Whipping up different flavours of teaching

Teachers find new ways to whet students' appetite for learning.
Contents

2 COVER STORY
Whipping up different flavours of teaching
Teachers show many inventive ways to get students interested in learning.

6 FEATURE
Character assessment made easier
Software that lightens the workload in tracking students’ character development.

8 MY 2 CENTS
What teaching motto keeps you motivated?
Winning entries from January 2014.

9 FYI
The makeover edition
Education gets a new look in some countries and keeps up with social media trends.

13 HEART TO HEART
Building a forgiving classroom
Open your heart to mistakes and learn from them.

14 FEATURE
Your appraisal and career planning process streamlined
Learn about the revisions made to the Enhanced Performance Management System.

16 FEATURE
Reflections from the ground
Two school leaders share their thoughts on the revised appraisal system.

17 FEATURE
How to beat those marking blues

18 LIFESTYLE
Getaways off the beaten path
Escape to these places for a well-deserved break.

INSIDE BACK COVER
PHOTO WINNERS
My favourite marking spot!
Winning entries from January 2014.

OUTSIDE BACK COVER
PHOTO INVITE
Wacky memories with students

Readers’ comments

Contact has many a times provided an enriching read after a long day of teaching. The stories shared by fellow educators make me feel less alone in striving for excellence. I have also often used the refreshing design of the magazine as a reference for the school’s publications due to its consistent art direction and neat layout.

Mr Tay Li Cheng
First Toa Payoh Secondary School

I read the January 2014 issue of Contact and noticed your new FYI section. I quite enjoyed your little ‘Fact or Fiction’ corner in the centrepread. The fourth item in particular sparked off an interesting discussion between my colleague and I. We debated at length on whether students will be more motivated to learn if rewarded (with candy and stationery, for example).

Mr Lee Han Shih
Assistant Project Director
Tuber Productions Pte Ltd

This issue...

We may think that innovations only come about from clever ideas devised by brilliant minds. While that may be true, we don’t look to why people thought of them in the first place. Many inventions came about because individuals saw a need, and then went on to address it. They sought solutions, spent hours to devise a plan, and worked tirelessly to execute it, even in the face of challenges.

The teachers in our cover story are such individuals. Their inventive teaching approaches inspired the students and delivered results to boot. Their smart solutions and spirit of innovation are driven by their dedication to their charges.

In this issue, we also share how teachers have designed new software to help their colleagues better track the character development of their students. Readers may also be glad to learn about the revisions made to the Enhanced Performance Management System, or EPMS, that promises to improve the appraisal experience and career development of teachers – our infographic feature provides a quick overview of the changes.

Education systems around the world are seeing changes, while new ways of teaching using social media tools are gaining momentum. Read about these exciting developments and more in FYI: The makeover edition.

Happy reading!

The Contact Team
Whipping up DIFFERENT flavours of TEACHING

Teachers find new ways to whet students' appetite for learning.

By Kate Lilienthal

Making ice cream. Telling the story of a Japanese cartoon character. Tackling an outdoor obstacle course. They don't seem to have anything in common, but they most certainly do.

They are innovative strategies adopted by teachers to motivate students to love learning more.

At Jurong Secondary, a multidisciplinary programme offers a hands-on, authentic learning experience for Normal (Technical) [NT] Stream students. That experience involves making something that almost every child enjoys—ice cream.

Nearby, Peicai Secondary School developed an initiative called the 4+1 Hands-On Elective Modules (HOME), where students spend four days a week in conventional curriculum classes and one day in enrichment learning a new skill like designing cars, sport or activity such as outdoor obstacle courses, hairdressing, sailing, or cooking.

Over at Clementi Town Secondary, Express Stream students are learning Chemistry through the unfolding story of a cheeky Japanese cartoon character named Mao.

The three programmes are new, introduced over the last five years, and each was kickstarted when teachers saw a need to engage students in different, more novel ways of learning. All three schools have won Imerys Awards for their innovative programmes—Jurong Secondary in 2009, Clementi Town Secondary in 2011 and Peicai Secondary in 2013.

Different flavours, flying colours
Not only are these strategies innovative, they work.

Mrs Juliana Ng from Jurong Secondary, the Head of Department for the NT curriculum, says that the number of absenteeism and rate of absenteeism have decreased and NT students express a greater affinity for the school, since the multidisciplinary programme began.

Meanwhile, Peicai Secondary has seen improvements in the results of students. In 2007, before 4+1 HOME began, only 11.1 per cent of the NT students passed both English and Maths at the GCE ‘N’ Level Examinations. By 2011, the passing rate had increased to 30 per cent. Also, student response to the Quality Student Experience (QSE) survey has shown improved feelings of association with the school.

