

# CONTACT

The Teachers' Digest

## SOFT SKILLS MATTER

They are just as important as technical know-how

## COME TOGETHER

Two principals share insights on school mergers

## SHARING STRATEGIES

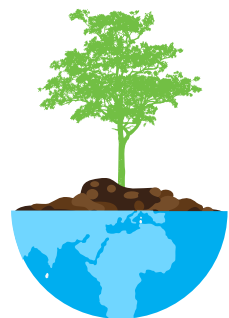
Find out how you can use the Singapore Teaching Practice



# Building a Community

One Piece at a Time

# Contents



## 02 Cover Story

### Building a community

Read about how four schools build identity and instil in students a sense of belonging towards their community.

## 06 FYI

### Contributing to the community

Find out how schools around the world encourage students to pay it forward.

## 08 In Focus

### Colouring fun (for fellows)

Find out what goes on in the staff room when students have gone.

## 09 Feature

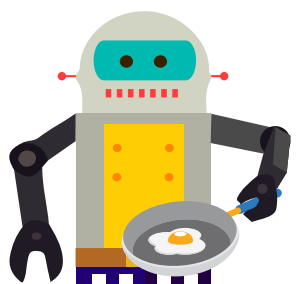
### Teaching and learning, the Singapore way

Five things to know about the Singapore Teaching Practice.

## 10 SkillsFuture

### Hard truths about soft skills

What are soft skills and why are they important? Read about the five traits that will help students thrive in the new economy.



## 14 Principals' Voices

### Developing character and values

Hear two Principals talk about the Singapore Spirit and the important role that CCE plays.

## 16 Feature

### Growing a reading culture

Schools get creative with pyjamas, lollipops and origami to get students to read.

## 18 Feature

### When 2 schools become 1

School leaders of newly merged secondary schools share their experiences.

## 20 Feature

### Great teachers inspire

These educators have been recognised for their enthusiasm and for being role models to other teachers. Here's a snapshot.

Outside Back Cover

## Crossword

### Can you solve this?

Show us how well you read *Contact* and you may be a winner!

## CONTACT

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# THIS ISSUE...



Students at St Andrew's Junior College regularly plan events in appreciation of college staff, from the security guards and cleaners to the operations manager and the Principal. These events include giving out goodie bags of snacks and thank-you notes for non-teaching staff. Titled Project Acknowledgement, this annual initiative goes beyond simple gratitude; it helps to build bonds within the school community.

Nurturing a sense of community is critical. When people feel invested in a place, they care for the people and are committed to maintaining the place. As the saying goes, home is where the heart is. But how do you create a sense of community among students?

In this issue's cover story, read about how four schools nurture community spirit in their own ways.

This issue also looks at "soft skills" and why they are crucial for the future. There is no doubt that technical skills are important. However, soft skills

– which include communication, leadership and emotional intelligence – are equally important in today's workplace. This know-how will help people thrive in an increasingly complex world. Flip to the SkillsFuture section to discover the most sought-after soft skills.

We also explore the tricky topic of school mergers. Two secondary school Principals share their insights on the emotional and bittersweet process. Find out how the school leaders communicated with the students and staff to address various concerns and worries. You'll learn how the closing of a chapter is also the beginning of another, with merged schools providing new programmes and opportunities for their students.

As we enter the holiday season, may these stories excite and inspire you, and give you fresh ideas for the new year! 🎉

**The *Contact* Team**

## Readers' comments

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Get the soft copy of the magazine at [www.moe.gov.sg/teachers-digest](http://www.moe.gov.sg/teachers-digest)



# Building a Community

We know the saying “Home is where the heart is”. And Singapore is our home. But how do we nurture this heart of ours, so that it can “drive” us into the future? Discover how these schools help students develop a sense of belonging and be active members of their own communities.

**“[They needed] my help. You can’t watch people suffer without doing anything.”**

12-year-old  
Ashvin Gunasegaran

When Ashvin Gunasegaran witnessed two cars colliding right outside his primary school last year, the 12-year-old immediately dashed out to check on both drivers. One was a pregnant lady – traumatised and in tears. Ashvin approached her and asked ‘Madam, are you OK?’. His words comforted and helped calm her.

Ashvin’s actions, which were captured on camera by his schoolmates and uploaded onto Facebook, went viral. And when the media asked him why he went to help the drivers, in contrast to older passers-by who just stood around to watch, the Yishun Primary School pupil simply said: “[They needed] my help. You can’t watch people suffer without doing anything.”

His simple act of stepping forward and offering kindness is in sync with the values that schools are attempting to teach students, an idea that Education Minister (Schools) Ng Chee Meng shared in his addendum to the Debate of President’s Address in 2016 – values that shape their character beyond the classroom and create a strong community spirit.

This love for country and community is manifested through care and concern for fellow countrymen on ordinary days and in ordinary ways, he said.

Beyond academic excellence, schools have been tasked to help students nurture a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their community. Once they feel a commitment towards others, it helps with the development of qualities such as responsibility and empathy. This makes it easier to extend such caring to the global community – a 21st CC strength.

How do you do this in your schools? We show you how four schools are building community bonds – to inspire you to sharpen your own focus...

## IGNITING SCHOOL SPIRIT

Pasted on the window of the security guard post right by the main gates of St Andrew’s Junior College (SAJC) are coloured boards with notes scribbled on them. One reads ‘Thank you for opening the side gate when we come back for lunch and dinner!’ Another

goes ‘Thank you so much for keeping us safe and being very friendly in the mornings!’

These notes were written by first-year college students to thank the non-teaching staff, who play essential roles but whose contributions sometimes go unseen and unheard. The initiative, named “Project Acknowledgement”, is a yearly tradition at the college since 2010 and is helmed by Saints Advocate, a CCA group that champions changes for worthy social causes.

This year, the project adopted “Heroes” for its theme. Last year, the theme was “Vital”, to show that non-teaching staff are a vital part of the school. Ms Soh Xiao Fen, one of five teachers in charge of the CCA, said: “We often ask ourselves: What is Saints Advocate advocating? Besides advocacy beyond school, there are also unsung heroes within the college community. This is why year after year, Project Acknowledgement continues.”

The aim is to get students to focus on the group of more than 60 non-teaching staff, ranging from the principal to security guards and office staff, who keep the school safe and in order. Appreciating the work of these non-teaching staff help students form connections and bonds with the school.

The initiative runs for three months, with Saints Advocate regularly uploading photos on their Instagram account to raise awareness. To encourage interaction, students were encouraged to post photographs of themselves with the non-teaching staff on social media.

A handful of students also followed the operations manager around for a day – similar to a job attachment programme – to better understand his work.

The project ended on Teachers’ Day, when non-teaching staff attended a concert organised by the Student Council, with singing performances and skits put up by students. Non-teaching staff also received goodie bags filled with biscuits and lanyards to thank them for their contributions.

First-year student Chong Yaw Chih, 17, who is in the organising committee for Project Acknowledgement, said it is part of a larger mission to create a culture of appreciation and care in SAJC. “Writing notes and giving them goodie bags are small actions... but they can make big ripples,” he shared.

All this creates mutual feelings of positivity, a sentiment that will rally the school together.



Photos from St Andrew’s Junior College





Photo from Fernvale Primary School

**“When you talk about values in a theoretical way, you can [talk] until the cows come home but it will not align with the students’ thinking. Outdoor education helps to concretise them.”**

Mrs Tonnine Chua

### INCLUSIVE INTEGRATION

There is a gate separating two schools in Fernvale – one for children with special education needs (SPED), and the other, a mainstream primary school. But the gate – normally a barrier – is a gateway to good relations between students at Fernvale Primary School and Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore’s (Minds) Fernvale Gardens School.

Since Fernvale Gardens School moved to its current location in 2008, both schools have sought out opportunities for their students to interact and collaborate with one another.

This year, both schools started a joint reading programme. Eight pupils from Fernvale Gardens School went over to Fernvale Primary School to attend a reading programme in the school library. The students were accompanied by three Primary 5 students from Fernvale Primary, who are dyslexic and started school unable to read.

