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# CONTACT

ISSUE  
32

THE TEACHERS' DIGEST



## PASS ON THE TORCH

When teachers help to mentor other teachers, both they and their students reap the rewards.

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For the young actors in the *Harry Potter* films, there is one role for which the late Alan Rickman will be remembered among all others: being a mentor. "He was so encouraging of me both on set and in the years post-Potter," wrote Daniel Radcliffe in a eulogy to the English star, "He was one of the first of adults on Potter to treat me like a peer rather than a child...and I will carry the lessons he taught me for the rest of my life and career."

Mentorship is an integral part of our education system. Teachers who have been mentored well will, like Radcliffe, appreciate the impact it has had on their lives and careers.

This issue, we look at how mentoring sets us up for success, instils in us a sense of bigger purpose, and gives us confidence to persevere when the work gets challenging (see **p02** and **p08**). From professional relationships to networks, we also look at how schools build rapport with other partners in education (see **p06** and **p11**).

Speaking tangentially of networks, the Student Learning Space (SLS) not only supports knowledge transmission, but also offers digital tools to plan lessons and bring in new ideas (see **p15**). If you're looking for more analogue material, flip to the book reviews by recipients of the Inspiring Teacher of English Award (see **p18**), or turn to our distinguished colleagues for teaching inspiration (see **p20**).

Finally, special thanks to Dr Charles Chew at the Academy of Singapore Teachers for helping us with this issue's Back Cover. A little humour helps us pick up and prepare for the year ahead.

All that remains to say is cheers to a happy, healthy and productive 2019 – and thank you for reading *Contact*. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you around. 

### The Contact Team

What do you think about Contact? Please fill in this short survey to help us improve. Take the survey at [bit.ly/ContactReaders2018](http://bit.ly/ContactReaders2018)



In this issue: stories from President's Award recipients and many more inspiring educators.

## CONTACT

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: GARCON DESIGN

# PASS ON THE TORCH

Even mentors need a hand sometimes. Four Mentor Coaches from the Academy of Singapore Teachers share why mentorship is important, and how it can be improved.



## Every Teacher Needs a Mentor

“Some may think that if you need mentorship, you must be lacking as a teacher,” says **Mrs Koh Ming Hwee**. “But that’s simply not true.”

When Mrs Koh was a beginning teacher at CHIJ St Nicholas Girls’ School, she looked up to one of her senior colleagues. “She would give me advice on how to improve in my classroom teaching, and vet the exam papers that I had set.”

That formative experience stayed with her throughout her teaching career, especially after she became a School Staff Developer, tasked with helping others to become better teachers. “Even though she wasn’t officially my mentor, she shaped my attitude towards teaching and mentoring, and my belief that teaching is a team effort,” says Mrs Koh. “I wanted to be like her.”

Over the years, Mrs Koh has guided scores of her colleagues. She assisted many beginning teachers in refining their lesson plans

and developing their classroom management skills. With a teacher who was an Acting Subject Head, she discussed how he could work with the other educators in his department, including the implementation of school programmes.

“No matter how good you are, you can always be better,” says Mrs Koh. “In other professions, having a mentor is a prestigious thing. It means that your employer is invested in you. We should think of mentorship that way, and say that all teachers deserve mentors.”

### The Mentor’s Journey

Started teaching: 1993

Started mentoring officially: 2013

Became a Mentor Coach: 2016

**My proudest moment:** When I left my school in 2015, my colleagues told me that they would ask themselves when they face challenges at work, “what would Ming Hwee do?”.



# Mentorship is Different Today

Well-meaning and useful, but ad hoc and sporadic – that’s how **Mr Christopher Tay** describes the advice he received from colleagues when he started teaching at Catholic Junior College.

One senior teacher would occasionally observe his class, and give him feedback on what to improve. Another spoke to him once (and only once) about his potential career path in the school.

“Mentorship is very different now,” says Mr Tay. “It isn’t about telling your mentees what to do for specific lessons. It’s about getting them to reflect on their teaching methods so that they can grow in the long run. By working together for a longer period, you understand them better and can guide them more holistically.”

After Mr Tay enrolled in mentorship training, he saw the value of a structured programme – with regular meetings and class

observations. For two years, he scheduled sessions with his own protege every fortnight. It enabled both of them to identify and work on areas for improvement. His protege blossomed into a confident and thoughtful educator.

“I saw the difference in my mentee,” he added. “At first, when we talked about what he wanted to achieve with a particular lesson plan, he would give generic and broad statements. Later on, he could zoom in on specific things he wanted his students to learn, which made his lessons sharper and more productive. That’s an example of the power of mentorship.”



## The Mentor's Journey

Started teaching: 2006

Started mentoring officially: 2009

Became a Mentor Coach: 2018

My proudest moment: When my first mentee told me in 2010 that I had played a pivotal role in her growth as a teacher.



# When Theory Meets Practice

Mentors can always use some training to become more effective.

"Take for instance the language mentors use," explains **Ms Lauren Toh**, "If I asked my mentee why she did things a particular way, it might make her defensive. On the other hand, if I asked how she came up with an idea, she would examine her thinking and be more open to a discussion."

What Ms Toh does is provide a sounding board, and allow the teacher to figure out which ideas will have the greatest impact for her classes. "It gives the teacher more clarity about what he or she wants to achieve."

Such techniques are taught at the Academy's Instructional Mentoring Programme. Going through the course, Ms Toh also appreciated the use of data. When she was a mentor, she helped her protege to collect data about students' behaviour

during classroom observations. That provided the basis for conversations about how her protege could differentiate lessons for students of varying abilities.

As a Mentor Coach now, she equips mentors with such skills to support their proteges. The role-playing exercises helps them fine-tune their approach in difficult situations, for example with a protege who is highly stressed.

"At the end of the day, the goal is for a teacher to leave every class saying, 'That went really well.'"

## The Mentor's Journey

Started teaching: 2007

Started mentoring officially: 2011

Became a Mentor Coach: 2016

**My proudest moment:** When I won the Inspiring Teacher of the Year Award in 2013. It was an affirmation from my students that their learning didn't end when my lessons did.





## A Network of Friends

“The informal mentors I had gave me the confidence to get to where I am today,” says **Madam Wan Fazithahariani**, “and I want to give back.”

On her first day at Temasek Secondary School, many years ago, one colleague not only showed her around the premises, but also included her in various gatherings. “Her friends became my friends and I had a support network immediately that made me feel safe and welcomed,” says Madam Wan.

That camaraderie spurred her to mentor other beginning teachers later on. More recently, she enrolled for mentorship training, during which she enquired about becoming a Mentor Coach.

She notes that as the teaching profession evolves, so too must mentors. For example, the mentor coaching team has introduced modules on social and emotional learning, and how to work with

experienced teachers who may be new to a school, subject, teaching level or role.

“Even experienced teachers like myself may need help,” she says. “For instance, kids today are so savvy with technology, but I sometimes struggle with it, let alone use it to engage students. I’m sure there are many colleagues out there who are facing the same challenge.”

Here’s where mentorship and a support network can make all the difference. “We can all empower one another to do better,” says Madam Wan.

### The Mentor’s Journey

Started teaching: 1996

Started mentoring officially: 2015

Became a Mentor Coach: 2017

My proudest moment: When my first batch of Normal Academic students took their ‘O’ Levels in 1999. Two classes received the ‘Value Added Award’.





