

# ADVENTURES IN LEVELLING UP

Teachers are turning to innovative ways like  
storytelling to build their students' foundations.



## contact

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST

ISSUE 11 • JULY 2013

### New alternatives

More benefits for N(T) students  
with the set up of a new  
Specialised School.

### Are you engaging enough?

Reflecting on teaching practices.

### The pen is mightier

Literature lovers, take heart.



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**On the cover**  
Mrs Sharon Liang and student Aqirah  
Nur Shahzirah from Da Qiao Primary School  
roleplay storybook characters.

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# This issue...

Earlier this year, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat spoke about MOE's continuing efforts to provide opportunities for all through education. Our students now have more choices and pathways to develop their abilities and interests. Every child will be given a strong foundation so that they can be the best that they can be.

In our cover story, we feature teachers who are involved in primary school programmes to level up students with weaker foundations in literacy and numeracy. Find out how these teachers make learning come to life for their students. You might just pick up some ideas for teaching in regular classroom lessons or even outside of class.

Wonder how you, too, can progress in your teaching? In 'Pursuing passion', two teachers share how they took their teaching to a new level, while building on their interests with the Teacher Growth Model.

Even as we strive to help students with weaker skills, let us remember the importance of providing a holistic education. Hear from Deputy Director-General of Education (Curriculum) Wong Siew Hoong on the need to engage every student in learning.



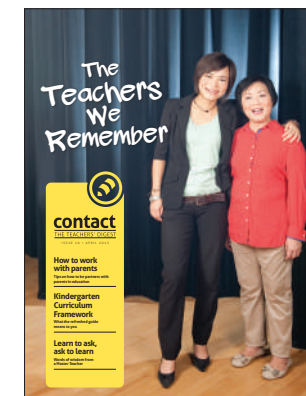
L-R: Chua Minyi, Chia Mei Liang, Sharon Chee, Yong Tsuey Ling

As you settle into a new school term, be sure to take care of a vital teaching instrument – your voice. Our *Lifestyle* feature, 'Good vibrations', reveals which methods work (or don't work) to protect and care for your voice.

Happy reading!

*The Contact Team*

## Readers' comments



As a Beginning Teacher reading *Contact* for the first time, I am thoroughly impressed with the content of the magazine. It has variety and depth in its information, and as a teacher I would be happy to take some time during work to read this for leisure. Most importantly, I think the magazine strikes a fine balance in dealing with the professional and personal lives of teachers. Its aim to improve the overall well-being of teachers is something that really impressed me.

**Mr Jerome Seow**  
North Vista Secondary School

I like *Contact's* layout and presentation of ideas – it is fresh and appealing. For the April issue, it was fun to read what superpowers teachers would like to have.

**Ms Valerie Wang**  
Sembawang Primary School

What do you think of *Contact*? Share your thoughts at [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg)

# How to interest students in Mother Tongue

## ★ WINNING ENTRY ★



Mother Tongue languages have to be taught in a way that is both fun and relevant to daily life, to interest the younger generation. I use computer, video, and Internet materials. For example, I show my students clips of animated movies *Finding Nemo*, *Toy Story*, and *The Incredibles*. The students translate the characters' dialogues from the clip into Tamil. Then, I play the clips on mute while my students voice the characters in Tamil. This creates interest and a different learning experience. My students also respond positively to comics. I white-out caption balloons from a comic strip, or have my students cut and paste comic strips onto paper. The students then build characters and their own storyline. They are able to re-write the comics, regardless of their writing skill and vocabulary. Language games and talent competitions are other ways to help increase student attention levels and enhance effective learning.

**Mdm Thajunisah**  
Tamil Language teacher  
Zhangde Primary School

For lower primary school students, I would use animated stories and recess time programmes like puppet shows and reading programmes (with a badge earning system). For the upper primary level, I would use interactive games (card/board/online), and school programmes like debates and readers' theatre. There could also be e-learning programmes through platforms like AskNLearn and the iMTL portal to engage students in the Mother Tongue language. I would also explore school-wide projects to set up different corners in the school, with each based on a particular Mother Tongue.

**Mr Seah Choon Sheng**  
Teacher  
Ngee Ann Primary School

Songs can be a fantastic tool to get students interested in learning their Mother Tongue. Songs and music resonate with the young. Students could learn to appreciate the language through songs. Also, we could use various songs that relate to the topics that we are teaching when we teach Mother Tongue.

**Ms Nazira Binte Abdullah**  
Tamil Language teacher  
Cedar Primary School

Mother Tongue language teachers should try to win the hearts of students to get them interested in learning their Mother Tongue. Teachers should criticise less; instead, they should motivate students, regardless of their proficiency level, to speak their Mother Tongue. Teachers could also use comedic scenes from movies or YouTube videos to teach Mother Tongue in an interesting way.

**Mr Mohamed Shariff H Alaudeen**  
Deputy Dean, Mother Tongue Department  
Anglo-Chinese School (Independent)

## NEXT ISSUE...

**'It wasn't on the lesson plan!'**  
Share how you handled such a surprise – not that you hadn't prepared – and turned the situation around.

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](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg) by **26 August 2013**. Entries should not be more than 250 words. Your entry might be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school, and contact number.

# ADVENTURES IN LEVELLING UP

Every student is unique; each of their (learning) journeys an adventure. To help students be the best that they can be, teachers can now tap into the enhanced primary school learning support programmes. Alexia Tung reports.

At Casuarina Primary School, some Primary 1 students are starting their day with a card game.

The students match picture cards of a six-year-old boy's activities to the hour he would perform them, and then arrange the activities in sequence. This game, with its element of storytelling, relates the concept of time to the personal experiences of students in the school's Learning Support for Mathematics (LSM) programme.

The LSM programme helps students with weaker numeracy skills to catch up with their peers. Along with the LSM programme at primary school level is the Learning Support Programme for English, which helps students gain basic literacy skills.

Together, these programmes help weaker students build strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. This is a key focus of MOE's efforts to level up students who require dedicated support.

To help our children succeed, additional learning support (ALS) programmes and other measures were announced earlier this year. The new ALS programme for literacy aims to level up students who have basic literacy skills but struggle to keep up with the pace of regular classroom teaching.



Teachers in the ALS and LSM programmes use different methods, arrangements and strategies to facilitate experiential learning. Students can learn more effectively, and at their own pace.

### Creating the right environment

The learning support programmes are conducted with fewer students in a class. Each child gets more opportunity and time to express opinions and respond to questions. Teachers can provide more personal attention, check closely on students' understanding, and adjust their teaching methods accordingly.

"Students who hesitate to participate in regular classes because they feel 'overshadowed' by their peers can learn at their own pace, speak out more and interact with their peers and teachers," says Mr Adrian Yan, an ALS teacher at Da Qiao Primary School. Students gain confidence as they progress in their learning.

Every learning support class starts with a 'tuning in' session that helps students recall and reinforce what they have previously learnt.

