keeps me in check as I'm in an environment of good practices. Teaching is also regarded as an honourable profession in my religion, Islam."

The 39-year-old attributes this meaningful aspiration to his father, Mr Dzul kifli Bin Abdul Manaf, who started teaching in the 1960s. When Mr Azhari was studying in the same primary school where his father was teaching at, he saw how his father

guided his students with a "strong emphasis" on character building.

Mr Dzul kifli, more widely known as *Cikgu Dzul* (Malay for "Teacher Dzul") or Mr Dzul, also led boy scouts activities such as hiking. He believes that scouts activities are a platform for developing students holistically in social and emotional learning.

Mr Azhari and his younger brother Mr Hafizh Bin Dzul kifli, 37, would tag along their father on such excursions. Venturing outdoors with their father, the two boys developed a keen sense of adventure and leadership.

A memorable excursion was a hike to Seletar Reservoir with the scouts from MINDS (Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore). When night had fallen and the group was still not out of the woods, Mr Dzul made a decision to set up camp for the night, intending to continue their trek at daybreak. In the wee hours of the morning, they found themselves surrounded by Police and paramedics after fellow scout leaders – thinking they needed help – lodged a report.

Sometimes, even Mr Azhari's mother would be roped into the expeditions, so that she could prepare meals for the scouts. "My scouts [would] get to eat pizza and *roti*

prata for breakfast!" recalls Mr Dzul, 66, who retired from teaching in 2003.

"I am really thankful that my father always brought us into his life. He spent all his holidays with us, and we knew all his friends. This is what I hope to do with my son too," shares Mr Azhari, who intends to enrol his six-year-old into Gongshang Primary next year.

Those days of literally following in their father's footsteps inspired both sons to join the teaching profession. Mr Azhari has been teaching for 12 years. His brother, Mr Hafizh, teaches English and Physical Education at Loyang Primary School. For Mr Hafizh, scouting with his father was what gave him his first shot at leading a group of people and planning for different needs. These are useful skills he later applied in his own teaching career.

Also, just as how their father always taught with a focus on values, Mr Azhari and Mr Hafizh now emulate that when teaching their own students.

The passion goes a long way back

Interestingly, Mr Dzul did not sign up for teaching on his own accord.

He good-humoredly shares that he was "tricked" into applying for a teaching job by his father Mr Abdul Manaf Bin Husain. He recounts: "My father had me sign a form, but I only knew what it was for when the Ministry of Education called me up for an interview to be a teacher!"

But he can understand why his father was so determined to make him join the profession.

Mr Abdul Manaf, now 93, devoted the best years of his life to education. He started out as a trainee teacher in the 1930s, and taught the Malay language for four decades – through the war, the Singapore-Malaya merger and Singapore's post-independence days.

The 93-year-old often relates to his son and grandsons about his years teaching in a village school on an island south of Singapore. He started teaching at 15, drawing a pay of \$15 a month.

Pulau Seking, which has since merged with Pulau Semakau, was then home to a small fishing village. Boys there grew up to be fishermen, while most girls aspired to get married. Formal education was not on their minds. Mr Abdul Manaf once had a 20-year-old in his Primary 1 class!

To encourage the children to attend school, Mr Abdul Manaf offered to pay for their school fees and managed to get donations of old school uniforms. Soon after, he even made the island his second home and lived in the teachers' quarters, so that he could have more time with the children.

So strong were the bonds between teacher and students that when Mr Abdul Manaf was transferred to another school on the mainland, the villagers petitioned for him to stay.

The petition was unsuccessful but Mr Abdul Manaf managed to encourage some of the children to continue their education. One of them even became a teacher.

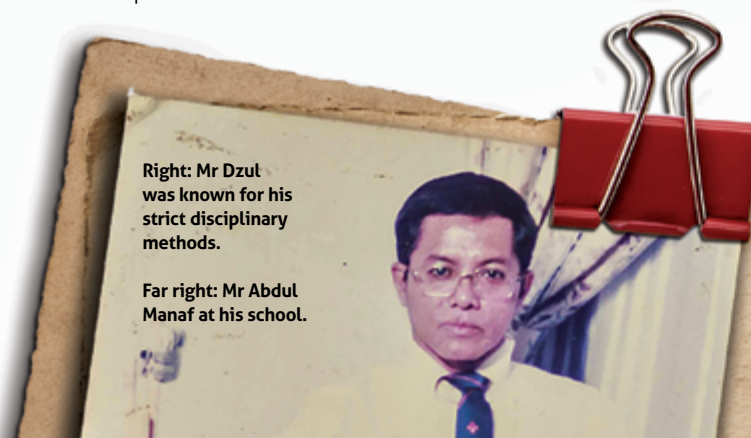
"He always brought us to 'his island', where he lived in a house on stilts. I loved being part of his friendships with the children [and seeing] how affectionate they were to him," Mr Dzul recalls vividly. He adds that Mr Abdul Manaf would bring him to class when he was just three.

Mr Dzul too had precious friendships with his students despite dispensing tough love to them through his strict disciplinary methods. The bonds he built with some of them have lasted beyond the classroom till now. The retired teacher even had Mr Azhari teach him to use Facebook so that he could keep in touch with them.

Although he was "tricked" to join teaching, Mr Dzul has never looked back. And before he knew it, his sons had joined the teaching service – albeit on their own accord – but not without his and their grandfather's influence.

Right: Mr Dzul was known for his strict disciplinary methods.

Far right: Mr Abdul Manaf at his school.





From left: Mr Ng, Mdm Wong and Mrs Chew share a tender moment singing along to a favourite song.

A subtle yet powerful influence

The inspiration to become an educator can happen differently in another family.

Mrs Rebecca Chew, 51, is the current Principal of the Singapore Teachers Academy for the aRts (STAR). She comes from a family who has contributed to the education scene in various ways.