# Create a Welcoming Village

Mr K. Govindan, Principal of Peiyang Primary, offers advice for building better relationships with parents.





**T**eachers get it: Working with parents produces better results for their students, given that both parties want the best for them. But it won't always be easy to engage parents. So, here's how school principal K. Govindan works with his staff to create mutually supportive relationships with parents.

**Contact: You've believed that teachers should work with their students' parents since you joined the profession 35 years ago. What started you on this philosophy?**

**Mr K. Govindan:** I started teaching in a little village school in Choa Chu Kang, where the children went to school for 5 hours each weekday. That's not much time. I felt that if I knew who the parents were, and they knew who I was, it would help my teaching and get them engaged in the child's learning as well. That was the starting point for me, in terms of working with parents.

Ultimately, the touch-points are the teachers. Teachers have to engage the parents, talk to them, communicate with them. We should work as partners to educate the child.

For some children who need a bit more attention, a bit more help, working closely with the parents can be especially good. In addition, when teachers engage parents well, and some things don't work out right, the parents will be more open to a better resolution to the issue. At times, there will be little misunderstandings, and even mischief amongst students at school. When the teacher is well engaged with the parents, it is much easier to resolve the matter.

**Contact: What can teachers do to build relationships with parents and earn their trust?**

**Mr K. Govindan:** I share with them that they should not contact the parents only when there is a concern with the child's work or behaviour. I encourage them to call parents to provide positive feedback, and not let too much time go by without speaking with the parents. If teachers engage the parents consistently, parents will know that teachers are working with them.

Of course, there may be some situations or meetings with parents that can be challenging. What the principal does in these instances is important too. I listen to what the parent says, and seize the right moment to slip in a critical point that will help enhance parent-school partnership.

I also never allow any parent, no matter how angry, to leave the room with any inaccurate assumptions about teaching, a teacher or the teaching profession. If during the course of a conversation,

a parent who is angry falsely alleges that my teachers are 'lazy' or 'uncaring', I will make sure to correct this assumption before the conversation ends. I'll say, "You said this earlier, and maybe you were just angry, but I assure you that my teachers do work very hard and care very much," and list some of the things that they do.

**Contact: How does your school engage with parents, apart from parent-teacher meetings?**

**Mr K. Govindan:** We have a good number of parents who volunteer at the school as Parent Support Group (PSG) members, which we welcome. However, I also tell parents that a key principle in volunteering is that you must be there for all the children, not just your own. We discourage parent volunteers from stopping a teacher to ask about their child during volunteer work. There's a time for

that, and you must make an appointment, like every other parent. Most of the parents agree with this approach.

The parent volunteers enjoy coming and being with other parents. There's a sense of camaraderie and fellowship. In fact, even when their children have graduated, some of the parents still happily come back to serve.

**Contact: What feedback have you gotten from parents so far?**

**Mr K. Govindan:** Recently, one of the parents called and said that she's happy with what her child has been learning and how the teacher engaged her. Last year, a parent wrote a long essay commending a teacher. I thought that the letter encapsulated very well what I've always been encouraging my teachers to do, with regards to working with parents and engaging the children. So, we read the letter out to the other staff members. The main points were that the teacher was caring, had constantly kept in touch with the parent, and managed a situation well when their child had run a problem at school.

Parents will remember such things. I still have parents of the students I taught who remember me even to this day, because I engaged them well when I taught their children. I do get invitations to former students' weddings.

Recently, when a former student of mine got married, she said that her mother, whom I had often engaged when she was my student, insisted that I be invited to the wedding.

The other day, the father of a boy I taught in the 1990s for just one year saw me in the neighbourhood and said hello too. If you engaged parents well, in addition to the students whom you taught, the parents will remember you as well. That adds to the satisfaction of being an educator! **L**

**"I ENCOURAGE TEACHERS TO CALL PARENTS TO PROVIDE POSITIVE FEEDBACK, AND NOT LET TOO MUCH TIME GO BY WITHOUT COMMUNICATING WITH THEM."**

# MY TEACHER, MY MENTOR

Teachers do much more than just impart facts and figures. Two students share how their teachers mentored them, which shaped their worldview and helped them find their path in life.



## Set on the Right Path

"I was a very poor student when I was in lower secondary at Sengkang Secondary School, and I hung out with a bad crowd and got into a lot of trouble," says **Mr Raniel Lee**, an entrepreneur who founded several companies, including a job-matching website and a training institute. However, the one closest to his heart is Intrinsic Academy, his latest venture which aims to help troubled and at-risk

youth through personalised mentorship programmes.

It was because of the intervention of one of his teachers, Madam Jane Cheng, that he changed his early ways. "She was my form teacher," he says, "and she constantly motivated me and told me not to waste my life. Even though I didn't appreciate it at first, her words eventually turned me around."

“She would recognise even the small things that I did, like pushing the chair back in after school ended,” he continues. “She gave me opportunities like being the class chairperson, and reminded me that I had promised her to get better grades.”

“Once, when I saw her with her kids and said hello to them, she told them that I was a good role model and they should be more like me. I was very naughty at the time, and hearing her say that made me want to be better.”

Other teachers at the school nurtured his nascent interest in info-communications technology. During his wayward days, he had picked up basic coding to personalise his blog page. When he joined the school’s Media Club, the teacher-in-charge encouraged him to learn more related skills, appointed him as the club’s head of videography and asked him to train the younger, incoming club members.

Under the influence of these teachers, Mr Lee started to take his schooling more seriously, eventually studying info-

communications technology at ITE and business informatics at NYP.

In 2016, Mr Lee won the Singapore Computer Society’s IT Youth of the Year Award for his contributions to the industry.

With Intrinsic Academy, he driven by the pivotal role that his secondary school teachers played in his life. “I really want to help society, especially young people who need help,” he says. The organisation offers three types of after-school programmes for, respectively, students who are at risk of falling into bad company, those who are already troubled, and those who do not even bother to come to school and are beyond school counsellors’ help.

“People tend to condemn youth who are not academically inclined,” says Mr

Lee. “My teachers gave me opportunities and, more than that, trusted me to be better. Now it’s my turn to pay it forward, to help those who want to help themselves but don’t know how to do it. I want to be there to show them the way.”

**“MY TEACHERS GAVE ME OPPORTUNITIES AND TRUSTED ME TO BE BETTER. NOW IT’S MY TURN TO PAY IT FORWARD.”**

– MR RANIEL LEE, 27, ENTREPRENEUR

**Dare to Dream**

*With a little help from school, these cool kids are encouraged to pursue the passion projects that motivate them to excel.*



**Ulrica Cheong**

18, Community first aider

“Getting the Edusave Character Award was the first recognition of my commitment to being a first responder. I was given the chance to speak for ‘My Space, My Voice’, a morning assembly programme. The perseverance and experience I picked up as a first responder was applied to my school work, when I pressed on and pushed myself to do better in my studies. In the future, I want to be a first aid instructor and help in overseas humanitarian missions.”



**Daryl Chia**

21, Jiu Jitsu athlete

“I made sure I got school work done before training. In addition, the school and environment has been very supportive. My lecturers are understanding when I have to skip some school days for overseas competitions. When I return, they will stay back and help me catch up. My diploma in sports and leisure management is applicable to my sport. As an athlete, I want to be one of the best in Asia, and one day become a coach to others.”