Mdm Wong Hwee Kim, an LSM teacher at Casuarina Primary School, explains why this is important: "For Maths, you must understand one concept before learning a new one. For example, to understand a lesson on 'Patterns', students must first be able to identify the four basic shapes. I usually spend some time revising the concepts I have taught, and ask questions to test the students' understanding before I move on."

Similarly, Mr Yan starts his ALS classes by re-reading a story from a 'Big Book', such as one titled 'Food Fit For A King'. He then uses birthday cards and photos to reinforce the main points, helping his

students to recall and relate the stories to their own experiences.

Using examples from the stories, Mr Yan teaches students how to recognise and spell words, and construct sentences. He also organises them into group and individual activities to facilitate learning.

During group writing sessions, Mr Yan guides students to contribute sentences to form a combined piece of writing. For example, the class can work together to craft a simple birthday card greeting.

Students get to work on their own to practise spelling words they choose themselves based on their standard. They then rearrange the letters to form words and also practise rearranging words to form sentences.

### Engagement through activity

In ALS and LSM classes, experiential and peer learning is key. Students learn through

play that facilitates the understanding of concepts at their own pace.

"Each child is unique. Students who are musically inclined learn better through music, rhythm and sound, while those with high interpersonal intelligence learn best when interacting with others in a group," explains Mr Yan, who has taught English and Maths for three years.

ALS and LSM classes cater to different learning abilities, and are primarily activity-driven. Teachers use songs, games, storytelling, group exercises and individual worksheets to engage students at a deeper level and help them relate lessons to their experience.



► Mr Adrian Yan reads a Big Book story called 'Food Fit For A King' before guiding his ALS students to form sentences in a group writing activity.



▲ Mdm Wong Hwee Kim also uses the Big Book stories to teach Maths concepts; this interactive story is called 'Telling Time with Big Mama Cat'.

◀ Teaching the concept of time visually: Mdm Wong turns the hour and minute hands of a big clock, as she explains how to tell time.

For example, to teach students about the life cycle of a butterfly, Mr Yan plays a documentary video and even shows a live caterpillar.

Mdm Wong, who has taught for 13 years, uses games, storybooks and manipulatives (e.g. wooden puzzle blocks, small clock models) to simplify Maths concepts. In her first lesson about 'Time', students get to assemble parts of a clock like a puzzle. Through this activity, they learn that the numbers on a clock face represent the different hours of the day.

Mdm Wong also creates her own activity cards and worksheets to personalise her students' learning, and uses competitions to motivate students to challenge themselves.

"The children really enjoy the Maths games. More importantly, not only do they understand the concepts, they are also able to apply them and remember more through this form of learning," says Mdm Wong.

To facilitate peer learning, Mdm Wong and Mr Yan pair a weaker student with another student with a higher learning pace during group activities.

### Identifying unique learning needs

Before starting on the LSM curriculum, Mdm Wong determines each child's level of numeral literacy using a simple 'diagnostic' worksheet that she devised. It has questions on counting (visual and numeral), and addition or subtraction – topics that would have been previously taught.

As students in the LSM usually struggle with vocabulary, Mdm Wong reads the questions aloud and observes the student's areas of weakness as he attempts the questions.

"Even though all the students have been identified as requiring LSM intervention, this 'tool' helps me to gauge each student's numeracy level and areas of strength and weakness. It gives me a good idea of where to start teaching and what I should focus on," she adds.

### Helping students learn effectively

Both Mr Yan and Mdm Wong had professional training that helped them learn more structured and focused teaching methods for ALS and LSM students. Their training helped them to design lesson plans and personalised resources that facilitate experiential learning. Mdm Wong says: "Some of the worksheets that the other teachers came up with were really creative! Over the years, I have also adapted and built up my own teaching resources."

Before undergoing training, Mr Yan had experimented with using the game *Scrabble* to help slower learners build their vocabulary. He says: "While this was fun for my students, my training provided a more structured way of helping them to improve." His training sessions, with sharing of strategies and discussions of videos of 'live' classes, helped him expand on examples of effective learning for children.

Mr Yan and Mdm Wong's passion to help students who learn at a slower pace led them to be part of the ALS and LSM programmes in their schools. Through creative teaching methods and tools, these teachers inspire change and help their students build strong foundations. ➤

Teachers play a big role in helping students succeed. You, too, will get to 'level up' through professional training opportunities. Turn the page to find out more.





# SUPPORT ... FOR ... TEACHERS

Teachers play a key role in helping students succeed. MOE supports teachers by providing professional training and resources for them to be effective.

## For the Additional Learning Support (ALS) programme teacher

### Professional training for ALS

Teachers will learn to work with small groups of children, using mainly teaching strategies adapted from the Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading (STELLAR) programme, such as the Shared Book Approach and Modified Language Experience Approach.

Intervention strategies will be integrated into the school's scheme of work. They will use STELLAR programme materials, which may be supplemented by other books and materials.

ALS teachers can attend workshops to learn how to:

- Identify children with learning difficulties using assessment and observational techniques, and data analyses.
- Apply STELLAR teaching techniques for small group instruction.

- Select and use teaching materials and resources.
- Use Assessment for Learning principles to provide feedback on students' responses.

There will also be workshops on the basic principles of teaching English to students whose main language is not English, and related concepts of scaffolding and differentiated instruction.

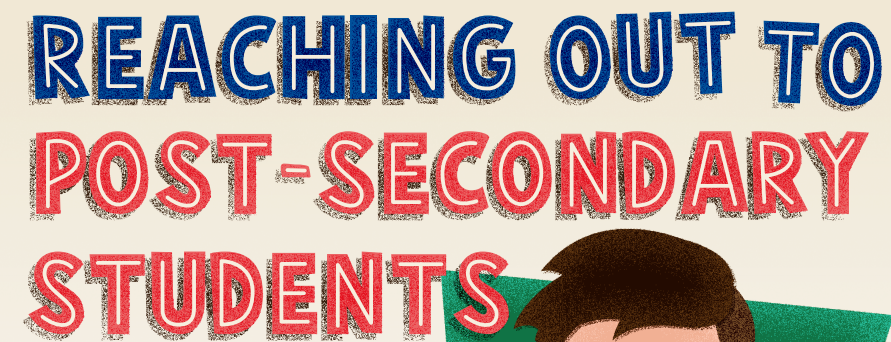
## For the Learning Support for Mathematics (LSM) teacher

### Professional training for LSM

Teachers in the LSM programme undergo an initial year-long training that focuses on structuring lessons appropriately, using strategies that work with students who require early learning support, and monitoring students' progress. Strategies focus on four areas: cognition, metacognition, motivation and environment.

The training comprises workshops, networking sessions and an annual seminar, as well as mentoring support to help teachers plan and implement their lessons more effectively. Teachers are offered further training in subsequent years to hone their skills in diagnosing their students' learning needs and crafting customised lessons. Heads of Department also undergo training to manage the LSM programme in their schools.

Teachers can tap into various resources such as the LSM teaching resource pack and tools to monitor students' progress. Diagnostic packages are also available to help teachers identify students' misconceptions in specific topics. Teachers can participate as a member of a virtual learning community through the LSM Group Collaboration in OPAL. ➤



# REACHING OUT TO POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS

A pilot foundation programme at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) will enable students who need greater support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The efforts of MOE to level up students are inclusive.