Her father, Mr Ng Fook Kah, was part of the pioneering team that launched the Singapore-Cambridge GCE 'A' and 'O' Level examinations in the 1970s. He was the Chief Examinations Officer then. Her mother, Mdm Wong Kam Chee, taught at Pearl's Hill Primary and later Pei Tong Primary School before she retired.

Her sister, Ms Gracia Ng Pek Yee, is a former vice principal of Anglo Chinese Junior College (ACJC). Her husband, Mr Andrew Chew Hui Keong, used to be Greenview Secondary's principal and was the former Deputy Director, Co-Curricular Activities Centre.

Like Mr Ng, 82, who also founded Ghim Moh Secondary School and received numerous accolades for his service over some four decades, Mrs Chew is a pioneer in her own right.

Before joining STAR, she was the founding principal of the School of the Arts (SOTA). She played a pivotal role in assembling a faculty of educators both local and from abroad, many of whom were artists themselves. They helped design a curriculum where the arts and academics are treated as equal voices.

This was no mean feat – it took many years of conceptualising and constructing a multidisciplinary curriculum and teaching methods, and studying the most suitable form of assessment.

Mrs Chew's father stood by her throughout the challenging process of starting the school, just as he had always supported her in her career. "Dad encouraged me. He listened," says the music and arts lover.

Mr Ng has been supportive of her passion since she was a child. He often encouraged his children to pursue what they love in life. "Dad gave us the freedom to decide and choose different means to expand our learning (outside of the academic curriculum), whether playing the piano in church, or being part of the Girls' Brigade," says Mrs Chew.

Mr Ng was also patient with his children when they did not do so well academically. Mrs Chew shares that she was a "late bloomer" who had her fair share of academic struggles, especially in Mathematics. It was her father who always encouraged her to focus on the process rather than the product.

"Dad never pushed me. He just told me to do my best, pass the exam and move on to Secondary 1. Fortitude in life will give you the resilience to go on, he said," she explains.

Just as how her father has supported her, Mrs Chew wants to see the same patience and support from the arts teachers for their students. She said: "My dad has always shown me 'guan hui' (care in Chinese) and this is what our close-knit family thrives on. I hope



Above: (from left) Mrs Chew, Ms Rosita Ng Pek Yeng, Mdm Wong (sitting), Ms Gracia Ng Pek Yee and Mr Ng in a family portrait.

Right: Mr Ng as an officer.



to nurture the arts teachers in the same manner such that they can pass it on to the next generation."

Mrs Chew wants to share her love for music with students and teachers. She believes that an education grounded in the arts will help in a young person's growth. She is also confident that nurturing deep understanding of transdisciplinary pedagogies will broaden student learning.

She holds the strong belief that the arts can inspire courage in people to face difficulties in life.

For Mrs Chew and Mr Azhari, the love for education clearly runs in their families. Though inspired differently, they share the same resolve to make a difference to the next generation. ♡

Left: Mr Ng and Mdm Wong in their younger days.

Far left: Mr Ng (right) receiving an award for his service.



"My dad has always shown me 'guan hui' (care in Chinese) and this is what our close-knit family thrives on. I hope to nurture the arts teachers in the same manner such that they can pass it on to the next generation."



Mr Lennie Chua and the performers (from left): Mr Ainsley Liew, Bowen Secondary; Mr Desmond Seah, Hong Wen; Ms Stella Yu, Planning Division; Mr Lennie Chua, STAR; Ms Desirée Chua, Clementi Town Secondary; Mr Ray Aziz, Opera Estate Primary; Mrs Constance Loke, Principal of Haig Girls' School; Mr Xie Zhizhong, Chong Boon Secondary; Ms Dorothy Seng, Yishun Secondary; Mr Allyn Eng, Ngee Ann Primary; Ms Eunice Chew, Mayflower Primary; Mr Willy Tan, Principal of Edgefield Primary.

'Shining Light': from page to stage

Music teacher Lennie Chua sheds light on the challenging but rewarding process of writing a song and getting educators to perform it for the Work Plan Seminar 2014, for the first time.

When Mr Lennie Chua was asked to write a song for the Work Plan Seminar (WPS) this year, he invited his former teacher Mrs Constance Loke to play the violin for the performance.

Mrs Loke had piqued his interest in music. When he was a Junior College student, his mother wanted him to pursue something more 'useful' like engineering. Mrs Loke, then his teacher, persuaded his mother of her son's talent and passion in music, and that teaching music would be a meaningful career. Mr Chua is now the Programme Manager (Music) at Singapore Teachers' Academy (STAR) and Mrs Loke, the Principal of Haig Girls' School.

Mr Chua's story reflects this year's WPS theme of "Growing our Teachers, Building our Nation". On that platform, Minister Heng Swee Keat had said that the teaching fraternity needs to have mentors to nurture successive generations of teachers to do great work.

As many as 11 educators came together as a band to perform the song at the WPS in September.

Mrs Loke who took part in the performance at the invitation of Mr Chua said: "I couldn't say no to my former student, no matter how busy I was. It was a wonderful and memorable experience

making music with a team of incredibly talented and passionate musicians."

The idea for the collaboration was simple: write and perform a song for the WPS that would touch the hearts of teachers. Instead of the usual student performance, have the act entirely created and sung by teachers for the first time in the history of the WPS.

Mr Chua wrote the song 'Shining Light' with a friend, Ms Rachel Ee, from the Arts Education Branch. He said that the song captures the "heartbeat of the educator, which is to seek to inspire and nurture each child to be a shining light for Singapore and the world."

Photos (extreme left and right) by STAR

The lyrics also reflects the process of learning now, said Mr Chua, where a teacher moves away from being a bastion of knowledge to a facilitator that inspires students to reach their dreams.

On the performance, Mr Chua said: "It was a great way to demonstrate the process of collaborative and creative music-making, and to showcase the myriad of talents of our music educators."