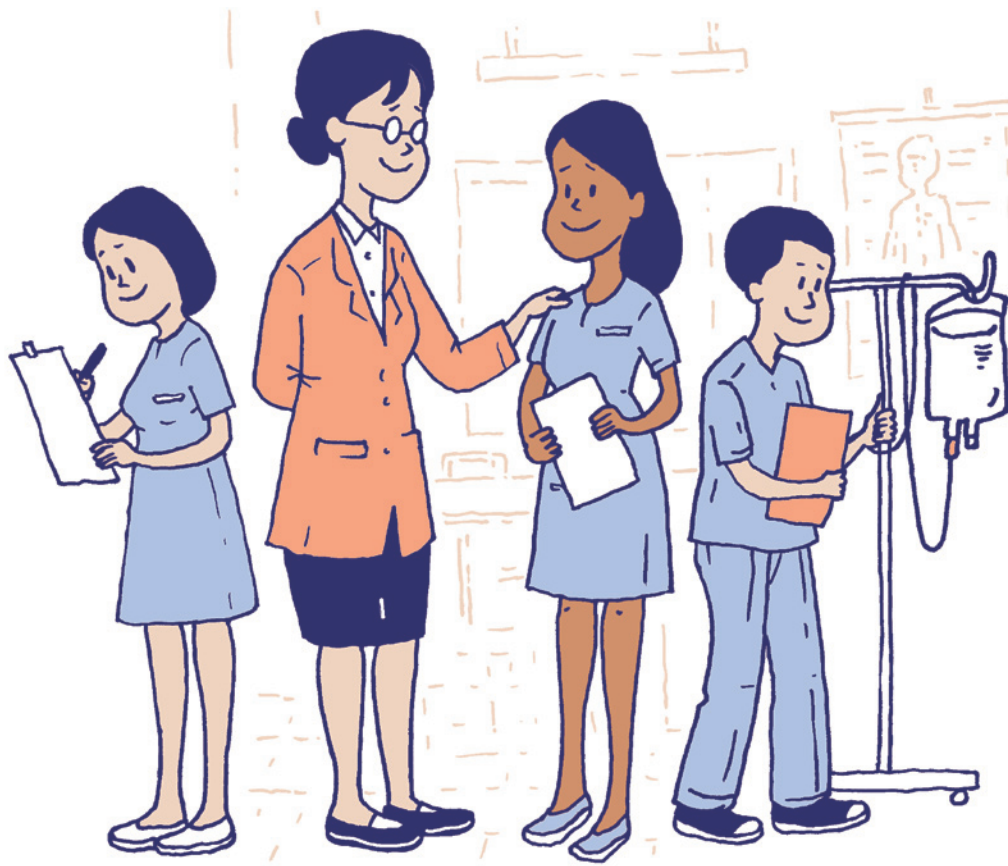
**Syakir Aniq**

13, Beatboxing enthusiast

“My school never discouraged me from doing beatboxing. In fact, my teachers gave me more chances to perform, in front of my friends, my classmates. My school helped me pursue my dreams; made me more confident. There’s a YouTuber I admire. He does v-logs and shows his talents to the world. More than that, he teaches his friends, and they beatbox together. I want to teach my friends and family to beatbox, and make music with them.”



Look out for their video stories on MOE’s YouTube, Facebook and Instagram!



## Sparking a Lifelong Passion

For **Ms Gayathiri Dhavadas** teaching and moulding the next generation of nurses in the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College East has been a homecoming.

About 12 years ago, she was one of the students in the classroom. It was one of those teachers who inspired her to return to the school as a lecturer.

Ms Gayathiri had wanted to be a nurse since secondary school. But her N-level scores did not qualify her for the nursing course at ITE. Instead, she was offered its Nitec in Service Skills (Office). After accepting it and graduating in 2002, she continued to harbour her dream of becoming a nurse, applying for the nursing course 20 times over three years before finally securing a place.

"Mrs Lee-Chick Wai Fun was my teacher in the nursing course, and I can honestly say that she changed my life," says Ms Gayathiri. "My class was a mix of younger and more matured students like myself, and those of us who were older really struggled. Mrs Lee was not just cool and collected when teaching all of us, she would answer any questions that we had, even at night. Even though she was firm when needed, she also treated you like a friend."

It was in Mrs Lee's classroom that Ms Gayathiri first thought of


not just becoming a teacher, but becoming a teacher in the same school. "The way she encouraged me and never gave up on me, it really moved me," she says.

Ms Gayathiri eventually obtained a Diploma and a Bachelor of Science in nursing, and worked in Tan Tock Seng Hospital. But returning to ITE was always on the back of her mind, and she finally took the plunge in 2017.

Even now, she often asks herself what Mrs Lee would do, when faced with difficulties in her class. Like Mrs Lee, she gets students who are lagging behind to sit at the front of the classroom, where she asks them questions to make sure that they are understanding the subject.

If a student is being mischievous or disrupting the class, she also takes him

or her outside of the classroom to address the problem, to avoid embarrassing the student, and in case there are more serious issues underlying the bad behaviour.

Ms Gayathiri and Mrs Lee were even colleagues in the school, briefly, when the latter came out of retirement in early 2018 to teach a course in community care as an adjunct lecturer. Ms Gayathiri says: "She said that she was proud of me." 

**"THE WAY SHE ENCOURAGED  
ME AND NEVER GAVE UP ON  
ME, IT REALLY MOVED ME."**

— MS GAYAHTIRI DHAVIDAS, 33,  
ITE LECTURER

# PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

A look at how schools around the world are engaging parents, businesses and their communities to build stronger ties and benefit students.

## Teach It to Parents

[United States]

Want a better way to learn? Turn to New York City's South Bronx Preparatory. There, students occasionally become teachers. For some classes, instead of giving homework, the school asks students to think about what they have learnt and teach it to their parents, who then provide feedback to the teachers. This role reversal gets students to understand lessons at a deeper level, and encourages parents to be involved in their children's schoolwork even if they do not know how to do it. "This changes the conversation about homework," says Principal Ellen Flanagan. "It's not just the parents saying, 'Is it done?'. It's about the students trying to figure out the best way to explain something, and them having fun together."