## The Enhanced NITEC Foundation Programme (e-NFP)

This is a new three-year ITE course specially catered to students who need extra help to complete the National ITE Certificate (NITEC) course. Students will spend an additional year in foundation training, with the course offerings spaced out to suit their learning pace. Additional English and Mathematics modules, delivered by seconded MOE teachers, will help these students learn better in their ITE technical modules. The e-NFP will be piloted in all three ITE colleges in 2014.

### What a two-year e-NFP consists of

- Customised English and Mathematics modules to build literacy and numeracy skills.
- Technical training to prepare students for the NITEC career core modules in their third year.
- Character education and social-emotional support to improve self-confidence and motivation.

### How the e-NFP helps students

Additional English and Maths components will be customised and integrated into the e-NFP. These components will help build the pre-requisite English and Maths competencies that support the learning of the content and skills in the technical modules. After the second year of the e-NFP, students will obtain the NITEC Foundation Certification.

### How the e-NFP impacts educators

Teachers seconded for the e-NFP gain professional development opportunities for curriculum design and acquire more pedagogical skills to help weaker students. Teachers will also understand the NITEC course requirements better.

### What profile of students the e-NFP is suitable for

The foundation programme is designed to help weaker Normal (Technical) students complete their NITEC courses. N(T) students with fewer than two N-level



## Specialised training for teachers of N(T) students

Teachers can sign up for professional development courses through the online portal TRAISI. Courses that teachers of N(T) students will find helpful are 'Engaging and Supporting Challenging Youths' and 'Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships', among many others.

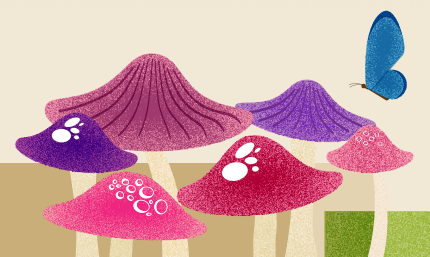
Teachers also get to experience collaborative learning platforms through the biannual N(T) Professional Focus Group meetings, organised by the Academy of Singapore Teachers. At such meetings, teachers share best practices and work on solving common problems encountered while teaching N(T) students.

Teachers are supported by the following resource experts:

- Master Teachers provide pedagogical expert advice in the areas of literacy, numeracy, Computer Applications, Elements of Business Skills, and Science.
- Guidance Branch officers provide resource expertise in the areas of social-emotional learning and teacher-student relationship.

Teachers can also learn through learning journeys to establishments and post-secondary institutions like ITE, so that they can provide authentic and relevant learning experiences for their students as well as appropriate career guidance counselling.

passes will automatically be given an option to enrol in the e-NFP during the ITE Admission Exercise. ➤



# Are you engaging enough?

Central to the 'Every Student, an Engaged Learner' philosophy is the belief that every child can learn and be engaged in learning – not just in school, but for life.

When you look around your classroom, do you see any student so immersed in the learning activity that he or she loses track of time? Are there students who take part in discussions enthusiastically, or students who love taking on challenging tasks?

"Students like these are affectively, behaviourally and cognitively engaged in learning. They will develop positive attitudes towards learning, and acquire the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies (21CC) that will stand them in good stead for life," says Mr Wong Siew Hoong, Deputy Director-General of Education (Curriculum).

"We want engaged learning for *all* our students because every child matters."

Engaged learning has always been a strong focus for our teaching fraternity. The Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) movement, started in 2005, promotes teaching that captures students' interest, builds their character, and prepares them for life rather than for examinations.

In 2012, as part of MOE's emphasis on Student-centric, Values-driven Education, our Education Minister Heng Swee Keat highlighted 'Every Student, an Engaged Learner' as a key attribute of the system.

Engaged learning is important to the holistic development of our students. Mr Wong explains: "If our students are engaged across all domains in the curriculum, the quality of their learning increases regardless of their background or ability."



## "We want engaged learning for *all* our students because every child matters."

– Mr Wong Siew Hoong, Deputy Director-General of Education (Curriculum)

### Striking a balance

Some teachers may feel that it is a challenge to develop students holistically in addition to preparing them for national exams. Mr Wong encourages teachers not to see both as mutually exclusive.

"Our exams go beyond testing students' knowledge to assessing some 21CC, especially those involving thinking and application skills," says Mr Wong. "However, as educators, we must recognise that exams cannot measure everything that is important for lifelong learning, for example, values like respect. That does not mean that we should not teach our students respect."

Mr Wong advises teachers to reflect on how we can help to develop students' understanding of specific concepts, as well as their skills, values and competencies. MOE is continually supporting teachers to understand how the curriculum can facilitate the development of 21CC in students.

The Science curriculum framework, for example, guides teachers to go beyond ensuring that their students have a sound grasp of content knowledge and application. Teachers can nurture in students a spirit of scientific inquiry through a focus on the development of scientific process skills, and appreciation of ethical issues in Science.

### Moving ahead

Ensuring that every student in every class is engaged is an aspiration all teachers should work towards. This requires us to reflect on our pedagogy, our everyday

teaching and learning activities, as well as our beliefs and practices.

"It is about each individual teacher and the education fraternity doing our best to build an environment, design lessons and use pedagogy that motivates students to learn. Every student then experiences meaningful learning," says Mr Wong.

"Engaging every student is ultimately about believing in each child's ability to learn, and empowering every child to succeed in life." ✨

**"A skilful teacher will be able to identify the needs of learners, design meaningful lessons and deliver them with passion. A good lesson is one where there is intellectual connection between the teacher and learners and not necessarily one where a large amount of content is delivered."**

– Mr Chris Loh, principal of Pei Tong Primary School

### Questions to reflect on

- **Why am I teaching this?**  
(What's the larger purpose of my lesson? Which 21CC naturally fit into the topic I am teaching?)
- **What exactly am I teaching?**  
(What knowledge, skills and attitudes am I focusing on?)
- **How am I teaching it?**  
(What strategies am I using to extend student learning to real-life application?)

### Find out more about 21CC

- To learn how 21CC came about, visit [bit.ly/MOE21CC](http://bit.ly/MOE21CC)
- To learn how to develop 21CC in our students, visit [21cc.opal.moe.edu.sg](http://21cc.opal.moe.edu.sg) (first login to OPAL)

**"An engaging learning environment is one where students are able to question when in doubt and give feedback to the teacher on how to help them learn better."**

– Mrs Wong Boon Leng, Senior Teacher at St Andrew's Junior College

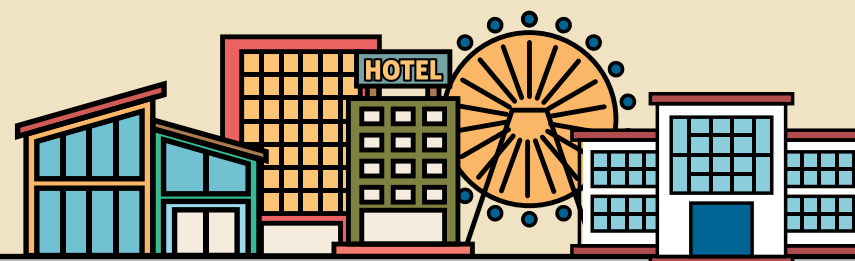
**"To me, quality teaching and learning means a teacher igniting students' curiosity and spurring them to ask deep questions to form knowledge that they will be able to apply as they meet different situations in life."**

– Ms Nuraini Abu Bakar, HOD of English Language and Literature at Loyang Secondary School

# New alternatives

Normal (Technical) students will now have more options for learning, with a second Specialised School for N(T) (SSNT) students, Spectra Secondary, opening in 2014. Here's what you need to know about SSNTs to guide your students' decision-making.