Each session began with Mrs Jacqueline Yeo, Senior Teacher for English Language, reading a story to them. Sometimes, she adds in songs to get the children moving. The children break up into small groups after that. The Fernvale Primary students then take over the job of teaching Fernvale Gardens students the alphabet, and to match words to images.

Mrs Yeo, who runs the programme along with two Allied Educators, Ms Chia Fei Lin and Madam Hui Soh Wai, said most of the children from Fernvale Gardens School are not too verbal. “Our aim is not for them to be able to read by the end of the programme. It is to get them to enjoy stories and make associations to their everyday lives,” she said.

Mr Lincoln Lai, Year Head for Primary 1 and 2, who oversees the partnership between the schools, shared that the programme strengthens self-esteem

and confidence levels of students from both schools. Fernvale Primary children also learn about inclusion and empathy.

It is indeed a learning experience for the three Fernvale Primary students who have been attending a dyslexia remediation programme in school for the last three years, to help them to read. This programme, apart from interacting with the younger Fernvale Gardens children, also reinforces what they have learnt from the remediation programme.

At Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road), inclusivity is also a key consideration. Allied Educator Vikneswaran, who works closely with students with SPED needs such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, believes it is important that these children feel a sense of belonging in a community.

“If we have a wheelchair user and we move the student’s class to the ground floor, it is something I must do to make sure the student can function in school. But I should also share with the other students some issues the wheelchair user faces, such as fatigue. From there, you get them to empathise with their peers.”

### BUILDING CHARACTER WITH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Step into Concord Primary School, and it feels a little like walking into a jungle gym. Among the school’s greenery are a 7m-high rock wall, and a four-storey high web of ropes and zip-line built above the school’s garden.

The aim is to make outdoor education easily accessible and enable the school to conduct outdoor programmes in-house, to teach values like collaboration, respect, ruggedness and resilience. These values help to develop community spirit, and are important for building character and citizenship.



Photo from Concord Primary School

Concord Primary School’s Principal, Mrs Tonnine Chua said: “The students are young. When you talk about values in a theoretical way, you can [talk] until the cows come home but it will not align with the students’ thinking. Outdoor education helps to concretise them.”

Students participate in overnight camps, nature walks and rock climbing. They also learn to work in groups to overcome challenges, and build on the strengths of their team mates.

“Through outdoor education, you learn to never give up easily. You remember how you overcame your fears and how your peers cheer for you when you climbed the rock wall or did high rope obstacles,” Mrs Chua explained.

In Primary 1 and 2, for instance, students go through basic team-building activities such as climbing and crawling through a simulated tunnel with torches and helmets. In Primary 3 and 4, they go on walking trails at West Coast Park. Primary 5 students have an overnight camp, while Primary 6 students go kayaking.

Asked why values education through outdoor activities plays an equal, or even more important role than academic subjects, Mrs Chua said outdoor education is more enduring than content knowledge and creates a lifelong impact on students.

“It may be sometime later in their life where they realise, ‘Oh, I have come across a challenge like this in Concord Primary School. And I remember how to go about mustering the courage to overcome it.’” she shared.

### A COMMUNITY BEYOND THE SCHOOL WALLS

When South View Primary planned its biennial Arts Showcase this year, its Principal, Madam Sharida Batcha Sahib, did not want a typical concert. She decided to invite D\*Artistes, a volunteer group of performers with special needs ranging from Down Syndrome to Global Developmental Delay, to work together with her students for the concert.

“Do not think that it is just able-bodied people who can contribute and give. We have much to learn from these performers. We are on equal footing here,” she said, a message she shared with her students.

In all, 200 South View students collaborated with 17 D\*Artistes performers on seven items, which included dance and choir performances, finally performing in front of a 1,000-strong audience.

Primary 6 student Hannis Rizal, 12, who was part of the Malay Dance team with D\*Artistes, said, “I was a bit scared when we had to rehearse with them. I



Photo from South View Primary School

**“We all form part of a community – be it your family, friends, school, and the larger community and society. We each have a part to play, and we should all contribute – this is critical for society to progress.”**


Madam Sharida Batcha Sahib

didn’t know how to communicate with them and I was worried I’d say something to offend them unknowingly. But after some time, we started to talk and I found that they were more energetic and enthusiastic than us.”

It is not the only instance of South View Primary engaging external partners. The school regularly visits an elderly home to give students a chance to interact with the residents. It also has an Inter-generational Learning Programme, where old folks come to the school to learn basic IT skills from the students.

While such programmes typically last about a day, the Arts Showcase required close collaboration over a longer period of time, shared Madam Sharida. She is now thinking of other ways to work with external groups for a longer period.

“There are so many different layers in a community. We all form part of a community – be it your family, friends, school, and the larger community and society. We each have a part to play, and we should all contribute – this is critical for society to progress,” she said.

And this is how bonds are built within the school and beyond, and in turn, community spirit is created where home is truly where the heart is. 

## Contributing to the Community

How do schools around the world encourage their students to pay it forward?

### Knitting for the homeless

What do you think of when you are riding the bus home? Earlier this year, a fifth-grader in San Francisco's John Muir Elementary started noticing the many homeless people on the streets on her daily commute home.

She started wondering if they were kept sufficiently warm when the weather turns cold. The student, who had recently picked up knitting, discussed her thoughts with her teacher, who then encouraged her to do something about it. She got hands-on with the problem: she started looking for knitting supplies and recruiting friends into an informal knitting club.

It was not long before a dozen students were hanging out during recess, knitting scarves. Most had no knitting experience, but it was not a problem –

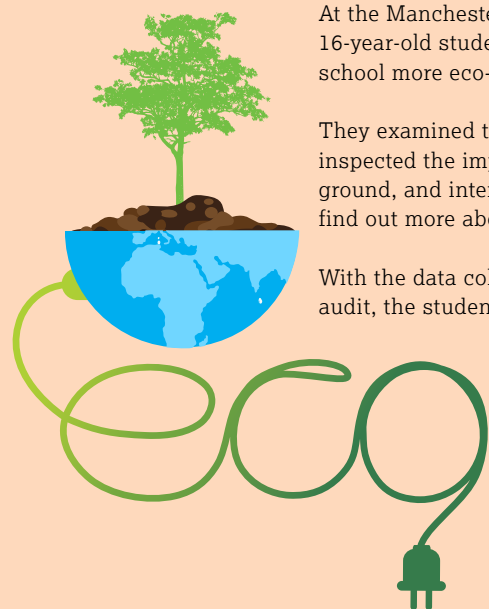
they turned to YouTube for knitting tutorials. The completed scarves were then gifted to the homeless.

The initiative received overwhelming support in the local community – other knitting clubs and individuals started donating supplies to the students. The knitting group in John Muir Elementary also expanded, as more people came forward to join the group.

Encouragement is a very powerful tool – while the student had an idea brewing in her head, her teacher, who heard her out and supported her, also played a crucial role in bringing her plan to fruition.



### Save the environment



At the Manchester Creative and Media Academy, 16-year-old students got down to work to make their school more eco-friendly.

They examined the school's energy policies, inspected the impact of these policies on the ground, and interviewed schoolmates and staff to find out more about their daily behaviour.

With the data collected from their environmental audit, the students planned a recycling and

anti-littering campaign. The effort was sparked off by the Green Schools Project – an initiative started by a former teacher, which encourages students to form eco-teams in their schools and promote environmental friendliness.

The Green Schools Project provides students with a starter guide on forming their own green teams, and resources to help them launch their ideas. It also works with schools to reach out to students to get them thinking hard about their environment.

With some help from the external community and their schools, students can work on great projects too!

### Helping hand for refugee children



In the United States, refugee children often struggle with mainstream school, especially if their families do not speak English. This usually results in the children having trouble reading and writing.

At Saint Andrew's Upper School in Boca Raton, Florida, which takes in students up to Grade 12, students and staff help support refugee children in their studies. Every other week, students are driven up to Lake Worth to visit a non-profit agency aimed at helping the Guatemalan Maya refugees.

The students give tuition to refugee children aged five to 12 at an after-school programme, La Escuelita. The older ones teach the younger kids basic maths, reading and writing, and help them with their homework from school.