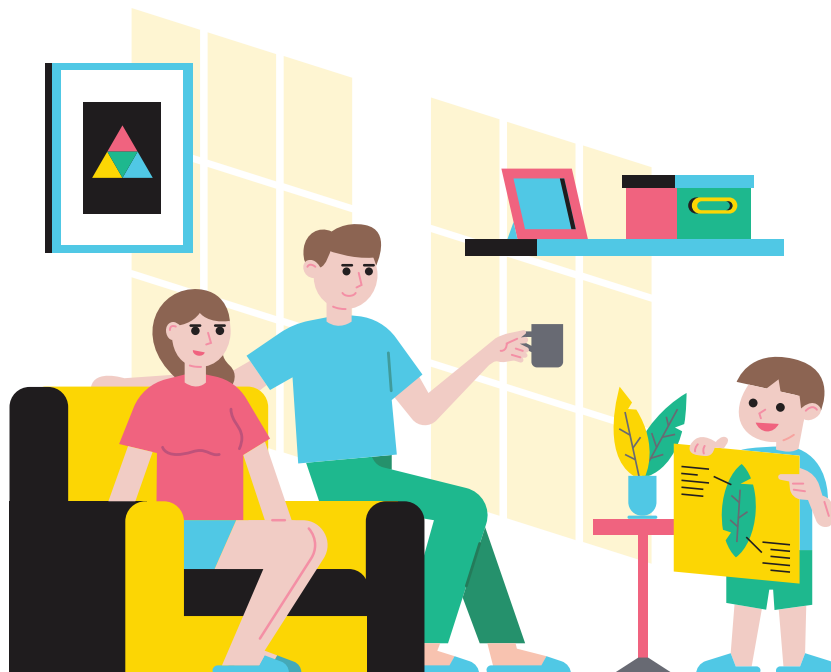
Source: The New York Times, [bit.ly/SouthBronxPrep](http://bit.ly/SouthBronxPrep)

## FAMILY TIME

**12 hours per week**

Number of hours parents in India spend, on average, helping their children with homework, the highest in the world. Singapore parents spend an average of 7.9 hours, also more than the global average of 6.7 hours.

Source: Varkey Foundation, [bit.ly/GlobalParentsSurvey](http://bit.ly/GlobalParentsSurvey)



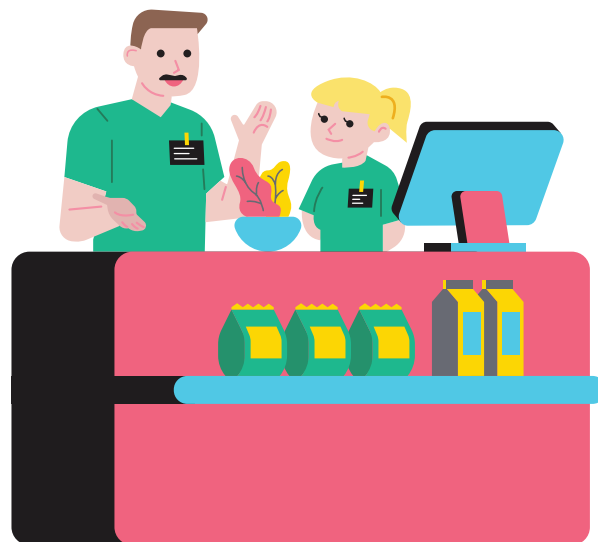


## Shopping for Future Jobs

[Australia]

Going to the mall is not just a fun activity but a learning experience for students at New South Wales' Figtree High School. To help the students to sharpen their interview and resume-writing skills, and learn about the world of work, the school partners with the local Westfield shopping centre to offer apprenticeships, traineeships and mentorships. Students learn about a range of professions, including human resources, legal, marketing, building maintenance and retail sales. The collaboration is a resounding success; local business owners have a closer relationship with the school and benefit from a steady stream of part-time help, while students gain valuable insight into working life and improve their future employability.

Source: NSW Department of Education, [bit.ly/FigtreeHigh](http://bit.ly/FigtreeHigh)

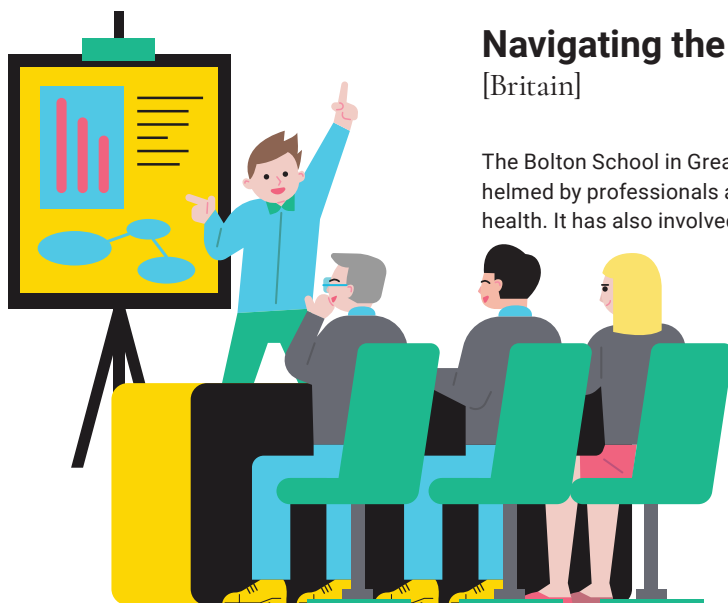


## Navigating the Teen Years

[Britain]

The Bolton School in Greater Manchester organises a series of "Teenage Journey" talks, helmed by professionals and practitioners, on topics such as social media and mental health. It has also involved parents more by planning events that make use of their skills: in 2017, it had a competition where students developed business ideas and were judged by a panel of entrepreneurs, including some of the parents. Ms Helen Critchlow, parent governor of the Boys' Division Parents' Association, says: "We need to move with the times and think creatively to ensure that there is meaningful engagement from parents which, in turn, helps them to raise their child."

Source: Bolton School, [bit.ly/BoltonSchool](http://bit.ly/BoltonSchool)



## What is it like to be a student today?

This 360-degree video gives you a child's eye view of morning assembly, a visit to the canteen and a Programme for Active Learning (PAL) class. You enter the world of a Primary 1 student (could be one of yours!), guided by the voice of a child, interacting with fellow schoolmates during the first year of school. Share this with new P1 parents, so they can start conversations about school with their children. Viewing on mobile devices is recommended, although you can also scroll around on a desktop computer. (The YouTube app is recommended for the best 360-degree video playback on mobile devices.) Watch the video at [bit.ly/moe360](http://bit.ly/moe360)





## SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

**84 percent**  
The proportion of schools in Malaysia in 2017 that saw over a quarter of their students' parents volunteering. Malaysia has made it a priority to encourage parents to participate in school and attend six key days in a year, including report card day and prize-giving day.

Source: The Star,  
[bit.ly/SchoolEcosystem](http://bit.ly/SchoolEcosystem)

**Ingredients for Success**

[New Zealand]

It takes a village to grow a garden at Auckland's Owairaka District School. Every fortnight, the students spend about an hour and a half working in the school's large garden and harvesting its produce, or cooking in the school's kitchen with the fresh ingredients, all with the help of volunteers from the community. The students learn valuable life skills and are exposed to different cultures, especially when the volunteers, who are from different ethnic groups, share traditional recipes. With the teachers' guidance, the students also learn how to find experts and ask for help, as when they approached a local business owner for assistance in building a pizza oven. The community has also grown closer, with residents looking out for the children even outside of school.

Source: New Zealand Council for Educational Research,  
[bit.ly/OwairakaDistrict](http://bit.ly/OwairakaDistrict)



## Heart of the Hood

[Canada]

In the city of Brantford in Ontario, the Major Ballachey Public School is a neighbourhood hub that brings together residents, parents, students and local groups. A large unused room was converted into a community space and now offers cooking classes, health and wellness events, skills workshops and other programmes for parents. More importantly, needy families can get help from experts on how to apply for financial aid, referrals for childcare subsidies and job search assistance. The one-stop centre has helped students from low-income families to stay in school, encouraged parents to meet, help one another and participate more in school activities, and strengthened community ties. [L](#)

Source: Community Hubs Ontario,  
[bit.ly/MajorBallachey](https://bit.ly/MajorBallachey)

## GIVING TO THE COMMUNITY

### C\$50 million

Amount of money  
(around S\$52.9 million)  
the Ontario government  
in Canada is spending  
to retrofit surplus spaces  
in its schools to serve as  
community hubs. Some  
of these hubs will offer  
entrepreneurship and  
training programmes for  
at-risk youth and women's  
groups.