Text by Siti Maziah Masramli Illustrations by Ng Shiwei



**"We have both the academic curriculum and the ITE Skills Certificate modules, which puts the students a step ahead, due to their experience with vocational subjects."**

- Mrs Usha Theva, Mother Tongue Subject Head, Crest Secondary

## 1. AFTER THE PSLE

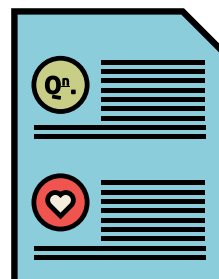
Primary 6 students streamed into Normal (Technical) get an SSNT application form. They can also choose six secondary schools in the Secondary 1 Posting Exercise.

### Making the choice: SSNT or a mainstream school?

The specialised schools take in N(T) students who will most benefit from the curriculum.

Crest Secondary principal Frederick Yeo shares: "Last year, many primary school teachers wrote testimonials highly recommending their P6 Foundation students to join the school."

### SPECIALISED SCHOOL (NT)



The SSNT application form includes...

#### A personal statement

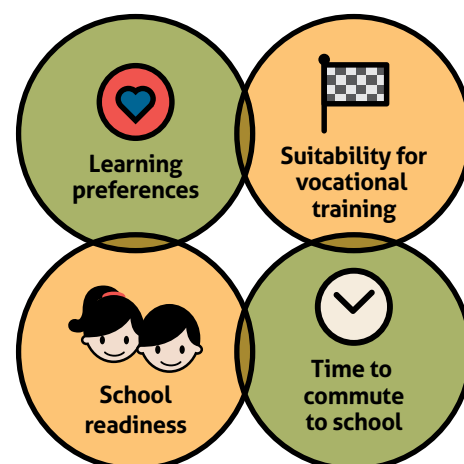
Students answer short questions about what they like to learn in class.

#### Teachers' written recommendation

Recommendations are useful but not mandatory.

### TRANSFERRING TO SSNT FROM A MAINSTREAM SCHOOL

N(T) students will be accepted in Sec 2 on a **case-by-case** basis. The schools will consider:



## 2. THE SSNT CURRICULUM

### Sec 1 and 2

#### Vocational training:

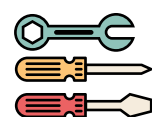
Eight compulsory ITE taster modules in four categories



Facility Services



Retail Services



Mechanical Servicing



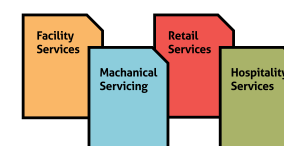
Hospitality Services

#### Academic curriculum: N(T) core subjects

English Language, Mathematics, basic Mother Tongue, and Science

### Sec 3 and 4

#### Vocational training:



Students specialise in one of the four ITE Skills Certificate (ISC) modules

**100 HOURS**

Industrial attachment/exposure

#### Academic curriculum: N(T) core subjects

English Language, Mathematics, and basic Mother Tongue (Selected students may take N(T) Science)

## BENEFITS

### CUSTOMISED LEARNING



Literacy



Numeracy



Vocational training

**20 STUDENTS**

Small class

Students at SSNTs learn academic content through the vocational curriculum, so that students can see the relevance of academic learning.

### BOOST IN SELF-ESTEEM



Students have ample opportunities to stand out. They can lead in CCAs, in class or as school prefects. Students with artistic talent will have more opportunities to perform on stage.

### DEDICATED N(T) TEACHERS



Teachers at SSNTs include engineers and architects among experienced N(T) and ITE educators, with about 40 percent holding Masters degrees. Mr Krishnan Aravinthan, principal of Spectra Secondary, says: "It makes a difference [when] the matching of teachers to students is a very good fit."

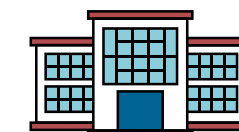
## 3. AFTER SSNT

Students graduate with a GCE N-level certificate and an ITE Skills Certificate.

### TAKING NORMAL (ACADEMIC) SUBJECTS

- If an SSNT student is academically inclined and wants to take the full N(A) syllabus, the school will facilitate the student's transfer to a mainstream school that has vacancies.
- At the end of Sec 4, selected SSNT students will be able to take examinations in N(A) English and Maths.

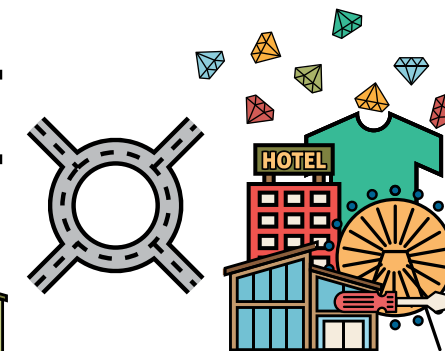
### MANY CAREER PATHS



ITE



Private Institution



Work

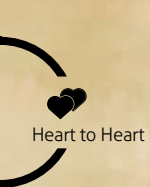
SSNTs do not prepare students for a specific vocation. Rather, they expose students to different types of real-world training. After graduating, students can choose from a range of ITE courses.

Crest Secondary student Kathleen Goh, 14, enjoys the taster modules: "If the subject is about fixing things, you can help at home to fix things that are not working." Kathleen has since become more confident in and out of class.

Fellow student Muhd Farhan Abdul Malik, 13, says he felt "not so smart" in primary school without hands-on learning. Now, with more opportunities for creative thinking, he no longer gets easily frustrated by his studies.

## GET TO KNOW SSNT BETTER

Look out for roadshows at Crest and Spectra Secondary in October, and guided open houses in November. Students can try hands-on activities and learn more about the SSNT learning experience.



# The classroom as a learning lab

Two American educators visiting Singapore through the Fulbright programme share their thoughts on the US and Singapore education experience.



**Ann Kaiser and Katie Cheng**  
Teachers for 14 years and six years, respectively

Hi Singapore teachers!

Thank you for welcoming us into your schools and giving us the opportunity to learn about your education system. Our experiences have been extremely enriching. We had sharing sessions about the US education system; conducted Maths, Physics, and English workshops; and observed lessons at various schools.

Certain similarities between our education systems stand out. First, we are all in the same boat! We all deal with the issues of time, assessment, economic pressures, multi-tasking, and a rapidly changing world that leads to changes in the education environment.