The benefits of this partnership go beyond academic help for Maya children. Students from both sides get to know each other better, and mainstream school children learn more about the Maya people and their circumstances. Meaningful bonds are also forged in the process.

### Students teach seniors to get online

Children these days are no strangers to Facebook, YouTube, and playing online games. But while these activities come naturally to the young, it is tough for senior citizens to learn to use digital and mobile technology adeptly.

For the latter group, their inability to get on the digital bandwagon may lead to them feeling detached from their younger family members.

Eight years ago, two teenaged sisters from Toronto worked on a school project where they developed a training manual to teach seniors how to use the Internet. The school project eventually grew to become *Cyber Seniors*, a Canadian documentary film about young people teaching old folks in a home the ways of social media sites such as Skype and Facebook.

Now, *Cyber Seniors* is also an active group that works with different schools to get students onboard the initiative.

One school that participated in the programme was Winter Park High School in Florida. Students are paired with the elderly for a one-on-one session every week for two months. In the two months, students got their older friends acquainted with the Internet, and taught them to get connected on social media.

Such intergenerational interaction is mutually beneficial – the seniors benefit by becoming more tech-savvy, while the project also encouraged interaction and forged bonds between two generations. ■



Do you have other interesting examples to share?

Write to us at [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg)



# Colouring Fun (for fellows!)

What goes on in the staff room when the students have gone? We find out...

**The Place:** Outram Secondary School  
**The Activity:** Stencil Art Making workshop 2017  
**The Teachers' Teachers:** Miss Syazwani binte Samure and Miss Rafidah binte Muhammad Nasir



Um... I thought I was making more progress...



Some examples of the stencils created by teachers

Miss Syazwani's reflections...

## On why

As teachers, we are always bombarded with everything digital these days. We even take students' attendance in an app in our handphones! These sessions allow my Outram colleagues to unplug, de-stress and express their ideas and emotions in a free and non-judgmental environment.

## On what

This activity is a yearly initiative and collaboration between the school's Staff Welfare Committee and the Art Department, both of which I am a part of. Some colleagues have even dropped hints about the kind of artwork they would like to try in future...

## On how

Despite a few having difficulty in completing their artworks the way they visualised, the satisfaction they felt in dealing with paint and seeing how the colours they chose work together, was quite evident! 🎨



Heads down and focussing hard... just what a teacher wants to see, right?



Oh, the feeling of accomplishment: Neat pattern and I didn't once think of my students getting into trouble...

# Teaching and Learning, the Singapore way

The Singapore Teaching Practice (STP) looks at classroom pedagogies as well as relevant theories and research. Created by MOE and NIE, it is hosted on OPAL. Here are 5 things you need to know about the STP.



### UNIQUELY SINGAPOREAN

The STP infuses global teaching practices into local context. It pulls together theories, principles and strategies from different education systems around the world and describes how they work together effectively in classrooms here in Singapore. It also refers to studies and research done in Singapore, and links different education strategies to the national curriculum, including Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) and Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). Teachers are also encouraged to share effective teaching and learning strategies on the portal. If you have used a teaching method that worked, why not share it?

### COMMON LANGUAGE FOR THE FRATERNITY

Over time, as more educators contribute to the STP portal, it will become a frame of reference to guide teachers in planning, enacting and reflecting on their work. The STP is not a prescriptive or exhaustive document, but a code of practice that aims to provide educators with a common foundation of beliefs, principles and practices. Simply put, it binds the teaching fraternity together.

### SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION

The STP portal aims to build an information repository that will guide educators in their daily work. When teachers are exposed to good strategies and practices that are well supported by research, it will also inspire them to update their lessons to support their students' learning. This ensures that classroom pedagogies are kept engaging and productive, moving with the times

to ensure students are well prepared for the future. In this way, the STP creates a pay-it-forward circle where teachers build on the good work done by their peers, and inspire other educators as they go along.

### DOCUMENTING PEDAGOGIES

Teachers may have come up with strategies, or adapted them to the local context, to make teaching more effective, and learning more fun and relevant for students. The STP site is a way for the fraternity to document the various good practices happening in schools. The portal will look at the theories and research that support the pedagogies, and describe how they are practiced on the ground. The next time you need some inspiration for lesson planning, head over to the STP to read about the experiences of other teachers!

### SOMETHING FOR EVERY EDUCATOR

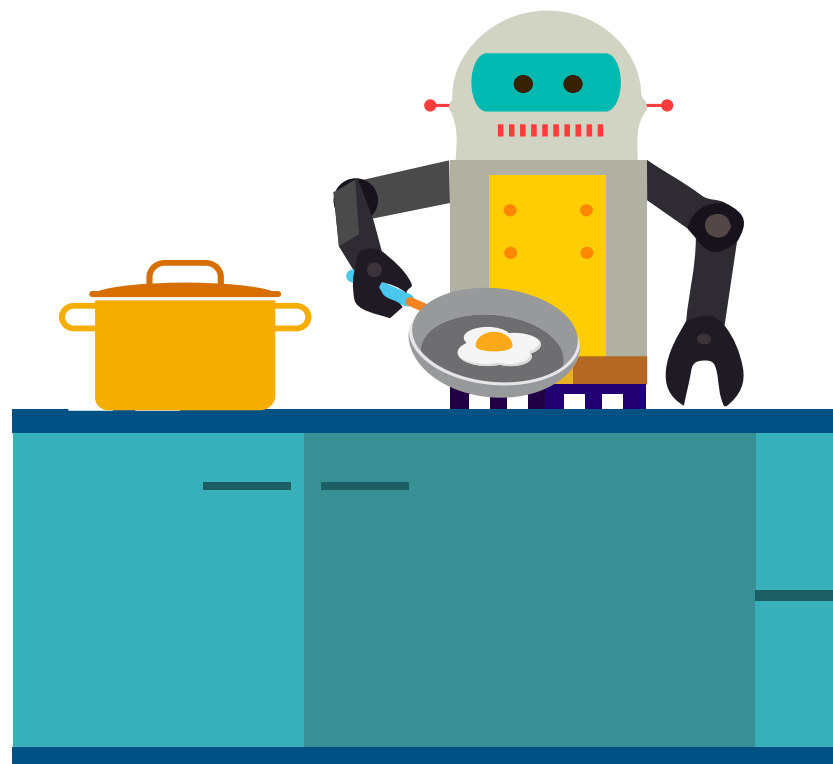
Everyone can benefit from it. It will guide teachers to conduct lessons effectively to let students learn better. Teachers who are mentoring other teachers can also tap on the information to better advise their colleagues. For school leaders and middle managers, the portal will help them identify specific areas of teaching and learning to focus on, and help them design meaningful learning experiences for students. No matter where you are right now in your journey as an educator, you will find something useful on the STP.

▶ Read more about the Singapore Teaching Practice at <https://opal.moe.edu.sg/stp>

# Hard truths about soft skills

If there is one thing robots have yet to learn, it is perhaps the human touch, or the soft skills of communicating effectively, working in a team, and being flexible and adaptable. With these skills, our students will be in good positions to deal with the complexities of the new economy.

So while guests who check in at M Social Hotel at Robertson Quay next year may be waking up to a perfectly-prepared breakfast made by a robot at the hotel restaurant's automated egg station, they might find the eggs a little cold without that personal element.



Experts are finding that soft skills are claiming the top spots of the hire-o-meter. We look at the reasons why they are important, and how educators can help students develop these traits.