Just as the craft of teaching needs honing, writing the song was no different. Mr Chua and Ms Ee fine-tuned the lyrics several times before it fulfilled their expectations and the requirements of the WPS organisers. Interestingly, Mr Chua's collaboration with Ms Ee, who was on maternity leave, was done entirely via email and social media.

The performers played a crucial role in the musical arrangement of the song, said Mr Chua. During rehearsals they worked out the song's musical structure, agreed on chord progressions and suggested ways to improve the flow of the music.

"The joy that I got from working with this bunch of teachers, who are also musicians, is the same joy that I get whenever I make music with my students in class."

Not one of the six late evening practice sessions was held with full attendance – recordings and notes were sent to absent members for them to practise and learn parts in their own time. The first time all 11 were present was on the day of the performance.

"The joy that I got from working with this bunch of teachers, who are also musicians, is the same joy that I get whenever I make music with my students in class," summed up keyboardist Mr Desmond Seah from Hong Wen School. 🎹

WPS 2014: Growing our Teachers, Building our Nation

MOE will give Beginning Teachers more time and space to learn on the job, train more mentors, get educators to specialise, and develop Teacher Leaders.

Schools will receive help in the form of time-saving solutions, centralised finance and procurement assistance, and the Student Learning Space, an online one stop centre of quality resources for teachers and students.

Watch inspiring videos such as *The Heart of Teaching* and *Cherishing Our Past* at bit.ly/2014wps

'SHINING LIGHT' LYRICS

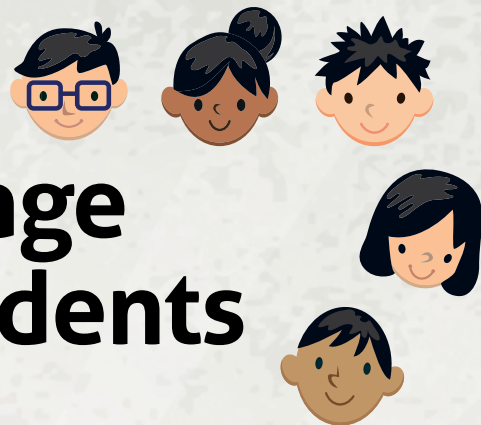
*This is your story
A canvas to be painted
with colours galore
Filling each space with your
blue skies and rainbows
There's a great big world
for you to explore*

*You will be a shining light
No matter where you are,
you'll illuminate the way
A ray of hope in the dark of night
You're a diamond in the making,
One day you will shine*

*This is my mission,
To help you find the courage to
step through each new door
Open your mind to endless wonder
Let your imagination rise,
spread its wings and soar*

*I do not have all the answers,
but together we'll ask the questions
I may not know what's in the future,
but I know that in the present
I have in my hands a little dreamer,
preparing to take flight*

A video of the performance is available here: bit.ly/wpssong



Smart moves to manage different types of students

★ WINNING ENTRY ★

There will always be that reticent one in class who will never raise his hand to answer a question. I used to teach such a boy in my class for two years and witnessed how he gradually opened up.

I did not exactly plan to help him to be more vocal. I just relied on intuition.

From his journal, I learnt that he was uncomfortable when he was put under the spotlight in class.

I also observed him during physical education lessons and learning journeys. This helped me identify the classmates he seemed comfortable with. I made it a point to group him with them for class discussions.

I am glad to share that what I did began to pay off. One day, the boy just found the courage to put up his hand. I responded as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Sometimes, all it takes is an effort to understand the child. With understanding, the appropriate steps to help the child will follow.

Ms Jermaine Tan
Teacher
Hong Wen School

I have some fun and smart moves to manage my diverse learners.

With active learners aka 'the loud speakers or class clowns', I share a joke, riddle or short story to get their attention from the start of the lesson. This makes them less disruptive.

With the quiet pupils aka 'the dreamers or soft-spoken pupils', I get them to pick the best art piece from me, and display it in a corner of the classroom. By giving students a role, I find that they are more engaged during lesson.

I make 'the lost sheep' aka students who don't complete homework the 'Homework Manager'. Before school ends, I get them to list their homework on the whiteboard. This helps them to remember somewhat.

Miss Jagjit Kaur
Lower Primary English Coordinator
Corporation Primary School

When I started teaching last year, I did not expect such diverse students in a class. Over time, I have learnt to manage their differences.

There will always be students that prefer not to voice their opinions. What I usually do when I am going through worksheets is to get every one of them to answer a question. This not only encourages students to speak out, but also helps them to value each other's opinions.

I also have my fair share of 'smart alecks'. They like to answer every question, so what I do is to ask them a different question and get them to think about it for a moment. This works as a gentle reminder to give others a chance to answer.

Miss Ruth Yap
Teacher
Yusof Ishak Secondary School

NEXT ISSUE...

Sparking a positive chain reaction

Did you have a mentor that inspired you? Did he in turn have one? We are looking for mentor-mentee chains which track the mentors' influence over generations of teachers.

Please send your submission to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 28 November 2014. Submissions should be no more than 150 words, and these might be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school and contact number. The best sharing will be published in the January 2015 issue of *Contact*.



THE UNUSUAL EDITION

Unconventional teaching. Unexpected learning. We highlight schools that are using uncommon methods with positive results.

“[W]e need to fail, children need to fail, we need to feel sad, anxious and anguished. If we impulsively protect ourselves and our children, as the feel good movement suggests, we deprive them of learning persistence skills.”