Second, as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the need for strong problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and adaptability along with a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy is a focus in both countries.

We both feel that the main differences in our education systems come from classroom enactments and we share more about our individual experiences.

## **Letter from Mrs Ann Kaiser: Active learning in Science**

I teach Physics and Engineering Design at LaSalle Academy in Providence, Rhode Island. In the US, many Physics teachers are moving away from approaches based on lectures, drills and worksheets. Laboratory experiences are becoming less structured and more student-designed.

Active learning requires active classrooms. In newer classroom designs, the teacher is no longer at the front of the room.

## THE NEED FOR *problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and adaptability along with a* **SOLID FOUNDATION IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY** *is a focus in both countries.*

Seating is group-style, and classroom spaces allow teachers to conduct hands-on activities for students to develop and apply concepts. The classroom has become the lab and vice versa.

While in Singapore, I observed Physics lessons at the School of Science and Technology (SST), NUS High School of Mathematics and Science, and Raffles Institution, as well as design classes and Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs).

My observation is that many conventional approaches are still used here. Classes tend to be lecture-based while practicals are highly structured. The conventional method is to first teach new concepts, and then techniques to solve problems based on these concepts. This encourages convergent thinking. Problems in the real world, however, often have more than one solution, and their resolution often involves divergent thinking skills.

The Physics students at SST quickly saw this with an Engineering Design-based project that I facilitated. They used a spring-loaded mousetrap to power a vehicle they created. They all had the same 'engine' (a mousetrap spring) and goal, but their approaches and final designs were all different. Their assessment was designed to emphasise the process (of considering many solutions) more than the final product (i.e. the car).

I found that there was less class time available here for a project like this than in the US. It also took a bit longer

for students here to ask questions and interact with instructors. But once they had their products (i.e. the cars) working and got used to a less structured environment, student interaction with instructors improved.

In Singapore, more opportunities for applied and project-based learning come outside the main curriculum. I think there are pros and cons to this: Many of these opportunities are complex, well-evolved projects, which get sufficient time and support in CCAs. But, this also means that not every student is exposed to learning by doing and designing.

I am hoping that using Engineering Design to connect form and function with scientific principles will provide a quality way to teach and learn.

## **Letter from Ms Katie Cheng: Working together and learning from each other**

In Singapore, I observed English and Maths lessons at Greenridge Primary and Tao Nan School.

I discovered that we are moving towards each other's educational models. In terms of pedagogy, the lower primary classes here look very similar to US classes. It felt just like being back at my school, P.S. 290 Juan Morel Campos elementary in Brooklyn, New York, where I teach English, Maths, and other subjects.

There is more cooperative and collaborative learning in Singapore's

lower primary classes, and lessons are more student-centred and hands-on.

Singapore's upper primary classes, however, seem more teacher-centred and worksheet-driven. Teachers have packed schemes of work to prepare students for exams, so there is less time to provide hands-on learning.

In the US, we are also currently facing similar struggles as we become more assessment-driven. I realised that we are both juggling the challenges of providing an enriching education while helping students succeed in high-stakes exams.

I have been learning how to integrate Singapore's Maths model method into my school's Maths curriculum. Seeing the model method in action here has been an eye-opening experience. I learned how powerful and effective this heuristic is in translating word problems into a visual format to help most students solve word problems successfully.

Although most Singapore students are adept at drawing models and find the model method extremely helpful, some are reluctant to draw them because they consider it 'troublesome', 'time-consuming', and 'too rigid'.

I have developed a chart, 'Model Drawing My Way', to spark student engagement in Maths model drawing by giving them more freedom and creativity when constructing their models.

I have also created a collaborative Google site for teachers to develop and share strategies in teaching the model method effectively. I am excited to share my chart and Google site with the US and Singapore teachers as we continue to work together and learn from each other.

Let's continue to learn to teach and teach to learn! 🌟

# Pursuing passion

Take a term off teaching to learn new skills, or opt for part-time study – there are many ways to pursue personal and professional growth. By He Yining



## A NOVEL CHAPTER

### MDM FOO HWA MING Ai Tong School

Head of Reading Committee  
(Chinese Language Department)

Having taught for more than 12 years, Mdm Foo Hwa Ming looked forward to Professional Development Leave (PDL). It was the perfect chance to get different perspectives and acquire new skills and knowledge.

Her choice of what to do for her PDL was simple: to pursue her interest in reading. She wanted to explore fresh ideas for Ai Tong School's reading club activities and to promote Chinese books to all students.

The avid reader seized the opportunity to work in a library for a school term in 2012. She applied to work with the

National Library Board's Whole School Reading Programme team at Geylang East Public Library.

Mdm Foo lent her expertise as a Senior Teacher for Chinese Language and Chinese Culture to start a Chinese language version of the library's existing projects.

One key project she took part in was creating packages for book talks, which are presentations to pique students' interest in a book. The packages contain book summaries, thematic explorations and thought-provoking questions.

She also created storytelling packages and recommended book lists, as part of another project to encourage students to read more.

Mdm Foo got to sharpen her skills in Information and Communications

## The avid reader seized the opportunity to work in a library for a school term in 2012.

Technology (ICT) while producing a book trailer using Windows Movie Maker, a video editing software.

When Mdm Foo returned to teaching at Ai Tong School, she could immediately share and apply what she had learnt.

She taught her Library CCA students to design book talk packages and book trailers, which the students then presented during pre-assembly periods. "It was good exposure for them to learn public speaking and presentation skills early even in primary school," says Mdm Foo.

Now armed with new ideas and methods to engage her students, Mdm Foo found her PDL experience to be fulfilling and invaluable. "It brought me inner peace to be able to focus on reading. I hope that students will take the initiative to read Chinese books and enjoy the beauty of the language, besides the stories."

## Miss Lee believes deeply in seeking out enriching experiences to continue learning.

### REACHING THE HIGH NOTES



### MISS JEANIE LEE

Fuchun Primary School

Head of Department (Aesthetics)

Miss Jeanie Lee took charge of pursuing her own educational experiences without waiting to apply for PDL – she wanted to pursue her interests "now, now, now".

The enthusiastic lady is currently working on two music diplomas in classical guitar and flute, adding to her two Masters degrees in Education (Music) and Communications Management.

Miss Lee completed her self-funded MSc in Communications Management at Singapore Management University (SMU) earlier this year. She taught full-time during the week and studied on weekends. During the course, she had debates and dialogues with classmates working in both the public and private sectors. She and her classmates would question one another's assumptions and points of view.

The intellectually stimulating exchange at SMU reminded Miss Lee of the need to ask a lot of questions as a teacher so as to prompt her students to ask questions and justify their viewpoints.

Miss Lee wants her students to develop social and leadership skills through self-awareness. "Part of leadership is being self-aware of how your actions impact you and others," she says.

When her Primary 3 students had disagreements or went off-task during an English class, she did not chide them. Instead she encouraged her students to discuss and reflect on what had happened. Miss Lee also taught them strategies to "agree to disagree". This suggested to the young minds the need to reason and engage with others' opinions graciously.



