

The Outstanding SPED Teacher Award

Ms Wong Geok Choo, Pathlight School

A trained dancer and a junior college Physics teacher – that was what Ms Wong Geok Choo was before joining Pathlight School in 2005. She was appointed a Subject Coordinator and then an Assistant Track Head within a space of 2 years.

An enthusiastic learner herself, Geok Choo takes time to understand each child so as to provide for their specific learning needs.

Ms Linda Kho, principal of Pathlight School says:

“Geok Choo has honed the art of giving; her gift of knowledge to child is always packaged with the child in mind. She unpacks the content of the curriculum and turns it into something that children can relate to.”

Indeed, Ms Wong’s goal in the class is to be able to take the children forward, in their learning, social skills and behaviours. The children look up to her as their leader and mentor. As one of her students said:

“She is very approachable and taught me how to answer the N level questions. She also gave me advice on how to handle stress.”

Ms Wong’s passion and determination to be the best teacher that she can be is also acknowledged by the parents whom she worked with. We asked one parent to share her impression of Ms Wong with us:

“Ms Wong is an excellent and dedicated teacher, she always has a warm smile on her face. She is able to interact and engage the attention of my child. My child has improved socially and surge ahead academically because of teachers like her.”

When Pathlight school started satellite classes in collaboration with the neighbouring Chong Boon Secondary School, Ms Wong has been providing unstinting support to the children every step of the way. Under her leadership, behaviour management plans, timetables and other support structures were drawn up and implemented to help the Pathlight students transit smoothly into the satellite classes.

Using her training as a dancer, Ms Wong choreographed modern dances for teachers and students at the Pathlight School. Ms Wong is also part of a dance team that represented Singapore in Adelaide at the Dance Festival. She shares with us how her passion and training in dance has shaped her both personally and as a teacher:

“Dance has taught me discipline. It requires long hours of practice. Through my love for dance, I’ve learnt to give the best of myself to everything, especially in my teaching. I believe in my students and I want to share with my pupils that they too have talents and that everything is possible if they work hard enough for it.”

Ms Chui Kit May, Chaoyang School

Ms Chui Kit May spent the first 10 years of her teaching career as a mainstream primary school teacher in Hong Kong. She came to Singapore and joined the STEP Program in Rainbow Centre in 1995. Here, she decided that she wanted to devote herself to teaching children with special needs. She went on to pursue a Bachelor of Philosophy in Special Educational Needs in University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. Upon returning to Singapore, Ms Chui joined the Association for People with Special Needs in 1999 and has been with Chaoyang School since then, because of her special interest in teaching children with autism.

At Chaoyang School, Ms Chui sets the direction for the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit and is actively involved in the review, development and implementation of the ASD curriculum. She pioneered the ASD integration programme which aims to integrate pupils from the ASD Program to the Intellectual Disability (ID) class within the school. The school has since integrated 12 pupils in the ID classroom. Ms Chui also spearheaded the design and development of the Play Skills and Social Skills curriculum. She is currently working on the Communication Skills curriculum.

As a key member of the school’s lifeskills committee in her school, Ms Chui has been instrumental in reviewing and developing the school’s lifeskills package. She was also involved in two major school based innovative projects aimed at experiential learning beyond the classroom – the Internet Café and Sparkling Loo.

Parents of pupils that Ms Chui have taught were impressed with her “transformational” work with their children. A parent of Ms Chui’s pupil shares:

“Ms Chui is an outstanding teacher. She performs her teaching duties effectively and provides extra support for her pupils with autism and their parents. As a parent, I have observed the great interest that she has in her work and the great effort she takes in exploring different teaching techniques to enhance her pupils’ learning ability and behaviour. My own child has benefitted in many ways. Under her, my child has shown significant improvement in his behaviour, learning ability and anger management. As she is always concerned about our problems, she has through her sharing sessions with us, empowered us to resolve the difficulties we have encountered with our children. ”

MS Chui herself sees parents as important partners in the development of her pupils. She initiated the formation of a parent support group to help many parents develop a better understanding of the needs of their children. The parent support group also provided a platform for parents to share on how they can improve on their children's learning and social behaviours.

We asked Ms Chui to share her thoughts on her love and passion for teaching pupils with ASD:

"There was a boy in my class who seemed quite aloof when I first met him. I journeyed with him for a year and I was determined to reach out to him. One day, I had a very trying day and to my greatest surprise, the boy came to me and asked, "Are you okay?" I was completely overwhelmed. This boy whom I thought was aloof and disconnected could care for someone and I was very touched.

I will never be bored teaching pupils with autism. They never fail to surprise me with their determination to want to learn and their openness to learning. It may not be easy for me to see a great leap in my pupils' learning, I take great pride and joy to see the little success they made each day and I am very proud of them."

Ms Chui also shared with us some of her favourite quotes which have kept her going during some of the most trying moments in her 13 years of teaching in special education:

**Teach rather than Judge
Model rather than Criticize
Provide Support rather than Label**

Ms Siti Anita Binte Rahmat, Chaoyang School

Ms Siti Anita started teaching in Chaoyang School in 1989 and has since taken on different roles and responsibilities. As the Sports Secretary, she trained pupils for their participation in local and overseas sports event organized by the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) and the Singapore Special Olympics. She also represented the school in the Affective Competency Development Committee (ACDC-MOE), creating a framework for the school's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. She is currently the Head of Department for Pupil Well-being and a firm believer of the importance of social and emotional learning for her pupils.

In her capacity as the Head of the Lifeskills Curriculum, Ms Siti Anita organized "The Life Skills Camp" for the lower functioning pupils to enhance pupils' basic daily living, social competency and numeracy skills. She also conducted mini school projects such as the Model Pupil Award, School's 3R values programme,

interclass cleanliness competition, Use Your Hand campaign and held various talks for pupils and teachers. Under Ms Siti Anita's leadership, Chaoyang embarked on two innovative projects; Internet cafe (i-cafe @ Chaoyang) and "Sparkling Loo" to provide pupils with lots of opportunities to practice life skills such as hospitality, interpersonal and computer skills as well as service workshops skills in an authentic setting.

A colleague of Ms Siti Anita says:

"As an experienced teacher, Anita is knowledgeable about the different pedagogical approaches to effective teaching. She never fails to share her teaching methods and resources generously with us. She is a great mentor and friend. Her classroom is always open for anyone who wants to observe her lesson."

Ms Siti Anita's passion for teaching and learning goes beyond the school. She has volunteered in MENDAKI in the late 80s and worked with the Special Olympics Singapore in organizing sports events for the school. At least two pupils under her training for track and field in Chaoyang have been selected yearly to compete in Special Olympic Games overseas when she acted as a sports secretary. This year, for five of her pupils who took part in A Nation in Concert 2008, Ms Siti Anita helped them by instilling in them a sense of perseverance, confidence and discipline which were required to help them pull through the performance. This she did by taking time to talk to them on a daily basis.

With her commitment and dedication to special education, Ms Siti Anita has nurtured many pupils who have been able to integrate into society. Some are working independently in the various work industries today.

Ms Siti Anita shares with us her thoughts on teaching children with special needs:

"I have been teaching for 19 years and although there were challenging moments at times, I have never regretted my decision to become a Special Education teacher. My pupils' parents tell me I have changed the lives of my pupils but I think it is my pupils who have touched and transformed me. I have learnt to look beyond a person's disabilities to recognize their potentials. My pupils have taught me that there is beauty in imperfections and that we just have to be open to seeing it."