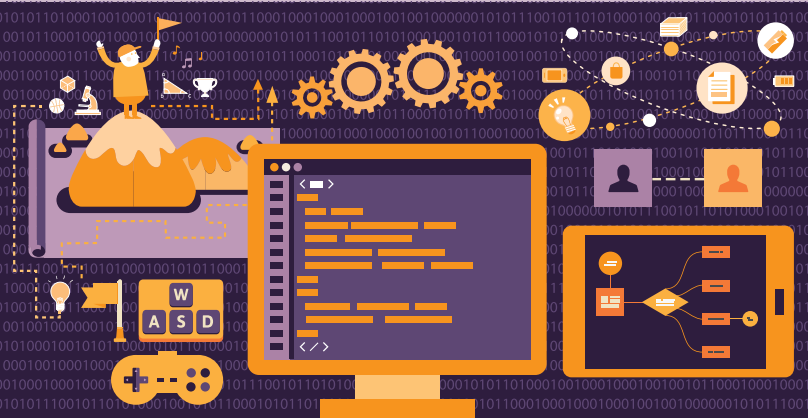
– Martin Seligman, American psychologist and founder of positive psychology

TRIVIA

How to praise students
Instead of empty praises that inflate your students' self-esteem, commend them for their hard work or for taking risks – researchers have found that doing so helps students to grow and enjoy challenges. Students who understand that their intelligence can develop as they learn also do better in the long run.
bit.ly/goodpraise

Hang on, what do you teach?

Subjects you probably never thought would be taught in schools around the world.



Programming in primary school, Estonia

Over in Estonia, students are exposed to Programming from their first year in primary school, so that they can learn to create something with technology instead of being just a passive user. They start off with smaller projects such as producing QR codes or programming robots, and move on to coding or even designing their own computer games. Beyond developing the students' creativity and thinking skills, teaching Programming paves the way for them to become the future drivers of the nation's booming IT industry, known for inventions such as Skype.

Read more: bit.ly/estoniacoding, bit.ly/e-stonia



Zombie-based Geography, USA

Do you know your knowledge of Geography could save you from a zombie apocalypse? Mr David Hunter, a Humanities teacher, decided to use the 'undead' to teach after realising that students are interested in zombies. He teaches nine- to 14-year-old students to plot the extent of the zombie outbreak on maps. He also shows them how to plan to gather resources and rebuild society.

Read more: www.zombiebased.com, bit.ly/zombiegeog



Philosophy for children, Australia

Students as young as six are tackling Philosophy at Buranda State School in Brisbane, Australia. Teachers use stories to introduce concepts from branches of philosophy such as ethics and metaphysics. Aiming to build students' critical thinking skills and confidence, the programme has resulted in improvements not just academically but also socially, leading to a drop in behavioural problems such as bullying.

Read more: bit.ly/buranda, bit.ly/burandaP

Different strokes for different folks

Explore how some schools adapt and create interesting approaches to learning.

Attention to art, USA

Students choreograph a dance to demonstrate their understanding of the revolution and rotation of planets at Wiley H. Bates Middle School. This dance is just one example of how arts-related activities – from the visual arts to drama and music – are woven into subjects including Mathematics and languages.

Teachers at the school identify concepts that students struggle with and use fun arts activities to make it easier for students to learn and retain content. This arts integration initiative was part of the school's improvement plan.

The school has seen a 23 per cent drop in referrals or suspensions and a nearly 30 per cent improvement in the students' reading and mathematics skills.

Read more: bit.ly/artsbates, bit.ly/artsbates2

Growing roots of empathy, Canada

A parent and baby are invited to visit a classroom nine times over the course of the school year. By observing the baby's growth and using the parent-child interactions as the ideal model of empathy, children learn to better understand their own feelings and that of others.

Former Canadian kindergarten teacher Mary Gordon started the programme, which is suitable for kindergarten students as young as five and can be adapted for older students up to 14 years old.

Research has shown that the programme has reduced bullying and increased positive social behaviours such as sharing or helping others. Several countries including the US, the UK and Germany have since adopted the programme.

Read more: www.rootsofempathy.org, bit.ly/rootsempathy

Alternative approach, Germany

An alternative way of educating students is much talked about in Singapore with the recent rolling out of ASPIRE or the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review.

Germany has also done it differently for students good with their hands. With its dual education route, students there get to pick up practical skills from colleagues at their workplace three to four days a week, and spend the remaining weekdays attending relevant theory classes in school. Students on such an apprenticeship programme gain hands-on experience, earn an allowance, and even have a chance at clinching a job. Their apprenticeship lasts up to three-and-a-half years.

This dual education route, taken by around 60 per cent of high school graduates in Germany, allows students to choose from 350 careers. The approach has helped to keep Germany's youth unemployment low – 7.9 per cent in 2013 as compared to 23.5 per cent across the European Union.

Read more: bit.ly/dualeducation, bit.ly/dualeducation2

Take a break, UK

Activities such as word games or art used in between lessons are believed to give the brain regular breaks to form long-term memory links between brain cells. Students of Monkseaton High School learn about Science through three rapid, structured repetitions of the lesson content in different forms. In between these three sessions, they get a 10-minute break where they jog or dribble basketballs, among other activities. This is part of "spaced learning", an approach inspired by a scientific study from the US showing that breaks aid the creation of long-term memories. Then head teacher Paul Kelley developed the approach with the help of neuroscientists and Microsoft Education.

Read more: bit.ly/spacelearn, bit.ly/spacelearn2

Heads in the clouds, India

Village children living in one of the poorest areas in India can learn almost anything independently through the Internet in a solar-powered learning lab equipped with computers.

This centre is one of seven "schools in the cloud" by educational technology professor Sugata Mitra. He developed it from his idea of Self Organised Learning Environments where students teach themselves in small groups by searching for answers online. They do so with the help of "Skype Grannies" – mostly retired teachers from the UK – who mentor them via Skype.

Mitra's idea was sparked by his "hole in the wall" experiment where he installed a computer in the wall of a New Delhi slum. There, he observed the street children. Although they had no previous exposure to a computer, they were found to be able to teach themselves how to use one within just a few hours.