### Continual learning with the Teacher Growth Model (TGM)

The TGM guides teachers in planning their professional learning. Teachers can consider their interests, strengths and needs when choosing learning opportunities.

TGM highlights the numerous professional learning areas teachers can pursue to help them fulfil their multi-faceted role today. Teachers can choose how they want to learn in consultation with their Reporting Officers.

Teachers can select from seven learning modes according to their preferred learning styles:

1. Face-to-face courses, workshops, seminars, conferences and symposiums
2. Experiential learning
3. ICT-based learning
4. Networked learning
5. Mentoring
6. Reflective practice
7. Research-based practice

Both Mdm Foo and Miss Lee pursued their interests in reading and self-development through experiential learning and face-to-face courses. Continual learning allows them to build on their interests and grow in their teaching career.

Miss Lee believes deeply in seeking out enriching experiences to continue learning. These experiences can be learning a new set of skills or finding an innovative way of thinking, and they can all be brought into the classroom environment.

She jokes: "I currently run a 'Master's programme' for Primary 3 students. But, I feel that's the right way to get students to engage in active thinking." 🌟

# The pen is mightier

Literature is too difficult and impractical, say some. Yet, a few schools have rising numbers of students taking Literature as a full subject. *Contact* finds out how Literature is enlivened by three passionate teachers. By Tay Qiao Wei

O Literature students, where art thou? Earlier this year, debate sparked over falling enrolment rates for Literature at both the O- and N(A)-levels. For some, it seems that learning about the works of William Shakespeare or Oscar Wilde is less important than knowing how to solve Maths problems.

The heart of the issue is that Literature is often perceived as a less practical subject than Maths or the sciences. But, Mr Ahmad Hashikin Mohd Latiff, Senior Teacher for Literature at Chung Cheng High School (Main), argues that Literature requires rigorous analysis, critical thought and coherent writing – skills that are necessary in many careers.

Furthermore, Literature allows students to have diverse views and see things differently, he adds. "They can't challenge a Maths concept, for example, but they can challenge the interpretation of a poem."

Literature students also get to appreciate different viewpoints as they learn more about values and moral dilemmas, says Mdm Noridah Moosa, Head of Department (HOD) of English Language and Literature at Nan Hua High School. Her students gained more mature views of the world after having discussions about white lies and other grey areas of human behaviour.

Given these benefits of Literature, the teachers agree that more should be done to encourage

students to take up the subject at upper secondary levels.

## Getting students fired up

"I think the onus is on us Literature teachers to make the subject come alive," says Mr Liang Sea Fong, HOD of English Language and Literature at St Andrew's Secondary School. At the all-boys school, he uses pop songs by Maroon 5 and Taylor Swift to teach Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, to help his students connect with what the lovers go through.

Many boys enjoy music, so Mr Liang shows his students how rappers use literary techniques from poetry to pen lyrics.

Debates engage his students too. "Boys love to argue and show who's superior. We make it more fun by having inter-school debates at the annual National Schools Literature Festival."

Another way to rouse students' passion is to bring Literature texts to life. At Chung Cheng High, Mr Ahmad galvanised all his Literature students to perform an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. "There's no better way to appreciate a play than to stage it," he says. Students who seemed bored in class participated enthusiastically as cast and crew, even returning to school on Saturdays for rehearsals.

Mdm Noridah taught the early batches of O-level Literature students at Nan Hua, and faced challenges such as having to prepare worksheets and tests for her students from scratch. To make Literature relatable to lower secondary students, she made students debate 'in character' and brought them out of the classroom to write poems.

She also invited older students taking Literature to share their experience at the Secondary 2 streaming talk. "Our Sec 2s can see for themselves how confident their seniors are, and how fun and meaningful studying Literature is," says Mdm Noridah.

Contributing to the fall in Literature enrolments are: A greater choice of subjects like Combined Humanities, and fears that it is difficult to do well in Literature, despite pass rates being on par with other humanities subjects like Geography and History. Students interested in Literature should not be deterred; every subject has its challenges after all.

"Nothing is easy at O-levels. Students must work hard in whatever subject they choose," says Mr Liang.

Even students who are weaker in the English language can do well in Literature, with some effort. One of Mr Liang's former

students who struggled with English earned an A2 for Literature after diligently writing extra essays to improve.

**Literature allows students to have diverse views and see things differently, says Mr Ahmad.**  
**"They can't challenge a Maths concept, for example, but they can challenge the interpretation of a poem."**

The number of students taking O-level Literature at these three schools has risen, contrary to popular opinion.

At Nan Hua, 72 students are taking O-level Literature this year, up from just 16 students in 2002. Many students also participate actively in school-wide drama, poetry

slam and writing competitions, as part of their annual English Language and Literature week.

"When I started teaching Literature, I didn't think it was possible to get this kind of response," says Mdm Noridah. "If you are passionate about Literature catching on, you should keep trying."

## National Schools Literature Festival

**What:** Students participate in debates on novels and poems, dramatic enactments of literary texts, and poetry slam performances.

**When:** 13 July 2013

**Where:** Dunman High School

First started in 2005, this annual event to promote and celebrate Literature is organised by a volunteer committee of Literature teachers, in collaboration with Word Forward (a non-profit literary arts company).



► **Mr Liang Sea Fong**  
Head of Department (HOD) of English Language and Literature  
St Andrew's Secondary School

**Mdm Noridah Moosa** ◀  
HOD of English Language and Literature  
Nan Hua High School

**Mr Ahmad Hashikin Mohd Latiff** ►  
Senior Teacher for Literature  
Chung Cheng High School (Main)



# Good vibrations

Your voice is your most important teaching tool, and you've got to take good care of it. Eating honey, avoiding milk, or whispering... which of these everyday voice-preserving practices actually work? *Contact* separates the old wives' tales from the facts.

By Tay Qiao Wei



**Mentholated lozenges are good for your throat**

**FALSE**

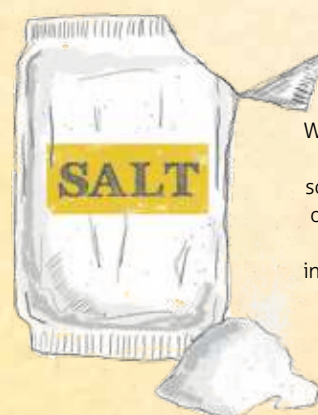
You may think you're doing your throat a favour with mentholated cough drops, but menthol, which numbs the pain, actually irritates the vocal cords instead. Covering up the 'stop, it hurts' signal also makes it more likely for you to strain your voice. To soothe your throat without irritating your vocal cords, choose non-mentholated lozenges, which doctors tend to prescribe for sore throats.