Students at Clementi Town Secondary are also showing greater interest in Chemistry. They are always asking their teachers about upcoming lessons, says Ms Tan Wen Yi, a Senior Teacher for Chemistry. To her, this is a clear sign that the curriculum is effective in motivating students to learn the subject.

Ms Tan attributes the success of the curriculum to teamwork. “As long as teachers have a shared vision, innovation will fall into place nicely. It’s difficult to innovate alone.”

Ingredients for success
To craft successful curricula, teachers first had to understand the learning needs and styles of their students.

At Jurong Secondary, the effort to create a different teaching approach began in 2008 when a team of teachers sought to get Secondary 1 and 2 NT students excited about coming to school to learn.

The teachers started with what they knew about these particular learners. First, the students needed to see, and then make and evaluate their product—ice cream. Secondly, young students like to cook. Ms Tan and four other colleagues in 2010, Ms Tan and four other colleagues began the Chemistry curriculum with two premises in mind. The first was that there is much to learn about basic chemistry through cooking. Secondly, young students like to cook. Ms Tan and four other teachers then came up with a plan to teach Chemistry concepts through molecular gastronomy—the science of cooking—and the antics of Mao.

To become a professional chef, Mao must accomplish tasks that require students to...
study and apply knowledge of Chemistry. For instance, when Mao makes synthetic caviar with two chemicals, students learn chemical bonding. When Mao makes a mess in the kitchen, students learn how to separate pure and impure substances. Students get to do the actual cooking right in the laboratory.

The curriculum runs for one semester in either Secondary 1 or 2 and covers five topics across six cooking sessions over a 15-week period.

Enlarging their world

Adventures don’t just have to happen in fiction. Students can have their own adventures too when they have the opportunity to try different experiences. But “Often, our N(T) students aren’t much exposed to [experiences] beyond their homes or classrooms. Our goal is to help them experience a broader variety of possibilities in life. We want them to learn that there’s so much they can do if they try,” says Ms Ming Fong Yee, Head of Department for Pupil Management at Peicai Secondary.

The school’s N(T) students also used to score poorly at the GCE ‘N’ Level Examinations for both English and Maths and gave a subpar rating on the Quality Student Experience (QSE) survey. In response, a team of teachers and Allied Educators led by Ms Ming, was tasked to design a programme that would improve the students’ academic performance as well as their affiliation with the school.

That’s how they came up with the initiative called the 4+1 Hands-On Elective Modules (HOME) that offers students a variety of enrichment activities outside the classroom.

Unlike other enrichment programmes that run for a five-day period after exams or once a week after school, 4+1 HOME runs every week and ties in with the conventional curriculum. For example, students may visit a car repair shop on a Friday, and then the next week in Science lessons, they may study car engines.

A more recent Friday enrichment activity had Secondary 1 and 3 students participating in an outdoor obstacle course at the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) Labrador Adventure Centre. While the younger students learnt to overcome fear and get out of their comfort zones, the older ones were trained in mentoring the younger students learnt to overcome fear and get out of their comfort zones, the older ones were trained in mentoring the younger students.

Overcoming glitches

Starting 4+1 HOME has not been a walk in the park. Initially, teachers resisted tying their instruction to the programme. Ms Ming had to convince them that while it may require more work to design their curriculum for the programme, it could benefit them, too. For one, it gives them more teaching time. Instead of, say, three periods a week for a particular class, the teacher can extend the learning into Friday’s activity, effectively adding a fourth.

Getting financial support for 4+1 HOME was also an issue, but the resourceful and dedicated team was able to find the funds they need from a variety of sources within the MOE – such as the Sports Education Programme and the Arts Education Programme Funds – plus the students’ own Edusave accounts. Today, they continue to tap these sources.

At Jurong Secondary, a regular challenge in running the programme is integrating new teachers into it, as they could do with some help incorporating their subjects’ content into the programme. Also, not all new teachers have experience teaching N(T) students and many have expressed concerns on how best to engage them, says Mrs Ng.

Part of our work is building new teachers’ confidence in the classroom. These [N(T)] students aren’t harder to teach. You just need different ways to teach them,” she says.

To support these new teachers, Mrs Ng and her core team of curriculum leaders, Senior Teachers and Allied Educators share pedagogy and teaching techniques with them during their weekly Professional Development periods. The team also invites the new teachers into their classrooms to observe how the lessons take place.