Source: Government of Ontario,  
[bit.ly/OntarioCommunity](https://bit.ly/OntarioCommunity)



# Chart a Fresh Course

A beginning teacher's journey with the Student Learning Space.

BY MS TAY YINMIN,  
GEOGRAPHY AND MATHEMATICS TEACHER,  
DAMAI SECONDARY SCHOOL

**W**ith the recent spate of rainy days, I thought up an unconventional get-out-of-the-classroom opportunity for my student geographers to examine authentic flood control strategies in the school.

I wanted my Sec 2 students to think about the locations in school that were more likely to flood, and why? What were the crisis control strategies that had been implemented in the school? How effective were these strategies?

First, to understand how flood management strategies help to reduce flooding, my learners watched curated videos on the Singapore Student Learning Space (SLS). The stimulus videos enabled them to learn at their own pace as they could pause the video and re-watch any segment, allowing their curiosity free rein.

They then walked around the school to observe the environment for elevated properties, vegetated surfaces and widened and deepened channels. They photographed and described these factors and recorded all the data on their tablets. Back in the classroom, applying what they had learned from the videos, the students analysed the observations that the class had gathered – all easily accessible via SLS – and evaluated the pros and cons of the physical factors. Each group then discussed before arriving at a consensus as to whether the flood control for a selected site was working.

Justin Tan, a Secondary 2 student, shared with the class later, "Learning Geography this way makes me see how the subject is relevant to the real life. This



motivates me to want to find out more about the world around me!"

**As my students had different opinions about the strategies**, they also learned to communicate their views effectively to others, and eventually crafted a group response to be posted on the SLS platform. I find this is a good way to encourage collaboration and ownership of their knowledge.

Chloe Lim, a student in my Secondary 2 Geography class, told me, "I love how I can 'peer' into my friends' thoughts on the Thinking Routine wall when my teacher flashes that on the screen! My friends and I

also like to share our responses in the Polls and Quizzes."

This insight from the Thinking Routine feature on SLS is also valuable to me as "live" responses can be viewed in real-time in class. Mistakes or misconceptions in students' responses can be immediately addressed while perceptive ideas can be discussed. I was particularly impressed when I read one of their responses to the "See-Think-Wonder" thinking routine: "What can we do to prevent floods in an area crowded with concrete structures?" This showed me that the students were able to relate the lesson to their personal context.

Teaching was my childhood dream. I feel it is my calling. And I love bringing joy into learning.

SLS helps me to better engage and connect with each and every one of my students – even those who might otherwise be too shy to speak up. For example, a student, who was usually reserved and rather passive, began to speak up and even initiate ideas after a couple of guided group work activities in SLS.

I also love to include the interactives that can be found in the SLS MOE library in my lessons, as my students enjoy learning with the engaging multimedia.

**Technology is a means for us to enhance our teaching**, but it cannot replace teaching. Being digital natives, my students are more engaged when I use videos and simulations on SLS to help them visualise and discuss difficult concepts. As the lesson designer, my role is to select and scaffold the resources to suit the learning needs of my students – for effective learning to take place.

At Damai Secondary School, I was a member of a Professional Learning Team (PLT) working on integrating SLS into our lessons. Referring to

design samples provided in the SLS Starter Kit, our teams tried designing our first SLS lesson during an allocated professional development session.

**We're also encouraged to open up our classrooms to our colleagues** here at Damai. The open classrooms give me the opportunity to think about the interactions taking place. I saw first-hand how other teachers encourage their students to learn, create meaning and interact with one another. This allows me to reflect on my own approaches and encourages me to try new teaching moves.

In turn, when I open up my classroom, I receive valuable feedback from my colleagues that help me to refine my instruction and improve my lessons. In this safe environment where I learn, share and grow, I know that I'm not alone.

This makes me want to create more designs on SLS to transform and deepen learning in the classroom. And as I also teach Mathematics, the fact that students can revisit past lessons anytime, anywhere, on only one platform – it makes me feel even better able to nurture and inspire their young minds. **📌**



Will it flood in Singapore? Students dive into the SLS to search for answers.





# SLS by the numbers

You met online. You may have glanced over, shared a smile or two. Or maybe you got really involved and started right in sharing your everyday lives. But how much do you know about the Singapore Student Learning Space?

## Are you one of them?

> **6,240** teachers have completed the self-paced learning module in OPAL on “Introduction to Singapore Student Learning Space”

> **1,650** teachers have attended the SLS Design Challenge

**12** schools have opened up their classrooms to **120** teachers from other schools to view SLS lessons in action

> **2,500** views for SLS how-to video “Design Good Lessons with the Learning Experiences Templates” (on the ETD-to-go YouTube channel)

## What’s new?

### 7 features released in Sep 2018

**Poll** for live in-class survey of students’ responses

**Question Collection Library** (Personal) for teachers to build their own question collections

**Lesson Pacing** for control of learning activities

**Learning Experience Templates** to support teachers in (embedded with SLS Pedagogical Scaffold) for designing of active learning experiences

**Thinking Routines** for making students’ thinking visible

**Error Editing & Audio Response Question Types** for students’ language learning

### 3 new features from Dec 2018

**Inter-School Groups** for forming of groups comprising students from more than one school

**Link Classes Across Years** for managing current classes that advance to the next year

**My Drive** for organising learning resources using folders

## What else?

Did you know that the SLS MOE Library covers:

> **240** unique subjects

> **20** academic levels & streams (from P1 up to Pre-U)

# THE BOOKS THAT INSPIRE

Recipients of the 2018 Inspiring Teacher of English Award review that one book they would recommend to every student.



01

## Dr Audrey Cheong

Teacher (General Paper),  
Hwa Chong Institution  
Teaching Award (Pre-university Category)

### The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood

"A fictional masterpiece of political dystopia. Despite being published in 1985, its themes of female subjugation, the abjection of the body, and the normalisation of inequality give us pause. It serves as a stark reminder of what happens when societies become desensitised to injustice and inured to unfairness."

02

## Mr Ratish Balakrishnan

HOD (English Language),  
Evergreen Secondary School  
Leadership Award (Secondary School Category)

### The Alchemist, by Paulo Coelho

"There are many lessons here that students can learn: resilience, learning how to embrace the moment, and live your dream. In it there's a quote, 'The secret of life is to fall seven times and to get up eight times', which captures the essence of resilience. You follow the journey of a boy named Santiago, and read about the perils, pitfalls and getting back up in order to reach his destination."

\*Book borrowed from the school library.

03

03

## Mrs Mishaella Chua

Teacher (English),  
St Joseph's Institution  
Teaching Award (Secondary School Category)

### Unreliable Memoirs, by Clive James

"Clive James is a gifted humourist, and knows how to add details to make a scene vivid without weighing it down with descriptions. This is his first memoir about growing up in Australia, and the adventures and mischief he got into. However, it also addresses profound themes concerning childhood, family, love, confidence and self-acceptance. The author struggles with feelings of regret and frustration about how he acted as a child. But he also tries to forgive himself for those transgression. His recollection of growing up will resonate in some ways with almost everyone. Hardly a page went by without at least a chuckle."