**Drinking water lubricates our vocal cords directly**

**FALSE**

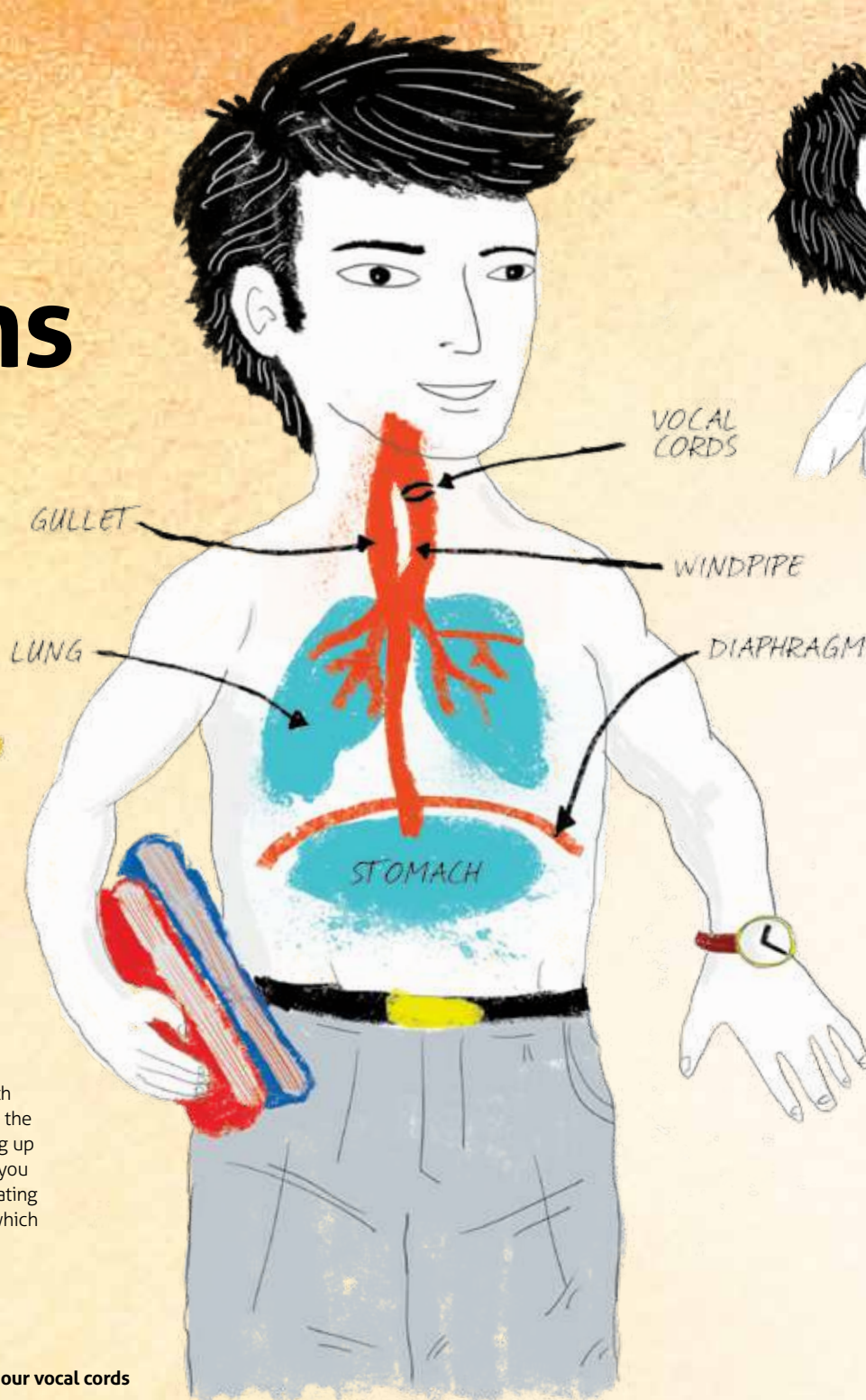
You wouldn't want the water you drink to touch your vocal cords – it could cause a bout of violent coughing. When you drink up, water passes through the gullet, which is situated behind the voice box. To deliver moisture directly onto your vocal cords, try inhaling steam from a pot of boiled water instead.



**Salt water soothes sore throats and colds**

**TRUE**

Want to wash away the germs and irritants lurking in your mouth? Gargle with a solution of half a teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water to reduce swelling, loosen phlegm, and improve the circulation of infection-fighting antibodies. The best part about this remedy: It's practically free.



**Clearing your throat soothes irritated vocal cords**

**FALSE**

Imagine your vocal cords grinding together while they are trying to vibrate. This is what happens when you clear your throat. Doctors and speech therapists warn that chronic throat clearing can even injure the vocal cords. Try swallowing or taking sips of water instead.

**Caffeinated drinks dry out your throat**

**TRUE**

Caffeine can dehydrate your body, including your vocal cords. This causes your vocal cords to stiffen and require more effort to vibrate. Can't survive without your daily cuppa? Consume your tea or coffee well ahead of lessons and drink more water to compensate for the dryness.



**Dairy products increase phlegm**

**FALSE**

Several studies have shown that there is no link between consuming dairy products and phlegm production. However, you are not wrong if you feel like there is more mucus in your throat after drinking milk. This illusion is said to be due to the combination of saliva and the high-fat, creamy product. If your mouth or throat feels uncomfortable after consuming dairy products, it is best to avoid it before long stretches of lessons.

**Honey works as well as cough medicine**

**TRUE**

Thank the bees! Need proof that this home remedy works? According to a study by Pennsylvania State University researchers, honey reduces night-time coughing in children better than over-the-counter medicine. Even if your throat feels fine, mix two to three teaspoons of honey in a cup of hot water or tea, or swallow a spoonful of this throat soother as a precaution. In general, choose dark-coloured varieties of honey, such as buckwheat honey, as these contain more antioxidants than lighter varieties.



**Whisper to rest your voice**

**FALSE**

You may be tempted to drop your voice to a whisper outside of the classroom to conserve it, but doing so squeezes your vocal cords more tightly together than during normal speech. If you want to give your voice a break, speak softly or just stop talking.



## Tips to preserve your voice



**Learn how to project it**

Try using your 'head voice'. Imagine your voice making your skull and skin vibrate as you speak. To practise, hum the letters 'M' or 'N' while pressing your fingers to the sides of your nose to feel the vibrations made. Try to reproduce this feeling of resonance inside your head when you speak.



**Use non-verbal signals**

Why not use bells or musical instruments (such as a triangle or a mini xylophone) to get your students' attention? Simple actions like clapping your hands or turning off the classroom lights also beats screaming your head off to calm the class.



**Create your own PA system**

Give the rowdier students in class a good reason to use their loud voices – get them to help broadcast announcements or settle the class.

# We are a team!

MOE kindergartens will provide affordable, quality pre-school education for Singaporeans. With these located in primary schools and community sites, their proximity will enable many partnership opportunities.

## Primary schools

Primary schools that host kindergartens will have many opportunities to collaborate and share resources. Primary school and kindergarten teachers could work together to smoothen the transition from pre-school to primary education.

Mr Matthew Ou, principal of Blangah Rise Primary School, says: "Our teachers would benefit from a deeper understanding of the kindergarten programmes and attributes of children entering Primary 1. This helps teachers to differentiate their teaching strategies to meet their students' needs and abilities."