Initially, another challenge for the programme was obtaining the necessary funding to purchase equipment. At the school principal’s suggestion, the team tapped the Coyote Fund from MOE that awards up to $10,000 for programmes that experiment with new and innovative ideas. They succeeded in getting enough money to purchase the ice cream machines.

Despite the challenges, it is clear that these teachers will continue to find new ways to pique and stimulate their students’ love for learning. For them, the adventure has only just begun.
Character assessment made easier

Teachers from two schools develop software that charts students’ character development.

By Mavis Teo

With the growing focus on 21st Century Competencies (21CC), the responsibilities of teachers have gone beyond imparting the rudiments of a subject to developing a student’s character and moral values. However, tracking the character development of every student, in addition to teaching, is both challenging and time-consuming. It is also hard to precisely identify the areas for improvement in a student’s character. Furthermore, having to write comprehensive reports to parents in an area of development that is largely subjective, requires much effort.

Thankfully, while the Student Development Curriculum Division is looking into ways to improve methods of character assessment, two schools are developing systems to address such concerns and difficulties that teachers have about monitoring and assessing a student’s character.

The solution

In 2010, Mrs Clara Lim-Tan, former principal of CHIJ (Kellock), led a team of educators to put together the online portal K-SHARP (Kellock Student Holistic Assessment Reporting Portal). It provides timely and quality feedback about students’ academic progress through qualitative and quantitative assessments. It provides timely and quality feedback about students’ academic progress through qualitative and quantitative assessments. It contains an Assessment Reporting Portal. It provides development of character traits based on attributes of the Kellock Girl Trait means, Kellock is defining the traits for its students. It aims to help them “make easier for their development”.

K-SHARP began by charting students’ development module is in its pilot stage). It is designed to be customisable to any school, and aims to allow the seamless transfer of records between different schools from the Primary to Junior College level, or to the Year 5 and 6 levels in Integrated Programme (IP) schools.

Users give the thumbs up

Teachers in both schools agree that the systems have helped to reduce their administrative load in assessing students’ development in school.

At Kellock, teachers can post photos or status updates which parents and students can view using personal logins. No one else can view or post comments, hence ensuring confidentiality. “The interaction creates a closer tripartite relationship between pupils, parents and teachers,” says Ms Sri.

Parents welcome the interactivity feature, gauging from the response of Mr Philip Biancheri whose daughter is in Primary 2. “It’s a positive experience for both me and my daughter as we get to view what she is doing at school. My daughter was very excited to see a photo posted of her sandwich-making class,” says Mr Biancheri.

At Catholic High, CHAMPS has also garnered positive feedback from teachers who find it user-friendly. Secondary 1 form teacher Kenneth Loon says: “Even my older colleagues who were hesitant about the technology have found it easy to grasp.”

Future plans

Both Kellock and Catholic High have benefited from Tier 2 of the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) Innovation Fund, granted only to innovative projects that show strong potential of being implemented in other schools. With the funds, they are able to develop and roll out these systems with the aid of external software developers.

K-SHARP also received the Innergy Award (Bronze) at MOE ExCel Fest in 2013. Currently, the team is fine-tuning the interactive portal.

Going forward, Ms Sri hopes that some aspects of MOE’s School Cockpit system – a fully-integrated, web-based system that performs functions such as the tracking of examination results – can be seamlessly merged with K-SHARP, so that it provides a comprehensive overview of each student’s performance. A meeting with MOE last year shows that there is potential in working together to support the transfer of data between the two systems, she says.

As for CHAMPS, Catholic High’s ultimate goal is to track each student’s development (currently the system is piloted with five students from each Secondary 1 class). This will help the school better customise programmes and curriculum to meet the needs of students. Like K-SHARP, CHAMPS has also shown the promising potential to sync with MOE’s School Cockpit system.

Both K-SHARP and CHAMPS seem to help teachers better understand their students and reduce the complexity of tracking the latter’s character growth. Now that’s innovating for good, in more ways than one.
What teaching motto keeps you motivated?

**WINNING ENTRY**

“You don’t always reap what you sow.”

As counterintuitive as it may sound, teaching has turned this discouraging adage into the one thing that fuels my calling to teach. It’s even a familiar lament that I hear from fellow teachers — those who often feel like they’re pouring sands of effort and time into bags full of holes. Yet, the statement is also a delightful truth.