Read more: bit.ly/schoolinthecloud, bit.ly/schoolinthecloud2

Sing to learn, Singapore

Teachers at Fuchun Primary School are integrating music into the curriculum. Primary 3 students get to compose the lyrics for and perform a Science-related song in this "Music in Education" approach.

Students choose a Science topic – ranging from magnets to the life cycle – and pick out keywords to write lyrics to a song. During Music lessons, they use musical skills and knowledge taught to improve their musicality and expressiveness for the performance. The programme ends with an annual P3 Science Song Competition.

Teachers have observed that students enjoy singing as a way to learn scientific terms and are better able to consolidate their learning of Science concepts. The school plans to use Music to teach other subjects, including Character and Citizenship.

Back to Mother Nature, Indonesia

When students from Green School in Bali learn to make a vegetarian pizza, they actually head to the garden and grow the vegetables they want on their pizza.

The school's hands-on Green Studies curriculum teaches students from ages three to 15 practical skills such as gardening, and fosters their appreciation and care for the environment.

The school was named the Greenest School on Earth in 2012, and is largely built from renewable local resources such as bamboo, mud and grass. At least 30 Indonesian students have received scholarships to study at the school, with the hope of becoming the country's future green leaders. They study alongside international students.

Read more: www.greenschool.org, bit.ly/greenschooled

Do you engage your students using unconventional methods?
Share them with us at contact_online@moe.edu.sg

INSIDE THE TEENAGE MIND

Decode teen lingo and you'll better understand today's teenagers. Here, we get you started.

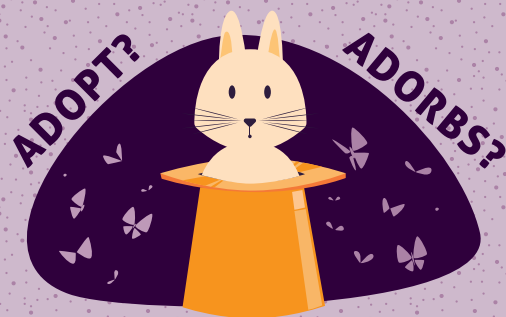
#YOLO



YOLO

"Gonna skip extra lessons to watch a movie #YOLO"

Often used as an excuse for reckless behaviour, this popular hashtag on Twitter stands for You Only Live Once. It also has a variation: YOYO (You're Only Young Once).



Adorbs

"The bunny is so adorbs!"

This common abbreviation of the term "adorable" has been added to Oxforddictionaries.com.



Ship

"I ship Katniss with Gale!"

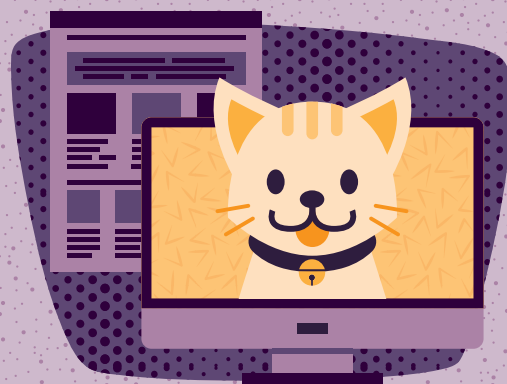
Not to be mistaken as a form of transport, "ship" can be used as a verb to support a fictional romantic pairing or a noun to describe that relationship.



Swag

"I have 100 times more swag than you!"

A noun that measures a person's coolness factor or confident attitude.



Listicle

"Have you seen the latest listicle on cats?"

An article presented as a list, popularised by websites like BuzzFeed. Listicles are also commonly shared on social media.



5ever

"I love you 5ever"

A superlative of 4ever. Need we say more?

Read more: bit.ly/teenlingo, bit.ly/teen slang

How I helped students enjoy what they learn

Dear colleagues,

Have you ever felt frustrated that your students still dislike the subject you teach despite all that you have done to teach it well? I certainly have.

I find attending workshops, learning journeys or conferences for Professional Development (PD), helps me reflect on my current approaches. When I do so with an open mind, I am able to improve my teaching.

I've learnt new and innovative methods to help students love the subject they are learning. I also learn from sharing pedagogical ideas with teachers who sign up for the same PD activities – we explore and further develop each other's ideas.

For example, a recent choral singing conference I attended in Seoul with a team of teachers got us thinking about how we could improve the quality of singing in our Music classes. From the sharing, I learnt how I can better engage my students through singing. By using hand gestures and imagery in vocal warm-ups, my students are encouraged to produce a good singing tone.

In my six years as an educator, I often have to think of new ways to engage students in Maths as some of them dislike or fear the subject. Being a Music teacher as well, I discovered I could use Music to get students to like Maths. For example, my team and I created a lesson where students learn the magnitude of fractions (e.g. 1/4 is bigger than 1/8) by clapping to

the rhythm of a song. A clap at the 1/4 beat will last longer than the one at 1/8. Such kinesthetic learning of Maths worked – students' feedback in a survey revealed they found Maths more interesting.

I also believe in encouraging students and working with them to remove psychological and emotional barriers they may have towards a subject. This belief is shaped by my own childhood experiences. In secondary school, one subject I struggled with was history. But my teacher's constant encouragement and passion for the subject helped me like and eventually do better in it.

As an educator now, I've found that to help students with similar struggles, teachers need to take concrete and practical steps beyond just finding out the root of the problem.

Once, I was helping a student Sara* who was underperforming because of her fear of exams. I gradually gained Sara's trust by listening to her problems and encouraging her. Then I took some practical steps – I made it a point to put her at ease by talking about other matters besides exams, before slowly tackling her issues. I also looked out for her as the exam period drew near, since that was when she was most likely to break down from the pressure. Finally,

Sara beat her fear and scored an A+ in the Primary School Leaving Examination.