## FUTURE-PROOF

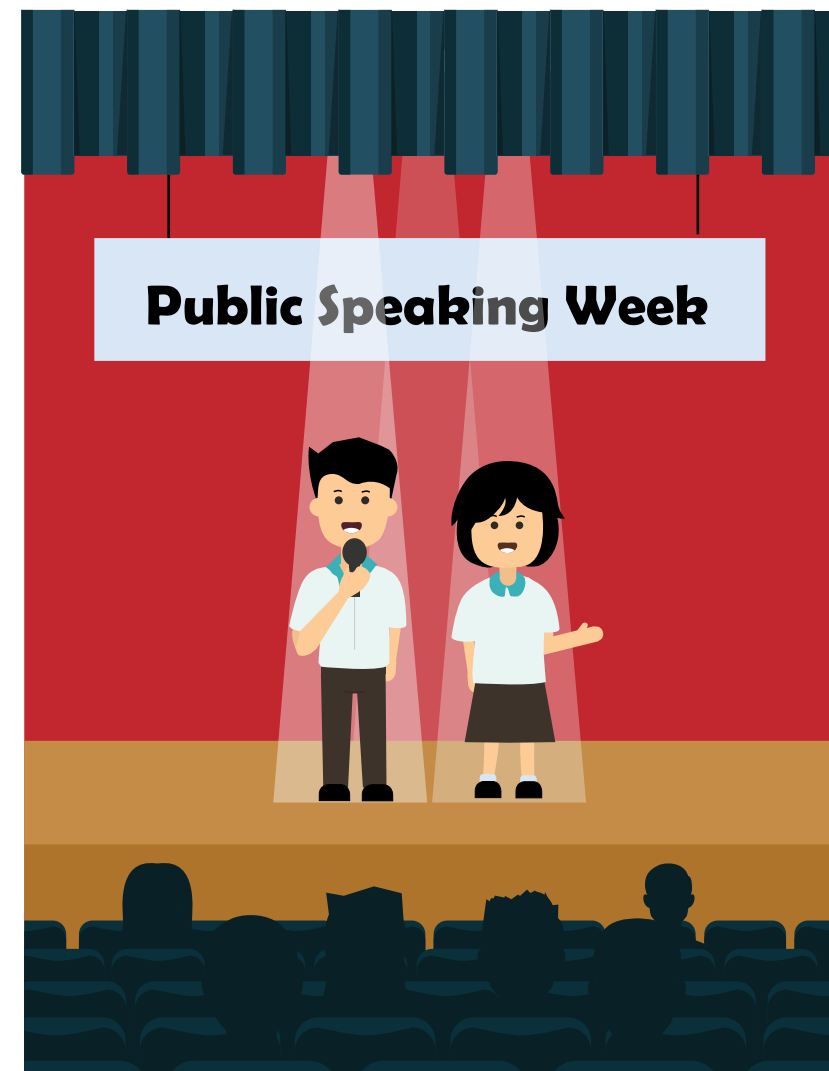
As educators aiming to equip the young with skills and knowledge for the future, how do we prepare our students for a future that is increasingly disrupted by technology or robots, and therefore highly uncertain? The World Economic Forum, in its Future of Jobs Report last year (2016), said that by 2020, social skills such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others will be in higher demand across all industries compared to narrow technical skills such as programming or operating and controlling equipment.

This does not mean technical skills and textbook knowledge are not important. But these alone are not enough to secure a job. Individuals need to supplement their knowledge with strong social and collaboration skills – even more so in today's climate, where job security cannot be taken for granted.

In Singapore, PSB Academy chief executive Derrick Chang said job seekers who are innovative, adaptable and have good social skills are highly sought after by hiring managers. "Schools must prioritise developing skills such as critical thinking, creativity and collaboration to give emphasis to soft skills beyond just academic knowledge," he said in a commentary published in *Today* earlier this year.

The key to preparing the new generation for the ongoing workplace evolution is to start young. Schools are the perfect places to create opportunities to nurture these soft skills in students. It is where students interact with their peers, work in groups, solve problems, manage conflicts and learn to be self-disciplined.

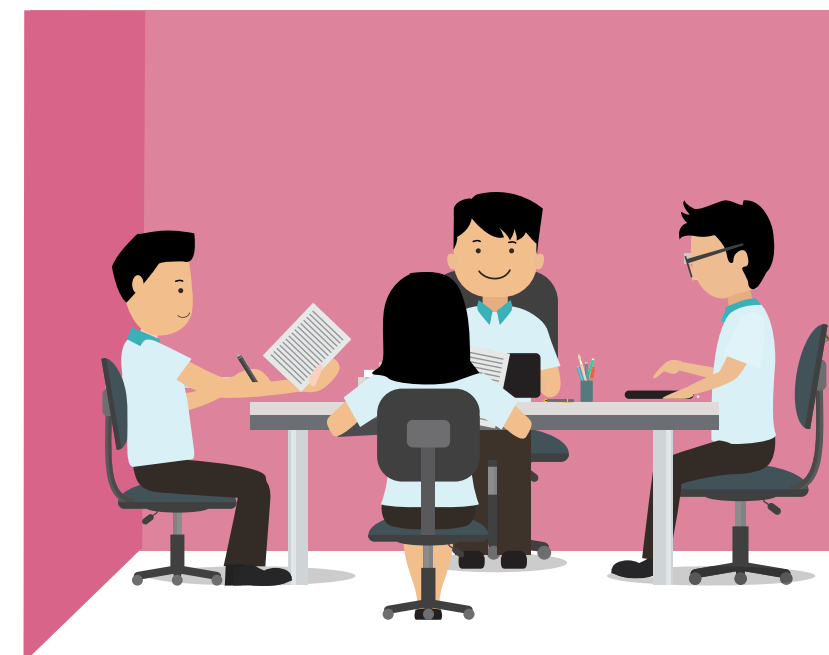
We take a look at five soft skills that experts agree will be crucial in the new economy.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

For many, speaking in public is a stressful activity that can leave some tongue-tied. Yet, the art of communication – especially public speaking – is essential at work when you have to speak up at meetings or other events to share your perspectives. To help students shake off such fears, Mdm Norlina Ahmadi from Anderson Primary School has been coaching pupils to speak to the school about a book they had read. The Senior Teacher guides the children on how to project their voices, assess the interest of the crowd, use humour to lighten the mood, and employ pauses and interactions with the audience to calm themselves when they fumble onstage. These skills – a combination of listening, observing and responding appropriately – help students communicate effectively with their target audience.

Another aspect of effective communication is to speak confidently. At Assumption English School, one Secondary Two student is tasked with preparing and reading two news headlines every morning over the school's public broadcast system. The aim, said Ms Phay Ee Lyn, who heads the English Language and Literature department, is to get them to step out of their comfort zones. "Sometimes, the students will be shaking from the jitters. But feedback has been good," she said. She has observed that students are more confident after going through the exercise. "This is important because even those who speak well falter when they lack confidence and get nervous," she added. In the classroom, educators can provide opportunities for students to air their views, learn how to listen intently, read nonverbal cues, and be respectful of others during disagreements without losing one's own stand.



## EMPATHY

Empathy, or the ability to see the world through another person's eyes, is a necessary skill that helps people establish connection, foster understanding and manage conflicts. As individuals have to collaborate and work in teams at the workplace, bosses are placing more emphasis on empathy. And yes, it's something that one can get better at.

Mdm Noormala Atan, Senior Education and Career Guidance Counsellor at Republic Polytechnic, said empathy is like a muscle that can be strengthened by giving students different scenarios to showcase their care and concern for others. When students connect with the people around them, they begin to see their actions in a larger context and understand how they affect others. In group settings, this helps them work better with their peers and makes them more accepting of differing perspectives as well as more open to dialogue, she shared.



A key component of empathy is effective listening. This means letting people have their say, holding back from interrupting and reflecting on what someone has said to assure them that they were heard, said American psychologist and mediator Marshall Rosenberg.

Interestingly, empathy also drives innovation. When leaders and innovators are able to empathise with others, they gain a deep understanding of the realities people face. This informs the products and services they design for people, so as to be user-friendly.

### SELF-AWARENESS

When students reflect on their actions, they learn more about their strengths and weaknesses, and understand how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour affect the people and situations around them.

In the long run, individuals who are aware of their thoughts, attitudes and actions are better able at exercising self-control and making decisions. American systems scientist Peter Senge wrote in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* that such highly-disciplined individuals who are in control of their emotions are able to “consistently realise the results that matter most deeply to them”.

For teachers, they can work closely with students to guide them in getting an overview of their own capabilities so that they may deploy their talents effectively. At the primary level, the Form Teacher Guidance Period is a key platform for teachers to have in-depth conversations with their young charges and equip them with social and emotional competencies.