I find that our students are like the magician’s hat; what you sow, for her fertiliser of love and commitment may come at the most unexpected of times, suddenly unleashing the latent potential that we always knew was there but woefully untapped into. I think this is why a teacher never really reaps what she sows, for her fertiliser of love and commitment may not reap equal measures of her students’ love and commitment for learning. It could be a lot more than she expects — a harvest of abundance that oftentimes surprises the teacher, and continues to make teaching an exciting vocation.

Ms Tey Pei Hwa
Teacher
Tampines Junior College

Every child in your class is someone’s whole world

I am a Tamil teacher. For the past two years, I have been teaching this boy who lacked interest in studying the Tamil language because he doesn’t find it useful for his future. He refuses to speak and write in Tamil, despite his Tamil-speaking environment. In 2013, I brought my class on a learning journey where they were given a task to communicate with Indian food stall owners in order to accomplish their project work. They realised that non-Indians learnt Tamil to communicate well with their customers. It was then that the boy promised that he would try to speak Tamil. From that day on, I found out that he has started to speak Tamil at home, too.

On Teachers’ Day, his mum thanked me for making a difference in his life and for giving him the confidence to speak Tamil. On reflection, I am so glad that I persevered and wanted to challenge the boy to speak Tamil.

Kalaivani D/o Ilango
Teacher
Sengkang Secondary School

My motto is simple: Always do what is right for our students. What is right is not necessarily easy, but do it anyway.

We tend to forget that the one key goal in our profession is to educate — to ensure that our students learn well and deeply. This is more so because of our hectic schedule, or eagerness to complete our tasks.

We should not compromise on our students’ learning for the sake of meeting our targets and objectives on paper. If we focus on that, our instructional strategies will naturally align themselves to effective teaching and learning. Let’s not be unnecessarily driven by targets and deadlines to the point where we forget the true meaning of education.

Ms June Chng
Teacher
Jurong Junior College

“The Makeover Edition

While education gets a revamp in some countries, social media is changing the way teaching is like in the classroom. Here are some of the latest trends and updates you don’t want to miss.

Google Glass

The much-hyped wearable tech allows users to access the Internet and record videos. With it, General and Trauma surgeon Rafael Grossmann (bit.ly/gpgherwell) will let his medical students see through his eyes, by putting up a video feed while conducting live surgery. At the same time, he was able to field questions from them.

Cat Academy app

Felino lovers will purr over this app, which uses the power of visual mnemonics. Each Spanish phrase comes with a picture of cute cats illustrating the meaning of the phrase. Why so catty? Japanese research shows that kawaii images improve students’ cognitive functions. Hello Kitty costumes, anyone?

Lecture capture software

Universities are recording lectures and making them available so that absentees do not miss out on lessons. Students away from class can log in and make notes onto their personal copies of the recorded lectures, or re-watch the lessons for clarity.

Augmented Reality app

Manchester University students can annotate on ancient manuscripts digitally without mutilating the artefact. Also, South Staffordshire trainee bricklayers can receive detailed instructions such as cutting a brick via a phone app and bar codes. Ninety-five per cent of students manage to cut bricks correctly at the first try, translating to huge savings on material costs.

“Let’s discover the earth first and after that reach for the stars. Let’s teach the basics... If students don’t know how to use IT properly for the purpose, it kills the joy of the whole project and takes the concentration to wrong places.”

Jonna Manninen, English/Swedish Teacher at Metsokangas Comprehensive School in Finland

“I can’t see a whole of things we could do...”

You don’t always reap what you sow.

What do you love most about your workplace?

Is it that wonderful pantry stuffed with goodies, your inspiring colleagues or the mischievous but adorable students? Share with us!

The best entry wins a prize worth $30! Other published entries get prizes worth $10. All entries should be sent to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 27 June 2014. Entries should be no more than 150 words. Your entry might be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school and contact number.
The education landscape around the world is transforming for the future, seeking improvements. We keep track of some of these developments.

UK: Specialist Maths free schools

The Exeter University and Exeter College, and the King’s College in London have announced that they would each run a specialist Maths free school with rigorous programmes for 16- to 19-year-old students to prepare them for university.

The schools, scheduled to open in September this year, allow the students to hone their critical thinking skills under the guidance of academics from these universities. Enrolment will be kept small, capped at 120 per school.

This is part of the UK government’s plans to boost Maths education, which also include overhauling the primary and secondary school curricula to keep up with some of the best programmes from other countries, and providing professional development to teachers.

Read more: bit.ly/UKfreeMaths

China: English weightage cut in Gaokao

Beijing authorities may reduce the weightage for English in the Gaokao, the high-stakes college admission test. Currently the test weights English, Chinese and Maths equally. But plans are underway to reduce scores for the English section to 100 points and increase the Chinese section’s weightage to 180.