04

## Ms Erin Elizabeth Woodford

HOD (Language Arts & English Literature),  
Temasek Junior College  
Leadership Award (Pre-university Category)

### Essential Poems from the Staying Alive Trilogy, edited by Neil Astley

"This anthology is a wonderful introduction to contemporary poetry for older students. The poems are all about what it means to be alive: to fall in love, to experience grief and loss, to grow up and discover one's identity, to survive and find joy despite terrible suffering. These experiences are both deeply personal and yet resonantly universal."

\*Book borrowed from the National Library.

05

## Mr Casimir Kang

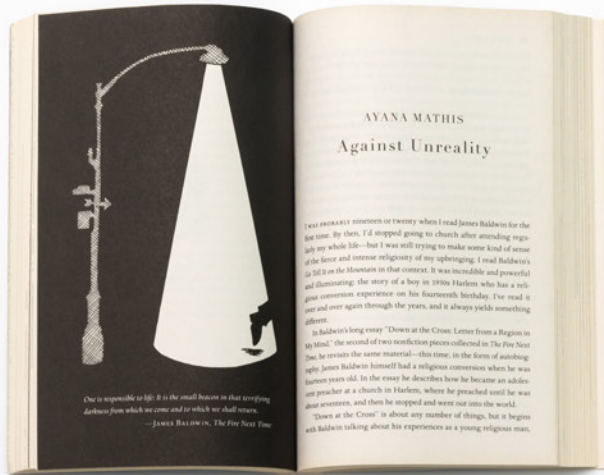
Subject Head (English Language and Literature),  
Naval Base Secondary School  
Teaching Award (Secondary School Category)

### A Short History of Nearly Everything, by Bill Bryson

"If you're curious about the world, this is a great book to read. It also provides little snippets that you can use to astound people; a small talk starter kit. Many of our young people are going to be global citizens, interacting with people from different walks of life, cultures and beliefs. It's important to be able to have a conversation with people. This book can be a starting point."



06



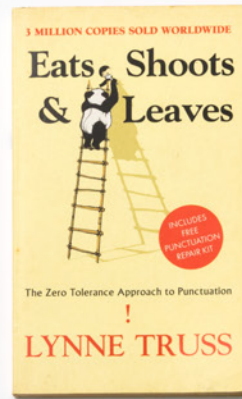
07

**Mr Yok Joon Meng**

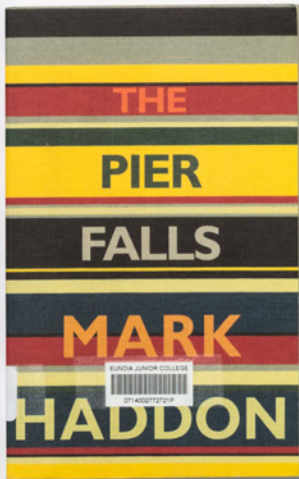
HOD (English Language & Information and Communications Technology),  
Yu Neng Primary School  
Leadership Award (Primary School Category)

**Eats, Shoots & Leaves, by Lynne Truss**

“This book is about punctuation, which we always associate with rules and conventions. However, the author uses anecdotes, infused with wit and humour, in her explanations of the history of punctuation marks and how the incorrect use of them could lead to ambiguity in meaning, and cause much hilarity.”



07



08



09

06

**Ms Chee Bee Phaik**

HOD (English Language),  
Tanjong Katong Girls' School  
Leadership Award (Secondary School Category)

**Light the Dark: Writers on Creativity, Inspiration, and the Artistic Process, edited by Joe Fassler**

“I love what writers have to say about what has inspired them, and how the writing or creative process works for them as individuals. It makes readers realise that everyday experiences can contribute to what we create when we put pen to paper, and write – whether for ourselves or others.”

08

**Ms Bernice Yeo**

Teacher (Literature in English),  
Eunoia Junior College  
Teaching Award (Pre-university Category)

**The Pier Falls, by Mark Haddon**

“This book contains the best collection of short stories I've read recently. The nine tales have thought-provoking plots with great twists – often chilling, and always beautifully constructed. It's like the *Black Mirror* of the literary world.”

*\*Book borrowed from the school library.*

09

**Ms Hing Mui Hong**

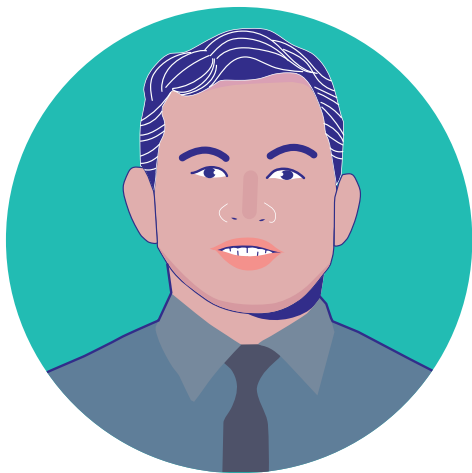
HOD (English),  
Keming Primary School  
Teaching Award (Primary School Category)

**Glimpses and Reflections, by Wee Kim Wee**

“It's about a boy from a poor kampong who became the country's president. Wee Kim Wee talks about losing his father when he was eight, and working to support his family when mum couldn't afford to let him continue secondary school. He worked his way up from a clerk to become the President of Singapore. It taught me to count my blessings.”

# WHY I TEACH

With a wealth of teaching experience and innovations between them, the eight educators who received the 2018 President's Award for Teachers weigh in on why they are passionate about their profession.



## Adventure Enthusiast

**MR EDZRA BIN ISKANDAR**  
HOD (PE AND CCA), BEDOK SOUTH  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

*The adventure enthusiast once worked a year guiding mountaineers in Nepal, before returning to become a PE teacher. Mr Edzra has since played a crucial role in developing the curriculum for outdoors education, and now helps to build teachers' capacity in it.*

"Education is not just about academic achievements. When I take students outdoors for sailing and other activities, they learn life skills such as first aid and risk assessment. They work together, which teaches them the value of cooperation, and they become more confident. When they face difficulties outdoors and overcome them, it also helps them to believe that they can do so in the classroom. I've always wanted to be involved in shaping youth, and when I see my students becoming well-rounded people, with character and leadership, it gives me a lot of satisfaction."

Read more at [bit.ly/Edzralskandar](http://bit.ly/Edzralskandar)

## Design Thinker

**MR GEORGE TEO**  
COURSE CHAIR (BUSINESS INNOVATION  
AND DESIGN), SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC

*From boosting students' self-esteem and teaching like a game show host, to helping people in the hotel industry uncover skills gaps, Mr Teo uses design thinking to bring out the best in others.*

"Recently, I met some former students. One was a chef and another one was in interior design. They were not top students, but they achieved something in their fields with the help of their teachers, and that made me very proud to be in this profession. It was also another reminder that it's important not to give up on any student. As a teacher, you will have students who are not motivated. That's why I try to do things differently, to make lessons more engaging and unexpected. When the class is fun, students are energised and they want to learn."