The saying "Seeing is knowing, doing is believing" sums up my teaching philosophy – when I see a student who's in need, I'm only aware that there's a problem. But the more powerful part is when I take action to help that child – then I believe that the student can overcome the obstacle. ➤

*not her real name



Ms Josephine Chan Yu Ling (Mrs Ng)
Head Of Department/Aesthetics
Bukit View Primary School,
and, Outstanding Youth in
Education Award 2014 Finalist

They've excelled, thanks to their teachers

Behind every successful teacher is another who has guided or supported them on their path to greatness. Ten among this year's winners and finalists of the President's Award for Teachers (PAT) and the Outstanding Youth in Education Award (OYEA) had the privilege to have encountered educators who taught them valuable lessons. They want to say "Thank you, teacher!".

By He Yining



A FAN OF HIS PLAYFUL IDEAS

Lead Teacher (Science) **Dr Muhammad Nazir Bin Amir** is recognised for his innovative method of engaging his Normal Technical (N[T]) students in Science through toy making. The PAT winner recalled how his mentor **Mr Ridzuan Bin Abu Bakar** backed him up when he proposed the unusual idea.

Mr Ridzuan even joined his students for a few lessons to learn Science through designing and making toys, shares Dr Nazir.

The Greenview Secondary School teacher met Mr Ridzuan 12 years ago when he was relief teaching. Then Head Of Department (HOD)



▲ Dr Nazir (left) and Mr Ridzuan make play a platform for meaningful learning.

of Science, Mr Ridzuan saw Dr Nazir's potential and encouraged him to join the teaching profession full-time.

Mr Ridzuan is "very honoured" that Dr Nazir thanks him for his mentorship. He tells *Contact* that he and Dr Nazir frequently discussed strategies to engage students in class.

Today a School Staff Developer, Mr Ridzuan says: "We wanted to show that there is a strong link between their learning and the toys they built. We wanted to ensure that it was not all play but there was deep learning taking place for our N(T) students. These students never imagined they could learn so much."

"We wanted to show that there is a strong link between the students' learning and the toys they built."

THE FIGHTER WHO MOTIVATED THE INNOVATOR

Mr Alan Joseph Varella, PAT finalist and Lead Teacher (Physics) was greatly inspired by Physics colleague, the late **Mr Muhammad Iskandar Bin Hairodin**. Mr Varella, who teaches at Temasek Junior College, had roped in Mr Iskandar and other colleagues to form a team to conduct teaching workshops in and outside the school.

Though Mr Iskandar was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2007, he insisted on joining Mr Varella at the workshops.

Mr Varella admires Mr Iskandar for not backing down in the face of adversity. According to Mr Varella, Mr Iskandar would often say: "Don't worry about me. As long as I am still breathing, I want to do something."

Although he was not well physically, he continued to teach with enthusiasm

and lead teams to science competitions. "He retained his positive attitude towards life and never once expressed any emotion of self-pity," says Mr Varella.

Mr Iskandar was a fighter to the end, never mentally succumbing to his affliction. "I started off aiming to inspire and develop him but instead I was the one who was inspired by his passion and tenacity," says Mr Varella.

Mr Iskandar passed away early this year at the age of 35.

"I started off aiming to inspire and develop him but instead I was the one who was inspired by his passion and tenacity."



▲ The late Mr Iskandar (extreme left) remains an inspiration to Mr Varella (extreme right).



▲ Mdm Hadzar (left) and Mrs Oon dedicate their lives to supporting special needs children.

THE "GUIDING LIGHT" WHO EXEMPLIFIES PASSION

When PAT finalist **Mdm Hadzar Bte Misiri** was a Beginning Teacher at the now defunct Fowlie Primary, she struggled to help an autistic student, *Gary, in her class. She then approached her colleague **Mrs Pamela Oon**, a Learning Support Coordinator (LSC), for help.

At that time, Mdm Hadzar was impressed by how far Mrs Oon would go for students and teachers. "Mrs Oon made an appointment for me to meet with an MOE psychologist who then explained to me about Autism, a learning disability that Gary was diagnosed with... She helped me plan my lessons, create social skills cue cards and plan behavioural interventions for Gary.

"It is senior teachers like her who really show the

young ones what passion for teaching is about," says Mdm Hadzar.

Following in Mrs Oon's footsteps, Mdm Hadzar continues to help students with special needs. The Senior Teacher (Special Needs & Lower Ability Learners) and LSC at Seng Kang Primary strives to improve literacy levels among lower primary students. She conducts the Learning Support Extensive Reading Programme to make information digestible for the children.

Mdm Hadzar thanks Mrs Oon for being her "guiding light". Mrs Oon, a LSC at Tanjong Katong Primary, says that she is "humbled by this acknowledgement." She readily admits that "I do not have all the answers all the time."

"Mentoring is not a one-way street; as mentors we can learn a lot from the people we mentor and advise," says Mrs Oon.

*not his real name

THE NURTURING MENTOR AND MENTEE

Mdm Lim Ai Lian, a PAT finalist, feels fortunate to have met "warm, caring and nurturing" teachers when she was in school. She thanks her Secondary 4 teacher **Ms Zaiton Bte Md Ali** from Ang Mo Kio Secondary School, for inspiring her to go the extra mile for her students.

Mdm Lim, who is Subject Head (Social Emotional Health) at Holy Innocents' Primary, shares that students' welfare is always Ms Zaiton's "topmost priority".

Mdm Lim herself was a recipient of Ms Zaiton's thoughtful care when she was her student. "I will never forget how she took it upon



▲ **Mdm Lim (extreme right) believes in caring for students holistically.**

herself to personally send me to my grandmother's house when I received news in school that my grandmother had passed away suddenly. Seeing how distraught I was, she comforted me and shared with me her own experiences of how she had coped with the grief and loss of loved ones."

Now Mdm Lim cares for her own students by developing efforts to strengthen their holistic development. For

instance, she worked with the Aesthetics Department to pilot the Music Therapy for Learning Motivation Project, which uses music therapy to boost students' self-esteem and motivation. The project made it to the 2013 MOE ExCel Fest.