In Shanghai, as well as provinces in Shandong and Jiangsu, English may be removed entirely.

A representative said the change highlights the fundamental importance of Mother Tongue in the curriculum. Proponents argue that this would encourage the students to learn English for communication purposes, instead of merely wanting to pass the subject in the exams.

Read more: bit.ly/gaokaoeng

South Korea: Test less, explore more

More emphasis on career exploration and teamwork has been placed on middle school education. The government has announced plans to replace examinations for a semester in their three-year education with a curriculum dedicated to outdoor activities, career planning and vocational training.

A pilot project involving 42 schools was rolled out last year. By 2016, all 3,200 middle schools will implement the test-free semester system.

However, the plan is not without its criticism. Parents are worried about the reduction in hours for teaching academic subjects such as Korean, English and Maths in school, and may turn to private tuition instead.

Read more: bit.ly/vocednews

Malaysia: A holistic plan for the 21st century

Closer to home, the Malaysian government launched its Education Blueprint for 2013 to 2025 last year, focusing on a holistic plan to prepare teachers and students for the 21st century.

The 11 shifts spell out in the blueprint include ensuring each student is proficient in English and Bahasa Malaysia, as well as making the teaching profession a career of choice. For the latter several plans are in place, like recruiting teachers from only among the top 30 per cent of graduates.

Read more: bit.ly/Malblueprint

USA: Blueprints for the future

The education authorities’ blueprint launched in April 2013 – titled Recognising Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching, or RESPECT in short – embraces seven critical components of a transformed teaching profession:

• A Culture of Shared Responsibility
• Top Talent, Prepared for Success
• Continuous Growth and Professional Development
• Effective Teachers and Principals
• A Professional Career Continuum
• Continuous Growth and Professional Development
• Top Talent, Prepared for Success
• A Culture of Shared Responsibility
• A Professional Career Continuum
• Effective Teachers and Principals
• Continuous Growth and Professional Development
• Continuous Growth and Professional Development

The blueprint is the result of two years of discussion with teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders, taking reference with Competitive Compensation
• A Culture of Shared Responsibility
• Top Talent, Prepared for Success
• Continuous Growth and Professional Development
• Effective Teachers and Principals
• A Professional Career Continuum
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This is part of the UK government’s plans to boost Maths education, which also include overhauling the primary and secondary school curricula to keep up with some of the best programmes from other countries, and providing professional development to teachers.

Read more: www.ed.gov/teaching.
How to tweet to teach

How do you teach in 140 words? Twitter may be a treasure trove of frivolous updates from celebrities, but it can also be used as a tool to engage students and create online activities. The Center for Instruction & Research Technology, University of North Florida offers these tips:

Follow the tweets of celebrities yourself, and use them as a part of your tuning-in activity or a discussion point in your lesson.

To encourage peer learning, create a hashtag for the course and let students tweet each other questions or comments. Seek approval from your principal first, of course.

Read more: bit.ly/tweetnteach

Put these tweets in charge

What happens when students decide what they want to learn?

Paloma Nayela Bueno, 12, lives beside a dump in Mexico. She was also the top Maths student in the country in 2012. Her talent would have gone unnoticed if not for her teacher, Juarez Correa. Correa was inspired by India’s Sugata Mitra, who left an unmonitored computer in a slum and discovered that the village children could learn by themselves.

Correa then experimented with the idea of a decentralised system in which the teacher is the facilitator while the students decide what they want to learn. However, where Mitra’s kids had access to the Internet, Correa had to hand in the piece of work on time and explained that it was impossible to complete.

Many students failed to hand in the piece of work and explained that it was impossible to complete. It was only upon taking a closer look at the task that they realised they were right.

"Boys and girls," I told them. "I’m so sorry. It’s my mistake, my fault. I designed an impossible task." I expected moans and reprimands, but instead the whole class laughed and cheered, and a student said loudly to me, "It’s okay Mr Grosse, you are only human. We forgive you.

I taught and served the students at Rosyth School for 25 years. And I have realised they were right.

Dear colleagues,

As educators, every day we are called to give of our best in that special place called the classroom. Yet, one certainty is that we will often fail short. We will fail. And fail again. But we will get up and get on with the learning and persevere with the teaching.

I feel that forgiveness is a missing element in our classrooms. When my students fail to submit their work, I ask why, then give them a chance — simply because we are human. We need to learn to forgive.