Read more at [bit.ly/GeorgeTeo](http://bit.ly/GeorgeTeo)





### Language Guru

**DR LIM YI-EN**  
**SENIOR HOD (INTEGRATED PROGRAMME)**  
**& HOD (LANGUAGE ARTS), NATIONAL**  
**JUNIOR COLLEGE**

*Whether it is using algebraic equations to teach the rules of English, or asking students to interview elderly relations for historical fiction writing, Dr Lim is never short on ideas for demonstrating how language pervades all disciplines.*

“Language is important because it helps students to learn things and express their thoughts, feelings and ideas accurately. They would be handicapped if their language skills are not developed properly. This is why ensuring that students are precise with language, and can tailor it to suit the audience, is something close to my heart. I once had a student who wasn’t confident about talking to strangers, but after we helped her, she could even chat with ministers at events. I teach because I want my students to become confident speakers and users of English, to open up possibilities for them.”

Read more at [bit.ly/LimYiEn](http://bit.ly/LimYiEn)

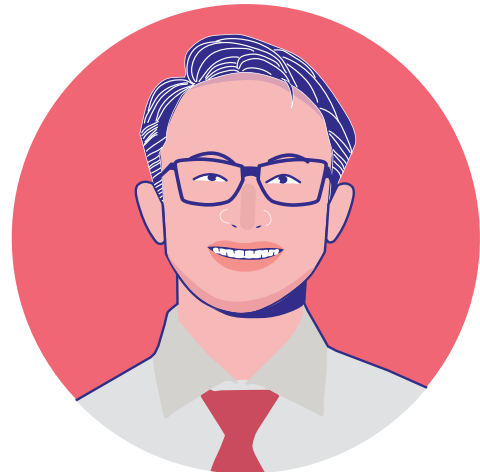
### Story Teller

**MR MATTHEW ONG**  
**HOD (ENGLISH), SAINT ANDREW’S**  
**JUNIOR SCHOOL**

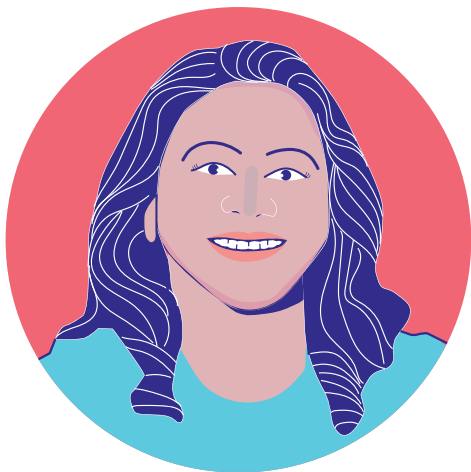
*Give Mr Ong anything – anecdotes from colleagues, the symbols used in the school crest, even the English language itself – and he will spin memorable stories out of them, with great learning points for his students.*

“Being a teacher is like being given a glass key. You can use it to open students’ hearts and minds, but it’s also a fragile connection and a heavy responsibility. I teach because I want to make a difference. I use stories, games, apps and videos because I want lessons to be joyful. I once had a boy with low self-esteem, and I used his interest in chess to show him how maths and chess are connected. That sparked his excitement, enough for him to go off on his own, learn and bounce back. When you can make that connection, you can do a lot.”

Read more at [bit.ly/MatthewOng](http://bit.ly/MatthewOng)



**2,571**  
**Number of educators nominated for the**  
**2018 President’s Award for Teachers.**  
**Have you sent in your nominations?**



### *Empathy Scientist*

**MRS S NIRMALA DEVI SANTHANASAMY  
LEAD TEACHER (SCIENCE), GUANGYANG  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Affective science (anchoring a scientific concept in something emotional) is but one of Mrs Sam's array of methods to engage her students – and she is happily sharing them with her colleagues.*

"I always tell my students that I'm not just teaching science. I'm also teaching them to ask questions about the world around them, so that they start to have the inquiring mind of a scientist. For dyslexic and autistic students, and I motivate them by giving them small, manageable tasks, and encouraging them when they take small steps. When they do well, it gives me a real sense of achievement to have helped them, and that keeps me going as a teacher."

Read more at [bit.ly/NirmalaDevi](http://bit.ly/NirmalaDevi)

### *Music Champion*

**MISS NG SHEH FENG  
SUBJECT HEAD (PARTNERSHIPS),  
AHMAD IBRAHIM SECONDARY SCHOOL**

*Building her school's Enhance Music Programme (EMP) from scratch, promoting it through lunchtime concerts, helping students unlock their musical potential – including two girls who made history by being the first visually-impaired students in Singapore to sit (and pass) the O-Level music examination... you name it, Miss Ng has done it.*

"Teenagers are amazing. Their brains are like sponges, and when they are passionate about picking up certain skills, they can get to a very high level. When we started the EMP, it was challenging. We also took in two visually-impaired students and had to make many changes and appeals so that they could take the O-Level in music. Fortunately, we succeeded and they did well. I'm proud of the EMP because we are contributing towards a warm and inclusive environment for the arts."

Read more at [bit.ly/NgShehFeng](http://bit.ly/NgShehFeng)



**KNOW OF ANY INSPIRING OR INNOVATIVE EDUCATORS?**

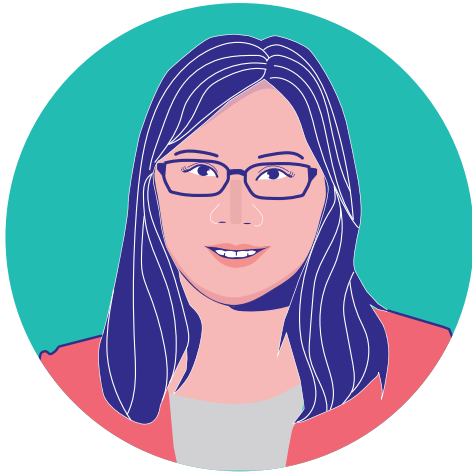
**CONSIDER NOMINATING THEM FOR THE NATIONAL**

#### **PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR TEACHERS (PAT)**

This gives national recognition to experienced teachers for their dedication and hard work in developing our young. These teachers prepare students for life, as well as model commitment to continuous learning and enterprise. Nominations for PAT 2019 are now open and will close on 22 Jan 2019.

#### **OUTSTANDING YOUTH IN EDUCATION AWARD (OYEA)**

This seeks to recognise excellent young teachers for their youthful idealism, energy, enthusiasm and active involvement in the development of youths. With effect from 2012, the age criterion for OYEA has been revised to 35 years and younger. For OYEA 2019, it is open to educators who are born on or after 30 Jun 1984. Nominations for OYEA 2019 are now open and will close on 8 Jan 2019.



*Star Communicator*

**MS TAN LAY KHEE  
MANAGER (ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT),  
TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC**

*When it comes to teaching pharmacy students, Ms Tan uses role play to build empathy, and self-assessment to allow learners to think for themselves. Her research on the latter includes work on a framework for other polytechnics to adopt.*

“If we want students to do well after they graduate, they can’t just be good on paper. They must be able to communicate and make sound decisions. I introduced role-playing to help my students discover their communication blind-spots, like if they speak monotonously or do not make eye contact; problem-based learning and self-assessment helps them learn to reason their way through situations, and identify their strengths and weaknesses. It is very fulfilling and motivating when I see them grow, and become more knowledgeable and self-reliant.”