"She comforted me and shared with me her own experiences of how she had coped with the grief and loss of loved ones."



▲ **Mdm Lim (right) thanks Ms Zaiton for her thoughtful care.**

Ms Zaiton, who teaches Combined Humanities (Social Studies and History Elective), says: "I wouldn't claim that I did so much but to be remembered is a good feeling, knowing that what I've inculcated is now being passed on."



▲ **Mdm Low (left) and Ms Tee share the same drive to improve art lessons for students.**

HER INSPIRATION? AN ALLIED EDUCATOR

Ms Tee Ngah Loui is the PAT finalist who started the practice of getting students to keep a diary of their art-making experiences.

The HOD (Information Communication Technology) at Evergreen Primary shares that working with fellow passionate educators is one of her main driving forces. One such person is her colleague **Mdm Audrey Low Hui Leng**, an Allied Educator.

Ms Tee explains how Mdm Low inspires her: "Audrey's initiative in going the extra mile to provide support to the students and teachers in my school is something that I appreciate most. I recall conducting a painting lesson for my Primary 4 students and before the start of the lesson, Audrey handed plastic bags to my students. The bags were for keeping their pencil cases so that the paint wouldn't stain their belongings."

Ms Tee also admires Mdm Low for how the latter is always eager to learn and make lessons better. Mdm Low, Ms Tee shares, would snap photographs of students' art-making steps in class, study the steps and come up with ideas to improve the lesson. She would then generously share those ideas with other teachers and design customised resources for students.

Mdm Low is "very glad" but surprised to know that Ms Tee sees her as an inspiration. To Mdm Low, she is just doing what she's supposed to do as an Allied Educator to support teachers.

She hopes that Ms Tee and other Art teachers in her school continue to conceptualise "fantastic lessons" for their "very lucky" students.

HER TEACHER TAUGHT HER TO EMPOWER STUDENTS

As far as HOD (English) **Ms Ang Mei Ling** is concerned, students can be entrusted with important duties – even if they are from the lower primary levels. This is why the PAT finalist, who teaches at Yu Neng Primary, gives her best at training lower primary students to be emcees for important school events.

Empowering students by assigning them tasks and believing that they can learn from the experience, is something Ms Ang learnt from **Mrs Alice Han**. Mrs Han was her form teacher when she was in primary school.

Ms Ang explains: "I did not study much in my primary school but I managed to score very well for my Science papers because Mrs Han put

me in charge of the Science garden." From tending the garden, she could describe the millipedes and the centipedes in detail, the growth of flowering and non-flowering plants in progress and the special movements of garden insects – without reading much of the textbook.

"Mrs Han inspired me to learn beyond classroom walls and textbooks. I wanted to be like her," says Ms Ang.

"Mrs Han inspired me to learn beyond classroom walls and textbooks."



▲ **Mdm Eng (left) reached out to Ms Wong when the latter was her student.**

THE CARING TEACHER BEHIND THE CAPTAIN

PAT winner and Captain of the Girls' Brigade in her school, **Ms Wendy Wong Yoke Chan** remembers her Secondary 4 form teacher **Mdm Hazel Eng**.

A reserved student before, Ms Wong has her teachers to thank for guiding and giving her opportunities to come out of her shell, in particular Mdm Eng.

Her efforts to reach out to her students left a deep impression on Ms Wong and inspired her to teach.

"Mdm Eng would invite my classmates and me to her house, and we would always have a good time bonding with her.

"I remember how she would pick us up in her small Subaru car to ferry us from the MRT station to her house. She had to do a couple of trips so that we did not have to walk the long distance to her house," shares the Senior Teacher (Mathematics).

Both are now colleagues at Geylang Methodist School (Secondary).

Ms Wong is known for starting the peer coaching programme for her Normal (Technical) students, getting the stronger students to help their weaker counterparts.

Also, for more than 14 years, she has been investing her time and energy guiding her Girls' Brigade members to develop their character and leadership abilities.

Mdm Eng is "very happy" that Ms Wong won the PAT award.



▲ **Ms Ang (extreme left in white) learnt from her former teacher Mrs Han (in brown) that it is important to give students responsibilities.**

OYEA



▲ Ms Khairiah on a learning journey.

HE SAW THE LEADER IN HER

OYEA winner **Ms Khairiah Bte Hairoman** says her mentor **Mr Shahul Hameed**, saw her potential early and gave her many opportunities to grow as a teacher and leader. For instance, he trusted her to lead the History and Social Studies Unit in curriculum innovation, and appointed her to spearhead projects and learning journeys.

She remembers one particularly memorable learning trip in 2011: "Mr Shahul allowed me to take charge of an overseas learning journey to India with 30 students. It was an extremely challenging task as there were many areas that needed to be taken care of, such as communicating

"Mr Shahul allowed me to take charge of an overseas learning journey to India with 30 students."



▲ Mr Shahul believed in Ms Khairiah's potential as a leader.

with vendors and parents, [and taking care of] the administrative aspects of the trip. This opportunity gave me confidence and in 2013, I took charge of taking another group of 30 students to Sri Lanka."

Ms Khairiah is HOD of Humanities, and Secondary 2 Normal (Academic) Year Head at Peirce Secondary School.

Combining her leadership abilities and pedagogical

skills, Ms Khairiah has played an important role in designing Peirce Secondary's Character and Citizenship Education package. She was also involved in developing its GROW & GIFT (Growing and Interacting with Form Teachers) Time, which supports students to become leaders in their own right.

Mr Shahul was a HOD before moving to the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA). Now SINDA's Deputy Director in education, he is happy at being "able to make a difference. I am extremely proud of her achievements."

He wishes to tell Ms Khairiah: "Keep your passion for teaching burning high! Excellent teachers like you not only make a positive difference to the child's academic achievements, but also... show care and concern for the holistic development of a child."