Teachers need forgiveness too. I once crafted a challenging piece of work on creative thinking and problem solving for my students. In my haste to be creative and efficient, I did not trial the piece of work myself (I usually do so to ascertain the time and effort the work requires). Many students failed to hand in the piece of work on time and explained that it was impossible to complete. It was only upon taking a closer look at the task that I realised they were right.

To hone your students’ comprehension skills, task them to select a tweet and elaborate on it beyond 140 words.

Want to teach your students to communicate succinctly? Tell them to paraphrase a book or article in 140 words or less.

Follow the tweets of celebrities yourself, and use them as a part of your tuning-in activity or a discussion point in your lesson.

#peerlearning

Food for thought — when average is not safe anymore

"Nowadays, training, learning and innovating are free, like Massive Online Open Courses, free apps, open access to scientific knowledge... All the knowledge and tools are there for you, you just need the courage to go for it."

—José Manuel Sáez López, primary school teacher at CRA Laguna de Pétrola and Associate Professor at the National University of Distance Education in Spain

Building a forgiving classroom

Dear colleagues,

As educators, every day we are called to give of our best in that special place called the classroom. Yet, one certainty is that we will often fail short. We will fail. And fail again. But we will get up and get on with the learning and persevere with the teaching.

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I taught and served the students at Rosyth School for 25 years. And I have come to recognise that teaching is firstly, and ultimately, an act of courage. The etymology of the word “courage” has nothing to do with heroism, but rather, is derived from the Latin word “cor” which means “heart.” We have to open our hearts — to learning, to possibilities, to mistakes.

Teaching can be full of tough, challenging and even, sad days. On such occasions, I often made my way to the school hall to be present during the Lower Primary Assembly. Listening to the little ones with their big voices singing the national anthem with every ounce of energy they possess, and reciting the pledge with an earnestness and conviction sent tingles down my spine every single time. I became recharged. Things would get better. My students were and are the reason why I want to teach and learn everyday.

In teaching, I lead our students in a personal journey to their true, best selves. We have to wait (at times the most powerful expression of love) for them to discover who they are, can be and want to be for themselves.

Teaching’s like riding a motorcycle. It is a joyful experience. Different drivers and road conditions require awareness and timely responses — just like in the classroom. This makes the ride challenging and presents opportunities for us to improve and become a better, more proficient rider.

Similarly, a teaching career is joyful and challenging; it is a never-ending learning journey about yourself and the subject(s) you teach. You learn new skills as you engage in new ideas about pedagogy. You learn how to deal with people in every conceivable emotional state. And you learn how to communicate a message and how to turn ideas into action.

Officially I am a Master Teacher, but I tend to see myself as a Most Senior Learner. I tell my students repeatedly, “I will quit teaching when I have nothing left to learn about myself, about you and about the subject.”

Every day we are invited to do important work with these very important people in the classroom. You are in the right place. Be happy.
Your appraisal and career planning process streamlined

If you’ve always found the appraisal experience time-consuming, here’s the good news. Now you can reduce the time taken to complete the work review form and plan your career growth more effectively with the revisions made to the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). Here’re nine changes you can look forward to. Text by Yvette Kan

1. FORM IS NOW SHORT AND SWEET
BEFORE: The form was lengthy and tedious to complete.
NOW: Number of pages reduced from 15 to 5

2. CLEAR KRA CATEGORIES
BEFORE: The KRA section was more focused on quantitative outcomes.
NOW: The KRA sections are merged into one single Competency Model

3. MORE QUALITATIVE APPROACH
BEFORE: The form was lengthy and tedious
NOW: The form is now short and sweet

4. MERGING SECTIONS
BEFORE: The KRA section was more focused on quantitative outcomes.
NOW: The KRA section was more focused on qualitative plans and outcomes.

5. CONNECTING THE DOTS
BEFORE: The individual sections in the form came across as being separate, with no bearing on the other sections.
NOW: The connections between various sections are indicated clearly for JHs to understand the EPMS as a whole.

6. GROW AND LEAD
BEFORE: There was no apparent link between the competencies. JHs were tasked to develop and the skills highlighted in learning frameworks such as the Teacher Growth Model (TGM) and Leader Growth Model (LGM).
NOW: EPMS competencies are linked to the Learning Outcomes under the TGM and LGM. This information can be found in the Individualised Profile.

7. BROADER DEFINITIONS
BEFORE: Each competency was strictly defined by specific Behavioural Indicators (BIs).
NOW: In addition to BIs, each competency has a one-line definition that captures its key elements. This allows the JH to think more broadly about his career development, and encourages in-depth qualitative discussions with the Reporting Officer (RO).

8. SMOOTHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE: There was one Competency Model for each career track – Teaching, Leadership and Senior Specialist. This made it difficult for those moving across tracks to monitor and plan their career development.
NOW: The three models are integrated into one single Competency Model that is applicable to all three tracks.

9. CUSTOMISED SUPPORT
BEFORE: When the EPMS was first rolled out in 2005, supporting materials comprising nearly 250 pages were provided to all educators regardless of their job function.
NOW: The supporting materials have been streamlined into just two key documents:

• The Human Resource Group (HRG) actively worked with other divisions and stakeholders to revise the EPMS. Here’s how the collaborative effort happened.
• In early 2014, HRG and Schools Division conducted workshops with school leaders and middle managers to strengthen their understanding of the EPMS and discuss good appraisal practices that could be shared across all schools.
• HRG will continue to enhance these practices and provide additional training support to Reporting Officers (ROs).

The 4-point scale has been removed.

The 4-point scale has been removed.

The Human Resource Group (HRG) actively worked with other divisions and stakeholders to revise the EPMS. Here’s how the collaborative effort happened.

• The Education Minister announced the review at Workplan Seminar 2012.
• Engagement of educators started in September 2012.
• HRG formed a Steering Committee, partnering the Academy of Singapore Teachers and the Organisational Psychology Branch on reviewing the competency model.
• In March 2013, HRG and Schools Division piloted the revised form in 12 schools involving 1,300 officers.
• Feedback from educators was gathered through check-in sessions at the pilot schools, surveys and small group discussions.
Reflections from the ground

School leaders from two pilot schools share their thoughts on the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS).

What do you think of the EPMS?

Mr Dennis Yap, Principal of Opera Estate Primary School: The new form is streamlined to capture only the essential information the Reporting Officer (RO) needs to engage in quality conversation with the Job Holders (JHs). The improvement I appreciate most is that though the quantity of information needed is reduced, the quality of the information is not compromised.

Mrs Christine Kong, Principal of Catholic Junior College: The revision has been timely. The original EPMS was both an appraisal and development instrument but many JHs lost sight of it as a development instrument and were more focused on results and performance.

The newly revised form reinforces the need to look at the purpose and process of appraisal. This provides room for greater and more in-depth discussion.

How does the integration of the EPMS with learning frameworks like the Teacher Growth Model and Leader Growth Model benefit JHs?

Mrs Kong: The alignment of the EPMS with the TGM encourages the JHs to take a longer term and more systematic approach to their development.

Mr Yap: It is also a good move to merge Section 4 and Section 6 as it allows the JHs to provide more focused input on their learning and development plans.

It makes establishing a JH’s learning and development needs neater and more purposeful.

How do you think ROs and JHs can be guided in using the revised EPMS?

Mr Yap: The complementary EPMS guide and checklist prepared for ROs and JHs are very comprehensive and they are guided in using the revised EPMS.

Mrs Kong: The effectiveness of using the EPMS will still depend on the ROs adopting good coaching and performance appraisal protocols (while upholding the right intent and purposes of guiding JHs). These include the frequency and sequencing of conversations between JHs and ROs, and the type of questions raised by the ROs to elicit honest and reflective responses from the JHs.

Tips for school leaders and middle managers to strengthen appraisal practices.

Do’s

✔ Set clear priorities in work and establish a common understanding of what needs to be achieved in work plans, competencies and expectations

✔ Share honest and useful feedback with JHs

✔ Meet JHs regularly to share feedback on how they have progressed throughout the year

Don’ts’

✖ Use separate school-based appraisal forms

✖ Ask JHs to include their school’s entire strategic thrust in their plans – just select what is relevant to their work

✖ Rely on matrices solely to quantify JH’s performance – assessment of JHs should be a holistic process that is contextualised to their work outcomes

How to beat those marking blues

Buried under a mountain of paper and workbooks to mark? Here are some pointers to keep those blues at bay. Warning! Results may vary!

Text by Yvette Kan Illustrations by Ng Shi Wei

Don’ts

Marking blues

Take a snack break

For every 10 workbooks or test scripts you get through, enjoy a small snack like a square of chocolate or one cookie. Now that’s something sweet to look forward to.

Do something nice for colleagues

Come to work earlier to surprise your colleagues with little surprises like encouraging messages on stickies. Doing good makes one happier according to a 2008 study in the USA.

Rely on matrices solely to quantify JH’s performance – assessment of JHs should be a holistic process that is contextualised to their work outcomes.