"The kindergarten teachers could also better understand how to build the children's confidence and instil positive attitudes towards learning."

Meanwhile, primary school students could develop their social-emotional competencies and leadership skills when they participate in joint activities for festive and national celebrations alongside pre-school children.

Mr Chua Chye Hock, vice-principal of Punggol View Primary School, says: "Our students could be involved in various aspects of the MOE kindergarten programme, such as helping out in reading programmes."

Mr Ou adds: "Learning to care for younger children provides opportunities for our students to put into action values such as responsibility and empathy."

## Parents

Collaborating with parents remains crucial in MOE's effort to foster home-school partnerships. Parents will be involved in their pre-school children's learning through take-home activities. Parents will also be engaged through seminars and sharing sessions to strengthen the partnership between the kindergarten and home.

## Other pre-school operators and centres

- MOE will develop teaching and learning resources and share them with other pre-school operators to enhance the learning of pre-school children.
- Best practices that work well in the Singapore context will be refined and shared with the other pre-school operators to drive improvements across the sector.
- MOE will also work with other pre-school centres that run good programmes to study the various approaches adopted.

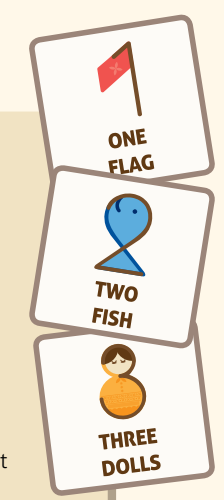


## Learning in the kindergartens

The curriculum is based on MOE's refreshed kindergarten curriculum framework, and will have distinctive Singaporean content. Local themes, stories and songs that draw on familiar things and experiences will help children make meaningful connections across different learning areas.

Teachers can use local songs and dances to design music and movement activities to strengthen children's social-emotional competencies, as well as their physical, language and cognitive development.

Through purposeful play, children will build self-confidence and positive attitudes towards learning, as well as develop social skills and foundations in literacy and numeracy. As the children explore and initiate play, teachers observe and facilitate with the objective of expanding the children's learning.



For more details on MOE kindergartens, go to [www.moekindergarten.edu.sg](http://www.moekindergarten.edu.sg)



## 'HOW YOU SPENT YOUR HOLIDAYS'

Thank you for sharing photos of your experiences. Winners get shopping vouchers worth \$30.



**CONTRIBUTOR:**  
**Ms Michelle Lim Peck Hong**  
*Allied Educator (Learning & Behavioural Support)*  
*Bukit Merah Secondary School*

Holidays allow me the time to take stock and reflect if I'm really happy.



**CONTRIBUTOR:**  
**Mr Quek Ming Yeow**  
*Teacher*  
*Siglap Secondary School*

I spent my holiday among giants from the past and imagining what it might have been like then.



**CONTRIBUTOR:**  
**Mr Suhaimi Bin Khalil**  
*Teacher*  
*St Hilda's Primary School*

Taking long walks at the beach with my lovely wife and daughter. It's not how I spend my holidays that matters; it's who I spend it with.



## 'FACES OF NATIONAL DAY'

How did you and your students celebrate National Day? Share your photo with us and stand to win a prize.



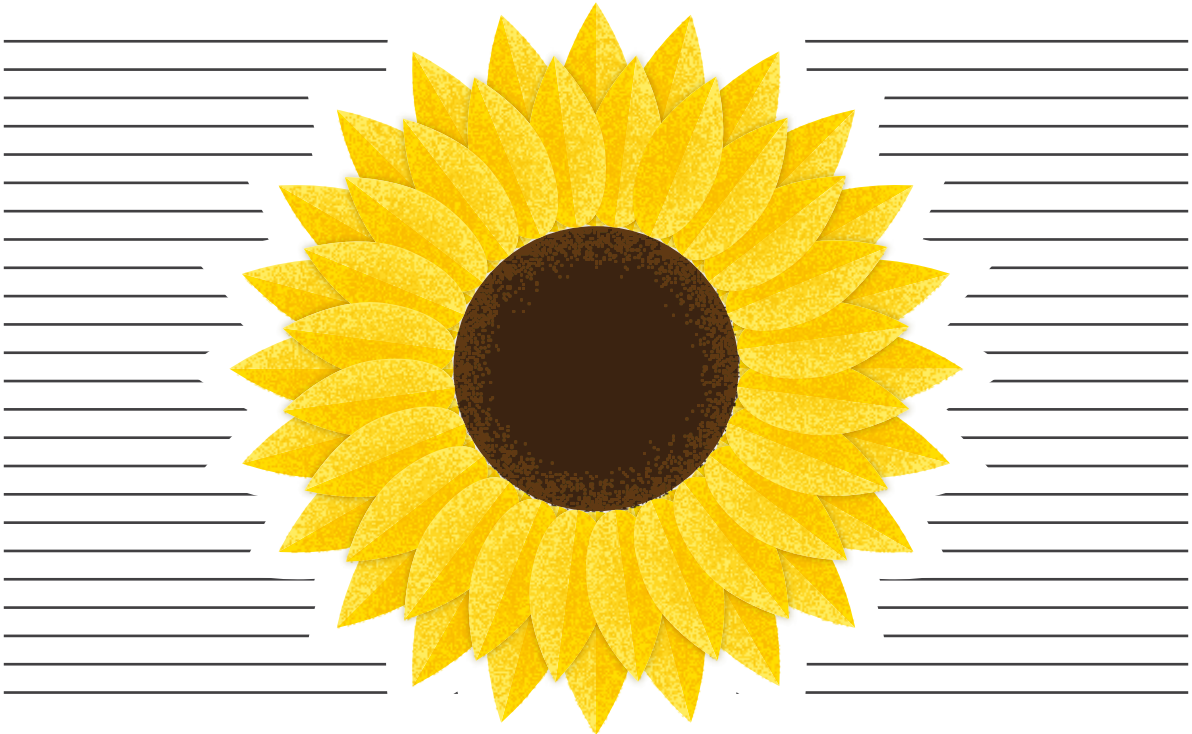
1. The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
2. The photo should be in JPEG format, A4 in size and have a resolution of at least 300 dpi.
3. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
4. Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, e-mail and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
5. Each participant is allowed only one entry.
6. Attach a caption (max 25 words), explaining how the photo reflects the theme.
7. The copyright of all entries shall remain with the photographer. However, *Contact* reserves the right to use and modify the selected entry as well as other suitable ones, with full acknowledgement to the copyright owners, for future use and publication.
8. The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity and originality. The judges' decision is final.
9. Three winners will each receive an attractive prize. *Contact* reserves the right to change or replace the prize with another of equal or greater value should the featured prize become unavailable. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. All winners will be notified by email. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
11. Send your entry to [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg) by 26 August 2013.



# Your



# SPECIAL DAY



Mark your calendar this year for a well-deserved rest on 6 September – Teachers’ Day.  
From this year, your special day will be celebrated on the last day of Term 3, instead of 1 September.  
This means an earlier start to the September holidays!  
Well in advance, the *Contact* team wishes you a very

# HAPPY TEACHERS' DAY!