THEY MENTORED HER TO IMPROVE SERVICE LEARNING

OYEA winner **Ms Poojalal Gidwani** from Haig Girls' School thanks her principal **Mrs Constance Loke** and former vice-principal Mdm Suraiya Hameed for their support when she created collaboration opportunities between students and community organisations to solve societal problems.

This enables the students to give back to the community as part of their service learning projects.

Ms Poojalal shares how Mrs Loke and Mdm Suraiya stood by her: "They allowed me to create authentic learning experiences for my students.



▲ Ms Poojalal (right) is thankful for Mrs Loke's support and mentorship.

"They also developed a culture where one is never afraid to make mistakes. This culture of trust and belief is very important and it is something that has impacted me as an educator."

She also thanks them for guiding her as she gains mastery of "innovative pedagogies, values-in-action and service learning."

Under their mentorship, she created service learning programmes that explore real-life issues and experiences.

As a result, students learnt to develop solutions and imbibe values such as empathy.

Ms Poojalal oversees the Integrated Project Work @ Haig Girls' School (IPW@HGS).

"This culture of trust and belief is very important and it is something that has impacted me as an educator."



▲ Mdm Nur Ain (left) enjoys learning from and working with her lively colleague Mdm Norla.

Mdm Norla, Mdm Nur Ain says, is "energetic, funny and creative", and the "kind of teacher you wish you had."

THE CHARISMATIC COLLEAGUE

With her penchant for injecting drama and acting into her lessons, OYEA winner **Mdm Nur Ain Binte Ahmad** is known for her creative, lively and effective teaching approach.

The HOD (English Language) at Park View Primary has taken a leaf out of colleague **Mdm Norla Binte Jailani's** book.

Mdm Norla, Mdm Nur Ain says, is "energetic, funny and creative", and the "kind of teacher you wish you had." Mdm Norla is the internally appointed Level Head (English Language).

Mdm Nur Ain shares: "Mdm Norla has encouraged many teachers (even the non-English Language teachers) to jump onto the drama bandwagon during our annual Library Fiesta, leading to

many drama productions directed by her.

"In the last Library Fiesta, for example, the teachers staged a performance around the theme of 'family and friends'. Mdm Norla wrote the script and gave us ideas for costumes and on how to act."

Mdm Nur Ain adds that Mdm Norla's creative use of ICT tools in lessons has spurred her to try out new strategies of her own too.

The OYEA winner uses Bitstrips (a web application that enables users to create comics) to teach students to write stories.

Mdm Norla "was surprised" to know that Mdm Nur Ain sees her as an inspiration.

She encourages Mdm Nur Ain to continue "to teach from the heart." 🌟



The President's Award for Teachers (PAT) and the Outstanding Youth in Education Award (OYEA) are top accolades for teachers here. The

PAT recognises individuals who are committed to their students' holistic development and have adopted innovative methods in the classroom. The OYEA celebrates the passion and active involvement of teachers aged 35 or below in youth development.

Can you change your belief system?

It is time to set a new tone for our society, shared Minister Heng Swee Keat, at the Parliamentary Debate on the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE), held on 9 September 2014. ASPIRE is at the heart of the matter; we can start by breaking through our limiting beliefs and taking action to be the best regardless of our starting points.

AIM FOR BREAKTHROUGHS



THINK ANEW
Qualifications, jobs and opportunities redefined



PURSUE EXCELLENCE
Qualifications alone don't cut it; attitude, skills, knowledge and experience count



LEARN BEYOND THE CLASSROOM
Apply yourself and learn on the job



REDEFINE SUCCESS
Know that everyone excels differently

LET GO OF LIMITING BELIEFS

Qualifications are all that matter

Qualifications don't matter at all

If others are more qualified, I lose out

TAKE ACTION

- Learn at every stage, from school to an Institute of Higher Learning to the workplace
- Learn in every way, to embrace and encourage lifelong learning
- Build a culture of respect and recognition



AS TEACHERS, YOU...

- Get the opportunity to deepen and upgrade your skills
- Get emplaced on graduate pay scale for outstanding non-graduates

MOE SUPPORTS BY:

- Continuing to recruit graduates – we need teachers with a strong grasp of the academic subjects
- Continuing to hire non-graduates with a passion for teaching

For Minister's full speech, please go to bit.ly/aspirespeech



FACES WE LOVE

As we wrap up the year, how about shining the spotlight on yourself and fellow teachers you have worked and played hard with? Snap a picture, send it to us. Each published photo will win a \$30 voucher!



INSTRUCTIONS

1. The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
2. Each participant is allowed only one entry. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
3. The photo should be in JPEG format, A4 in size and have a resolution of at least 300 dpi.
4. Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, e-mail and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
5. Provide a caption (max 25 words), explaining what the photo is about and how it reflects the theme.
6. Send both photo and caption to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by **28 November 2014**.
7. The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity and originality. The judges' decision is final.
8. 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.
9. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. All winners will be notified by email. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
11. 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.



CAPTURE

moments

WITH CONTACT

WINNING ENTRIES FOR THE PAST ISSUE

MAKING MERRY WITH COLLEAGUES

Thank you for sharing photos of you and your co-workers having a blast! Each published photo will win a \$30 shopping voucher.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Ms Clara Khoo Jie Hui
Teacher
Zhangde Primary School

Celebrating with our artworks created for "Earth". Without "Art", Earth is just "Eh".



CONTRIBUTOR:
Mr Tan Yuanyan
Teacher
Tampines Secondary School

Embracing outdoor education with fun-loving colleagues at our Secondary 3 Pinnacle Camp.



CONTRIBUTOR:
Ms Tan Hui Xian
Teacher
Kong Hwa School

Taking a groupie jump shot with fellow teachers during a field trip before Tanjong Pagar Railway Station closed. Whee!