WORKSHEETS

- Text by Yvette Kan Illustrations by Ng Shi Wei

- Marking blues

- Tips for school leaders and middle managers to strengthen appraisal practices.

- How do you think ROs and JHs can be guided in using the revised EPMS?

- How to beat those marking blues

- Text by Yvette Kan Illustrations by Ng Shi Wei
Getaways off the beaten path

You need to get cracking on planning a vacation for the June holidays to beat fully-booked situations. Check out these lesser-known vacation spots (so you don’t bump into your students) here and overseas. By Yvette Kan

This seafront colonial-style cottage is just what the doctor recommends to take your mind off teaching. Privacy is guaranteed in this fenced three-room cottage complete with a large garden. Lots of space for kids to run around, fly kites or kick a ball. The beach – accessible via a gate at the bottom of the garden – ensures sandy fun under the sun. Did we mention the BBQ pit? Here’s your chance to enjoy barbecuing chicken wings and marshmallows under the stars.

Public rates from $540 per night, with special rates for public officers

Take a break from urban life, forget about school and head for the D’Kranji Farm Resort. The villas are self-contained and the executive villa comes with a jacuzzi to help soothe the frazzled nerves (possibly caused by too much marking). Enjoy delicious food at the Resort’s restaurants with fresh greens plucked from its vegetable farm. You can also go fishing and prawning at the fishing village, where there’s a special rate for children ($12 for 45 minutes).

From $170 to $420 per night

With just 40 rooms, you’ll enjoy a quiet stay at Rider’s Lodge without bumping into colleagues or students. If that still happens, dodge them by hiding at the nearby Gallop Stables and try horseback riding. You can go on a trail ride exploring Bukit Timah to spot the rare pangolin, feed miniature ponies and donkeys (the kids will love it) or take a carriage ride (like the Queen)! For a hearty meal, head to Rider’s Café and dig into French toast and eggs benedict.

From $225 to $350 per night, including breakfast
QUEPOS, COSTA RICA

Lonely Planet says Costa Rica is “the most kid-friendly and most-developed travel destination in Central America”. Quepos is nestled amidst tropical forests, where you’ll have a higher chance of meeting the sloths and monkeys that roam freely rather than your students. The town is touted as an ideal gateway to many natural attractions – waterfalls, rapids and nature reserves. The most famous is Manuel Antonio National Park, named by Forbes in 2011 as one of the world’s most beautiful national parks.

From $2,900 for a 7D6N stay, including a round-trip flight and three-star accommodation

VANG VIENG, LAOS

A popular spot with Western backpackers, it manages to retain a peaceful, small-town charm. Wi-Fi connection isn’t that reliable so you’ll get a social media detox from students who are friends on your Facebook. Hit the night markets for Laotian snacks and soak in the fun-fair-like atmosphere. Children will enjoy the impressive caves surrounding the town. Your inner daredevil geographer (who says teachers can’t be adventurous?) will love exploring the Water Cave, with just an inner tube and a headlamp.

From $340 for a 4D3N stay, including a round-trip flight and accommodation at TripAdvisor’s 2014 Travelers’ Choice Bargain hotel, Inthira Vang Vieng

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

On the southern tip of the African continent, Cape Town has so many attractions you needn’t fear your children getting bored. Take part in culturally enriching activities like African dance or ostrich-egg painting, and share interesting stories about South African culture with your students when you get back to school. Head out to the iconic Table Mountain, which a 2011 global poll decreed one of the world’s seven wonders of nature. While you’re there, visit Boulders Beach, where you can see endangered African penguins from the boardwalk.

From $1,900 for a 7D6N stay, including a round-trip flight and accommodation at the Table Mountain National Park

AN ALTERNATIVE HOLIDAY

Volunteer with Cross-Cultural Solutions

If you’ve always wanted to volunteer, why not combine your holidays with volunteer work? It’s a great way to explore the world with your kids while contributing to the wider community. Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS) is a non-profit organisation that places volunteers with communities all over the world. For instance, you can help out at homes for the elderly and organisations that serve the disabled in nearby Thailand, or make your way to far-flung Guatemala to teach English to children (perfect for pros like you!).

While volunteering with smaller companies may be less expensive, CCS’s fees go to providing volunteers with a safe and seamless stay, transportation and meals. To cater to families, they offer family-oriented programmes and an $890 discount for children.

From $2,260 for a week
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 the photo submitted.

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. All winners will be notified by email. Upon receiving their prizes, winners are required to send an email acknowledgement, indicating their name, NRIC and contact number.

11. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.

12. Send your entry to contact_online@moe.edu.sg by 27 June 2014.