### ADAPTABILITY


With the world evolving at an accelerated pace, being able to deal with changes is an essential skill. Speaking at this year's Budget Debate, Minister Ng Chee Meng said the world today is changing at an unprecedented rate. The young students today will need to be adaptable and reskill themselves as needed, to navigate the many unknown changes and uncertainties ahead.

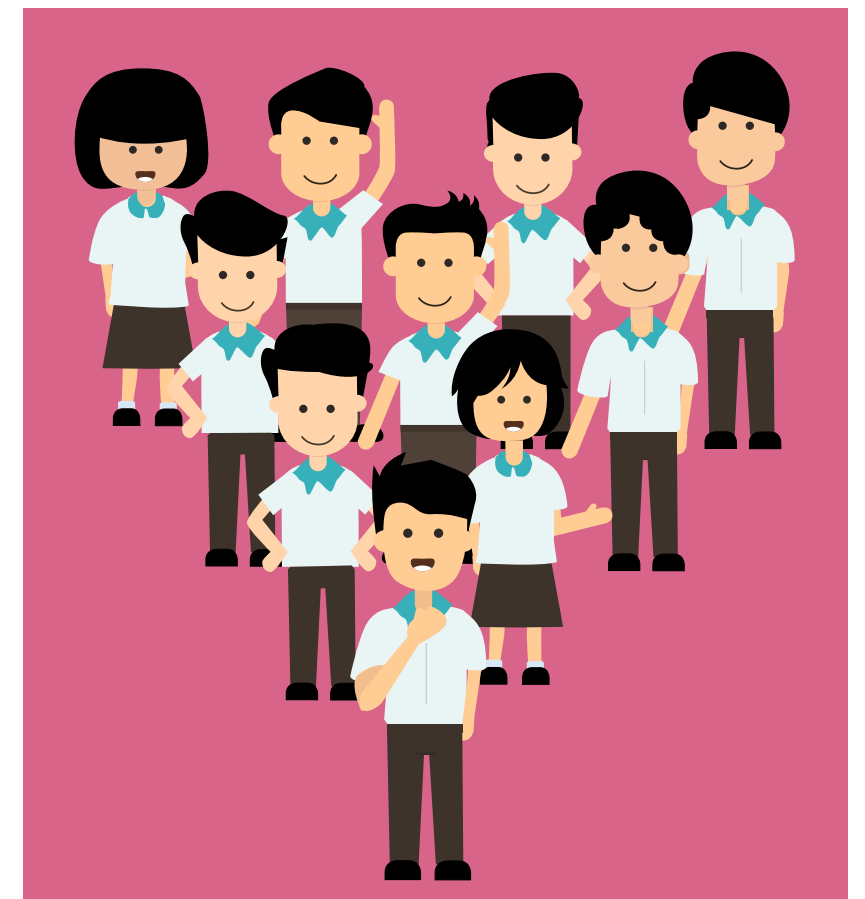
An adaptable person is one who can regulate his or her thoughts, behaviour and emotions in response to new or uncertain circumstances and situations. Adaptability enables students to quickly innovate and seize opportunities available, or respond to challenges ahead. But how does one learn to become more adaptable? Outdoor education, where students are encouraged to venture out of their comfort zones and take risks, is one way to foster adaptability. Back in the classroom, educators can nurture adaptable and flexible minds by encouraging spontaneity and creativity, and urging students to embrace ambiguity. Children tend to develop adaptability by trying things unfamiliar to them.

### LEADERSHIP

In this new economy, technology is replacing some of the skillsets that humans used to do. But leadership, which is a marriage of hard technical know-how and the human touch, is a core skill that robots are not able to do, said Mdm Noormala from Republic Polytechnic. “We cannot be led by robots. This means we still need people with the potential and charisma to be a leader,” she said.

Leadership is the pinnacle of all soft skills that requires an individual to exercise several other soft skills. In theory, what makes an individual a leader is his ability to use an assortment of soft skills seamlessly. A good and effective leader is an effective communicator who is disciplined, resilient, doesn't fear failure, and is able to manage people and conflicts well (among other skills).

How can students learn to be potential leaders? Schools already create ample opportunities to allow students to nurture and demonstrate their leadership competency, either through group work, co-curricular activities and programmes, or even job attachment programmes, Mdm Noormala said. Her advice for aspiring leaders: Be proactive, look for solutions, and demonstrate your effectiveness when doing a task. “People look to leaders for solutions,” she said. 





# How to develop character and values

What is the Singapore Spirit and how do we foster that through Character and Citizenship Education? We speak to two Principals to find out more.

**“You can’t expect others to look out for you. You have to fend for yourself. You have to look at your resources, and make the best out of them...”**

- Mr Abdul Harris Sumardi

## SHARING TEACHABLE MOMENTS WITH STUDENTS

As a child, Mr Abdul Harris Sumardi’s family could not afford to send him to kindergarten, and he had to help his mother sell cakes to make ends meet.

“One day, I came back and told my mum nobody wants to buy them. But my mum said, ‘You don’t come back until you are done’,” recalled the Principal of Westwood Secondary School.

Instead of despairing, he thought of an idea to overcome the problem: He rallied the help of his soccer *kakis* (buddies). “If I can’t sell the cakes, I can’t play soccer. So I told them, ‘You do the shouting, you hold the basket and I will collect the money.’”

It was great fun for them and the cakes sold out. “My friends enjoyed doing that with me. We looked forward to it, as it was like an adventure. At the end of the day, I would *blanjah* (treat) them ice popsicles. Then we would go play soccer,” he said with a laugh.

Today, more than 50 years later, it is a story he continues to tell his students, hoping to inspire them to make the best out of their circumstances. “I had nobody to guide me but myself. That taught me to be independent, to be creative, innovative and enterprising,” he shared. “You can’t expect others to look out for you. You have to fend for yourself. You have to look at your resources, and make the best out of them.”

That, to him, is what embodies the “Singapore spirit”, which he believes is about sharing experiences and is something that is tough to teach.

It is also similar to how he sees Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). “CCE should not be confined to the class period. It is best done in



moments when you are interacting with the students,” he said.

Mr Abdul Harris looks for occasions during assembly or in his interactions with students, where he will share stories with them. To him, values and character education is most effective in these “teaching moments” outside class.

Once, at Westwood Secondary, four students were accused of smoking at a HDB staircase. The students were caught loitering there with cigarette butts on the floor.

The students were defiant and challenged the teachers to prove that they had smoked. Mr Abdul Harris stepped in, turned the tables around and asked the students to prove their innocence.

“I told them, ‘I tell you what, now, you prove to me that you didn’t smoke.’ They gave me all kinds of reasons, which were not convincing. And then they gave up after that. They knew that they were in the wrong, but they wanted to test us. So I decided to give them the responsibility, the chance to speak up and to take ownership.”

He shares this story to his students and teachers, to tell them about how interactions with students are valuable teaching moments in instilling values. “Don’t underestimate the power of storytelling in character education. Tell your stories, because people will remember your stories most.”

On CCE, Mr Harris added: “CCE is the most important subject in the school, and the most difficult to teach. You can be the smartest kid, but if your character is flawed, you have failed,” he noted. “It is a subject that is hard to measure, and you only know you have done a good job much later in life.”

## GETTING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INTO CHARACTER EDUCATION

CHIJ (Katong) Primary School wants parents to play a part in the children’s character education and school lives. For every value that the school wants to teach its students, there is a parent volunteer to embody it. There are reading mums and recycling dads. Parents are also ambassadors for the arts, as well as cyber wellness.

“When we talk about Character and Citizenship Education in school, the family also plays an important role. We start with the home first, then the school and the community,” shared Mrs Judina Cheong, the school’s Principal.

For instance, in its Art Outreach programme, parent volunteers are roped in to guide the students on a learning journey along the Singapore River, and learn about the works of art there.

There are also recycling dads, who will go class-to-class to collect items for recycling. This happens during Recycling Week, the last week of the month where students bring their used papers, plastics and metals for recycling. The fathers then weigh them and take the items to the recycling corner of the school.

Parents play a role during teaching time too. During Teacher’s Day this year (2017), teachers came in after 9am, two hours later than the usual 7am. The aim, apart from giving the teachers a “treat”, was to get parents to become teachers and conduct activities for the students. “When parents come to take care of the students, they start to appreciate the work of the teachers more too,” she added.

Apart from the family, Mrs Cheong also engages the community to help instil values in students. Every semester, the Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) groups invite about 30 special needs students from Towner Gardens School, and teach them life skills such as using the computer, buying lunch in the canteen, or even join them for CCAs, such as in track and field or in choir.

During the school’s Founder’s Day, the students visit the old folks’ homes bearing goodies for the elderly. Separately, they each prepare a “gift of love” – a personalised, decorated envelope, where they donate any amount of pocket money to the homes. The school raised \$17,500 this year for a children’s charity.



“When you are able to empathise and know that there are people around who are not as fortunate, that prevents you from being sheltered,” said Mrs Cheong. “When the students help those who are disadvantaged, it gives them space for growth and understanding in how to interact with people from different backgrounds.”

“Being a school, we cannot be doing things in isolation. We must see how the students can be useful citizens beyond. One small way is to link them to people around, such as the aged, or those who are not well-off,” she added.

“Through this, they make a friend from another background – maybe someone who is autistic or has a special need. When they grow up, whatever decision they make, they will think about how it may impact this ‘friend’ that they have come across. It inculcates empathy for others at a young age.”

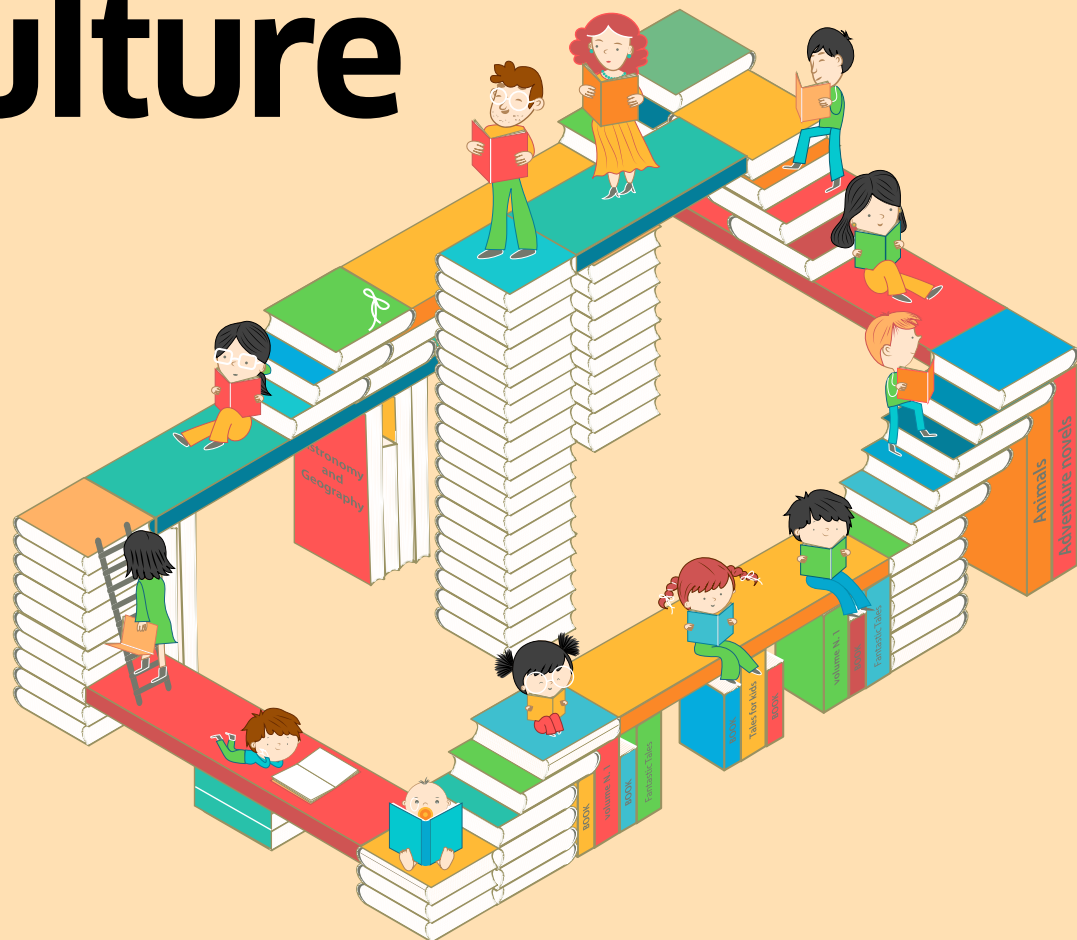
**“When parents come to take care of the students, they start to appreciate the work of the teachers more too”**

- Mrs Judina Cheong



# Growing A Reading Culture

What do paper folding, pyjamas, and animal costumes have in common? Clue: They all have something to do with storybooks! To get children interested in reading, MOE's very own Reading Unit collaborated with the National Library Board to think up activities to engage young readers.



## PICNIC AND BEDTIME STORIES

It's evening time and a bunch of children are in their sleepwear and toting teddy bears. But they're not getting ready for bed – instead, they are still in school. At **Juying Primary**, the night has just begun. Parents and teachers have prepared props and dressed up in fun costumes to read bedtime stories to the children. Through the annual event, Pyjama-Rama, Juying Primary hopes to entice students to enjoy reading through the activities, and to encourage parents to bond with their children.

**North Vista Primary** is another school using themed events to cultivate a love of reading in students.

Students go to the library for a reading picnic with their friends. Apart from books, students are allowed to have their soft toys with them. They are also handed lollipops. In groups, they read with their friends and their favourite soft toys while enjoying sweets!

## APPRECIATING THE ARTS

**Horizon Primary** uses reading as a way to nurture an appreciation for the arts in students. Primary 2 students were taken to watch a musical adaptation of *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, an Aesop's fable. The activity was part of the school's Performing Arts Appreciation Programme and drives home to students the importance of reading aloud, and speaking clearly



Retelling a story lets students find meaningful ways to express themselves.

and accurately. The exposure to the arts also motivates the younger ones to strive to read fluently and to be good communicators like the performers.

## GETTING INTO CHARACTER

An elephant dressed as a parrot, and a lion looking like an elephant. It is not the latest dress-up carnival, but the plot from the children's book, *Animal Masquerade* – about animals putting on costumes of other animals to attend a party. To get students interested in the story, **Teck Ghee Primary** got them to perform on stage as animal characters. The Learning Support Coordinator also dressed up as a lion for the event! Using "Storigami" to tell stories to students, the teachers fold paper creatures and use them to illustrate the story. The students were mesmerised and were fascinated by the various shapes that could emerge from a piece of paper.

## READING BUDDIES

Once a week, Primary 2 students from **Innova Primary** and **Greenwood Primary** are paired with student reading ambassadors and student librarians from **Woodlands Ring Secondary** to explore the world of books. Bonding over a common interest that surpasses age differences, this pilot effort by the North 8 Cluster sees the older students reading with their younger buddies, discussing the stories, and providing tips to enhance the reading experience. Ambassadors and librarians also share their reading experiences with their younger friends to inspire them to fall in love with stories and books.

## RE-TELLING THE STORY

It may not necessarily be the end of the story when one flips the last page of a book. Using the BookCreator app, a cluster of seven **East Zone Schools** rewrote the reading experience and extended the challenge to their students. After reading a story, a group of Primary 2 students in the Learning Support Programme reflected on their personal takeaways and tried their hand at re-telling the story on the app. Students got to draw their own characters and create dialogue for them. Retelling the story served multiple purposes: students think creatively to find fun and meaningful ways to express themselves while the Learning Support Coordinators can assess their students' understanding and responses to the story, resulting in deeper engagement with the story and empathy with the characters. ■





# When 2 schools become 1

While students potentially benefit from a merger – with new facilities and programmes – they worry about the loss of their original school premises and identity. The leaders of two recently merged schools share their experiences in forging a path for the renewed institutions.

## 1 ESTABLISHING COLLABORATIONS

To help students adjust to their new school, teachers and student leaders from Beatty and Balestier Hill got together last year to plan the Merger Friendship Programme.

Balestier Hill students were invited to their new school premise, where they joined in for morning assembly. For the rest of the day, they toured the school, familiarised themselves with the compound, and played games with their new schoolmates. Students also learnt about the founding of both schools.

“We wanted the new students to get to know the school, even simple things like knowing where the toilets are, or what morning assembly would be like,” said Mr Ling Khoon Chow. “It would be their school soon and they should feel at home.”

The Principal who took over the helm at Beatty Secondary School this year after it combined with Balestier Hill Secondary School had spent a large part of 2016 working with the previous Principals of both schools to ensure a smooth transition.

## 2 FACILITIES FOR EVERY SCHOOL ACTIVITY

At Marsiling Secondary School, bigger is better. The combined population of about 1,200 students, from Marsiling Secondary and Si Ling Secondary, can look forward to new facilities in niche areas such as environment as well as sports and outdoor education.

It currently has a vertical farm, which grows vegetable crops. The farm is used for lessons in science and national education. The merger is also timely, as the school is slated for new upgrades in the coming years.

“I have to be mindful that the teachers need time to adjust to new ways of working. It is definitely challenging for everyone”

- Mr Ling Khoon Chow

In 2019, the school will be equipped with an indoor sports hall and an upgraded amphitheatre, which will serve as a music studio and a literature theatre.

The indoor sports hall will span two levels, and include more court spaces for badminton, volleyball and basketball. It will also benefit Physical Education (PE) classes, as the current outdoor spaces are exposed to wet weather conditions.

“Right now, we can only do PE in the early morning or late afternoon. With the indoor sports hall, we do not have to worry about lightning alerts, and can free up time and have greater flexibility in planning PE classes,” said Vice-Principal Fiona Koh.

The merger also allows students from Si Ling Secondary to try out features in Marsiling Secondary that their former school did not have, such as a synthetic soccer field, as well as newer amenities. “Si Ling’s facilities were ageing. Things were starting to break down, and we had to patch them up. Now, many things are new,” said Mr Tan Tong Aik, Vice-Principal (Admin).

## 3 MORE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

At the old Balestier Hill Secondary, teachers were thinking about closing down the Scouts Club due to low membership. As Beatty Secondary also had a Scouts Club, the consolidation meant the two groups could join to form a bigger group and enable the Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) to continue.

Students now have a wider variety of CCAs to choose from too. For instance, canoeing – Balestier Hill’s strong suit – was introduced to Beatty students. “Balestier Hill was doing well in canoeing and it already has all the equipment. As Beatty had a maritime theme (the school was named after British admiral David Beatty) we thought we should keep the CCA,” shared the Principal, Mr Ling.

At Marsiling Secondary, the merger has allowed more academic subjects to be offered to students. The school now has biology and a new retail operations subject. Former Si Ling students also have the option of pursuing music and principles of accounting.

“If a school is below optimal capacity, we can’t run certain programmes. With higher enrolment, we can look forward to more effective use of programmes by putting resources of two schools together, such as better CCA outcomes, more subject offerings and having new facilities,” said its Principal, Mr Goh.

## 4 IT’S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Ask Mr Ling for his advice on how to manage a merged school, and he replied without hesitation: “You need to take care of the people.”



Students from Marsiling Secondary and Si Ling Secondary can look forward to new facilities, including a vertical farm.

His toughest task was to assemble a new team comprising staff from both schools. “We can’t take in everyone because there would be too many teachers. Instead of one plus one, it was more like 0.75 plus 0.75,” he said. That meant some teachers had to be posted to other schools or to MOE HQ branches.

He decided to meet all teachers from both schools for a one-on-one session. It was a chance for them to raise any concerns, and for him to explain why some stayed while others had to go.

There were more follow-up meetings this year, to find out what the teachers thought of the consolidation exercise. “I have to be mindful that the teachers need time to adjust to new ways of working. It is definitely challenging for everyone,” he said. “I have an open-door policy and I always encourage teachers to come in and chat with me about their problems. You have to give them an outlet.”

Similarly, for Mr Goh Aik Choon, who was the former Principal of Si Ling Secondary School that merged with Marsiling Secondary School, it is also about being open and honest. The Principal shared with teachers the hard truth that not everyone could continue with the new school. But he gave them the choice to stay or change their posting.

“We will help them explore alternatives if they want a change in environment. I even encouraged them to consider other postings, because it is impossible to bring everybody over. I think my former Si Ling staff appreciated my open approach,” he said.

The school consolidation has allowed him and his staff to communicate better and respond to challenges faster. “Because of it, we needed to communicate in a manner

that was less formal, more ad-hoc and spontaneous,” he shared.

“(This experience) is something new, and there are challenges that we had never anticipated or encountered. I tell them, let’s go buy two cups of coffee, sit down, and work things out.”

## 5 BUILDING HERITAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

It was the coming together of two established schools: Beatty Secondary was 63 years old while Balestier Hill Secondary was 52. As both schools have a long history, it was critical that their identities and heritage were preserved in some way. This was done by having Beatty retain its school uniform and English name, but taking on Balestier Hill’s Chinese name, *Bo Li Zhong Xue*.

The school also tweaked the grouping of Secondary 3 students – making every form class a 50-50 mix of faces from Beatty and Balestier Hill. Classes in the other levels currently remained unchanged.

Ex-students of Balestier Hill were also welcomed to visit their former teachers at Beatty this year. “Our theme for this year is ‘One school, one family’. We want students to see themselves as one community and get to know one another,” said its Principal, Mr Ling.

At Marsiling, the school erected a new joint heritage wall before the school year started, to highlight both schools’ histories and milestones. The heritage wall is presented using the metaphor of two streams converging into one river, and includes the display of the schools’ old uniforms, as well as the new school vision and mission.

“If a school is below optimal capacity, we can’t run certain programmes. With higher enrolment, we can look forward to more offerings”

- Mr Goh Aik Choon

# Great teachers inspire

## OUTSTANDING YOUTHS IN EDUCATION AWARD 2017 RECIPIENTS

**Mr Chiew Jing Wen**  
History Teacher  
Serangoon Garden  
Secondary School



Mr Chiew Jing Wen has a personal mission: to help his students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome their challenges. Some never saw their parents, some had parents who were serving time in jail, and some came from low-income homes. The history teacher wanted to give his young charges more opportunities. He now works closely with industry partners to explore attachment stints for his students to expose them to possible career options.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2AjKj1a>

**Ms Huang Huiru Faith**  
English Language  
Teacher  
Farrer Park Primary  
School



Ms Faith Huang has always enjoyed acting, which led her to develop a curriculum that infused drama into the teaching and learning of the English language. Through role-playing, her students learn to empathise with characters in stories and explore complex issues such as bullying and friendship problems in a controlled setting. Such activities also encourage participation from all students, including those who are normally shy and quiet.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2jLS214>

**Mdm Farah Syed Haider Alsagoff**  
Mathematics Teacher  
Chongzheng Primary  
School



Mdm Farah Syed Haider Alsagoff wants her students to be confident learners of Mathematics. Too often, she comes across students who fear the subject. To help them gain confidence, she created a Star Wars-themed inter-class maths quiz. Students work on maths questions in a fun way. For instance, they work in groups to answer multiplication questions in rapid succession. For students who have always struggled with maths, the game was a boost to their self-confidence each time they succeeded in a round.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2zq5PBx>

**Mr Muhamad Fadly Mohd Ariff**  
Physical Education  
Teacher  
Temasek Primary School



Mr Muhamad Fadly Mohd Ariff believes all students should have the chance to enjoy a sport of their choice, regardless of their ability. So he tweaked how sports CCA were run in school – instead of limiting places to students with the aptitude, he opened it to anyone with an interest. The move encouraged students to play sports for fun and not just for competitions, and led to a significant growth in the membership of sports CCAs.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2zX1X9X>

**Ms Sarene Loh Kah Lye**  
Art Teacher  
Ngee Ann Secondary  
School



When Ms Sarene Loh started out as a teacher, she had many ideas about using art to get students to interpret the world differently. But her introverted nature made her hesitant to act. Fortunately, a senior colleague, Mrs Anne Chan, encouraged Ms Loh to put ideas into action. Soon, Ms Loh's students were learning concepts through songs and debating about art. Now an appointed STAR Champion, Ms Loh runs workshops for art teachers as a way to pay it forward.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2AkZjw1>

**Mr Sng Kuo Wai Simon**  
Principles of  
Accounts Teacher  
Westwood Secondary  
School



Mr Simon Sng often meets students who struggle to make sense of financial knowledge. The former auditor knew that the way to help was to get them to link textbook concepts to the real world. So he taught students about trade and service businesses by taking them out to speak to shopkeepers in the neighbourhood. Students also learnt through computer games such as Capitalism Plus, where students set up virtual departmental stores and built apartments to collect rent.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2z9UTDN>

The Outstanding Youths in Education Award recognises young teachers for their enthusiasm and energy in developing students beyond the formal curriculum. The President's Award for Teachers honours educators who have not only inspired their students, but are role models for others in the teaching fraternity as well. Read on to find out more about the award-winning teachers!

## PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR TEACHERS 2017 RECIPIENTS

**Mdm Lim Hwee Sian**  
Lead Teacher (Music)  
Cedar Girls'  
Secondary School



Mdm Lim Hwee Sian tries to bring the arts into her students' everyday life. In 2014, she rigged a part of the school's central staircase to play musical notes when people stepped on them. It got the girls jumping and dancing on the steps. The opportunity to enjoy the arts, Mdm Lim believes, should be open to everyone.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2zWa3Aj>

**Mr Jahangeer Mohamed Jahabar**  
Head of Department  
(CCE)  
Endeavour Primary  
School



In his former job, Mr Jahangeer Mohamed Jahabar took apart aircraft components and computers for servicing. Today, he teaches his primary school students to break down complex tasks into smaller and more manageable pieces – and then tackle them one step at a time. His methods have been so effective that his students' parents occasionally turn to him for help.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2B1krDK>

**Dr Ow Yeong Wai Mang**  
Head of Department  
(Student Well-being)  
Henry Park Primary  
School



In the late 1990s, when Dr Ow Yeong Wai Mang oversaw her school's Learning Support Programme, she came across students with anxiety and behavioural issues. It made her want to learn how to better support such students. She spent about 15 years doing her Master and PhD in this field while teaching full-time. Today, as Head of Student Well-Being, she makes it a point for every teacher to speak to two of their students for five minutes each week just to hear them out.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2zXFhXb>

**Mr Djohan Abdul Rahman**  
Lead Teacher  
(Malay Specialisation)  
Bishan Park  
Secondary School



Mr Djohan Abdul Rahman wanted to find a way to motivate some of his struggling students. But he ended up creating a game that benefits close to 500 students from over 85 schools each year. In 2011, he started the Hawazi Daipi National Malay Scrabble Competition, which has now become a signature event of MOE's Malay Language Learning and Promotion Committee.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2BdkxsX>

**Mdm Asrina Abdul Samad**  
Master Mentor  
ITE Academy



When Mdm Asrina Abdul Samad could not find a classroom to teach engineering the way she wanted to, she designed her own. The result: a jumbo-sized Innovative Lab at the School of Engineering, or iLab@SEG. The lab is sparsely furnished, but it has interactive walls and augmented-reality applications. The success of iLab has made it a showpiece of ITE's pedagogy, and attracted the interest of overseas vocational training teachers from Bangladesh, China, Canada and Germany.

▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2A0vsWD>

**Ms Kwa Lay Ping**  
Senior Academic  
Mentor  
Singapore Polytechnic



The media industry can be unforgiving. To make sure her students are ready for its challenges, Ms Kwa Lay Ping does not go easy on them. Students may show up for class only to find out that they will have to do a full-day shoot on the weekend. Yet, despite her tough reputation, Ms Kwa enjoys great rapport with her students and stays connected with them on Facebook and Instagram.

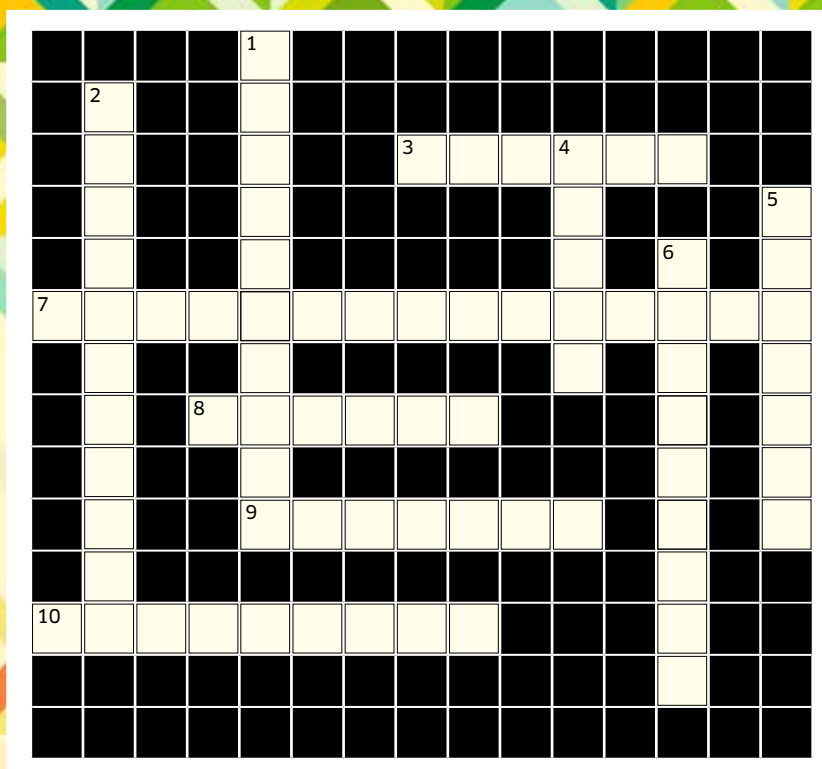
▶ Read more at <http://bit.ly/2B2cQVr>



ANSWER & WIN!

# Can you solve this?

Show us how well you read *Contact* by tackling this puzzle (answers can be found within the magazine). Three correct entries will be chosen to receive an attractive prize each!



## ACROSS →

- Mr Abdul Harris believes the 'Singapore \_\_\_\_\_' is about independence, creativity and innovation.
- St Andrew's Junior College has an initiative, called Project \_\_\_\_\_, that displays notes to thank non-teaching staff.
- Ashvin Gunasegaran was lauded for his act of kindness towards a pregnant lady. The 12-year-old is a student from \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School.
- Students from John Muir Elementary at San Francisco gifted \_\_\_\_\_ to the homeless.
- To build speaking confidence, students from Assumption English School are tasked to read news headlines over the public \_\_\_\_\_ system.

## DOWN ↓

- The Singapore Teaching Practice is an online portal that documents \_\_\_\_\_.
- A cluster of seven East Zone Schools used the \_\_\_\_\_ app to make reading more engaging.
- Marsiling Secondary School has a heritage wall which features two streams converging into a \_\_\_\_\_.
- Concord Primary School employs \_\_\_\_\_ education to build character and values.
- To engage the family, CHIJ Katong Primary has reading mums and \_\_\_\_\_ dads.

## Winners from last issue's puzzle



**Miss Nurainah Kapoor**  
East Spring Secondary School  
Teacher

**Mdm Lim Chor Sim**  
Pei Chun Public School  
AED (T&L)

**Ms Yoong Lian Teen**  
Catholic Junior College  
Teacher

**Congratulations!**

**THINK YOU HAVE THE ANSWERS?**

Send a clear photo of your completed entry to [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg) by **31 December 2017**. Please include your full name, institution, designation, NRIC and contact number in your email.

Answers to last issue's puzzle: 1. Privacy 2. Canteen 3. Reporting 4. Design 5. Innovation 6. Judgement 7. Relevant 8. Grid 9. Avengers 10. Empathise