*Read more at [bit.ly/TanLayKhee](http://bit.ly/TanLayKhee)*

*Life Coach*

**MS GOH WAI LENG  
SCHOOL STAFF DEVELOPER, GEYLANG  
METHODIST SCHOOL (PRIMARY)**

*Dedicating herself to a life of teaching, Mrs Chan finds professional success in helping others succeed, whether it is putting students through their paces as athletes, or contributing to the professional development of fellow teachers.*

“Being a teacher has been my first and only job. Helping others bloom is why my heart is in this profession. I remember this particular child who was a scrawny little boy. I saw his potential as a runner and encouraged him to train. He blossomed, became a good team leader, and went on to represent Singapore. He grew not only as an athlete, but also as a person and leader. Whether it’s training students or crafting my fellow teachers’ professional development, my goal is always to build them up holistically.”

*Read more at [bit.ly/GohWaiLeng](http://bit.ly/GohWaiLeng)*



**AWARDS CELEBRATING PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE.**

**SUBMIT YOUR NOMINATIONS ONLINE BY ACCESSING THE URLS OR QR CODES BELOW:**

**PAT 2019** <https://tinyurl.com/2019PAT>



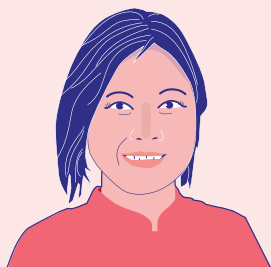
**OYEA 2019** <https://tinyurl.com/OYEA2019>



Hardcopy nomination forms and return envelopes have also been sent to all schools. Please note that you are not required to submit any detailed write-up or attach any evidence in the nomination form, except for a short write-up on how the nominee has made a difference. Further details about the submission of supporting materials will be communicated to the nominee’s school leaders after the nomination period.

# Passionate Educators from other Lines

They are dedicated teachers, but all of them started in another profession.  
What brought them to teaching... and what have they brought with them?



**MDM NORLINA BTE AHMADI**  
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER TURNED  
ENGLISH TEACHER  
ANDERSON PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Before I was a teacher, I was...**  
a public relations officer (2 years), a  
guest relations officer (2 years), and a  
relief teacher (6 months).

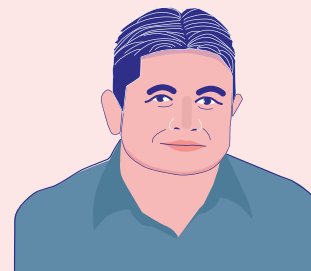
**I went into teaching because...**  
"Relief teaching literature at Fuchun  
Primary was an uphill task –  
building rapport with my students  
– but I managed to with videos, food  
samples, posters and poems in class.  
I felt so fulfilled. Communicating  
well is something I impress upon  
my students. What keeps me going  
after 23 years is being able to bring  
my personal interests – my pets,  
videos, audios, stories, poems – in  
my lessons."



**MR SIMON SNG**  
AUDITOR TURNED PRINCIPLES OF  
ACCOUNTS TEACHER  
WESTWOOD SECONDARY SCHOOL

**Before I was a teacher, I was...**  
an auditor (3 years), and a regional  
financial analyst (1 year).

**I went into teaching because...**  
"I overheard a group of Sec 3 students  
discussing a difficult accountancy  
question in a fast food restaurant. I  
explained it with fast-food examples,  
and they said I could become a  
teacher. Auditing is not something  
theoretical. Even today I explain  
concepts with our school bookshop/  
canteen. What keeps me going after 5  
years is the privilege of being able to  
witness the growth and development  
of my students."



**MR JAHANGEER B MOHAMED JAHABAR**  
AIRCRAFT TECHNICIAN TURNED  
MATHS TEACHER  
ENDEAVOUR PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Before I was a teacher, I was...**  
an aircraft technician (2 years),  
and a computer servicing engineer  
(2.5 years).

**I went into teaching because...**  
"I have always been fascinated with  
numbers, and I really enjoyed sharing  
my knowledge with my nephews  
and nieces. As an engineer, I break  
problems down into small parts.  
I guide my students do this with  
their Maths. What keeps me going  
after 16 years is the look on my  
students' faces when they master a  
concept, the little thank-you notes,  
and seeing my students grow up to  
become independent, confident and  
mature individuals."



# TEACHERS' CONFERENCE 2019

A NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR EDUCATORS TO ENGAGE IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING.

## WHEN:

27 to 29 May, 2019.

Pre-conference will take place on 27 May and the main conference will take place on 28 and 29 May 2019.

## WHAT:

The theme for Teachers' Conference 2019 is "Maximising Learning: Engage, Collaborate, Innovate".

The two conference strands are: (1) Designing Holistic Education and (2) Enacting Innovative Pedagogies.

## WHO:

The Guest-of-honour will be Minister for Education, Mr Ong Ye Kung. The keynote speakers are: (1) Dr Maurice J. Elias, Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University and Director of Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab, and (2) Janet Ang, Vice-President, Industry Solutions & Business Development, IBM Asia Pacific Member, IBM Industry Academy.

## WHERE:

Singapore Expo & Max Atria, 1 Expo Drive, Singapore 486150

Registration for both the pre-conference and conference will open in Jan 2019. Do look out for more information which will be sent via email. For inquiries, please email the organising committee at [MOE\\_tc2019@moe.gov.sg](mailto:MOE_tc2019@moe.gov.sg).

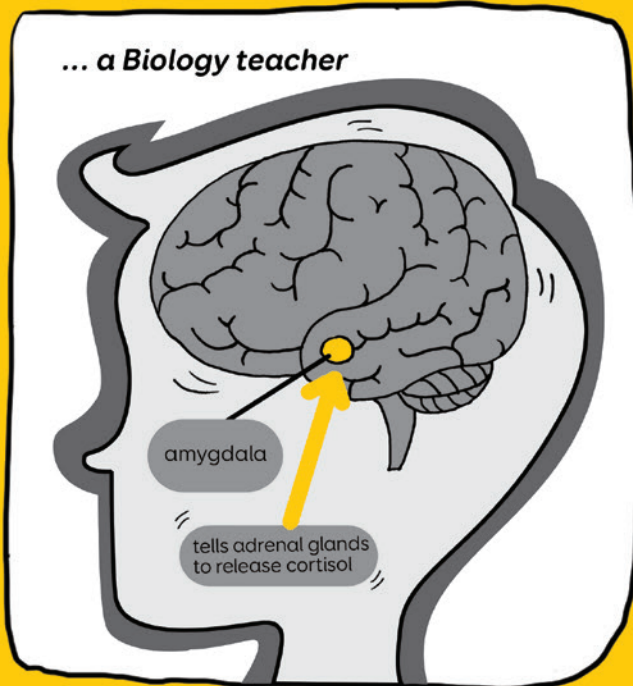
## MOE EXCEL FEST

Another main feature at this year's conference will be the MOE ExCEL Fest. It offers a wide spread of exhibitions and sharing sessions that will feature exciting innovations, from MOE Kindergartens to Schools, to MOE HQ divisions and our statutory boards. Plans for future innovations will be showcased, and we will also be seeking your ideas. It is open to all staff to attend as a rich professional development opportunity.



# How stress works, according to...

... a Biology teacher



... an English teacher



... a Physics teacher

$$\text{Stress} = \frac{\text{Force}}{\text{Area}}$$



... and a teacher in the timetable committee

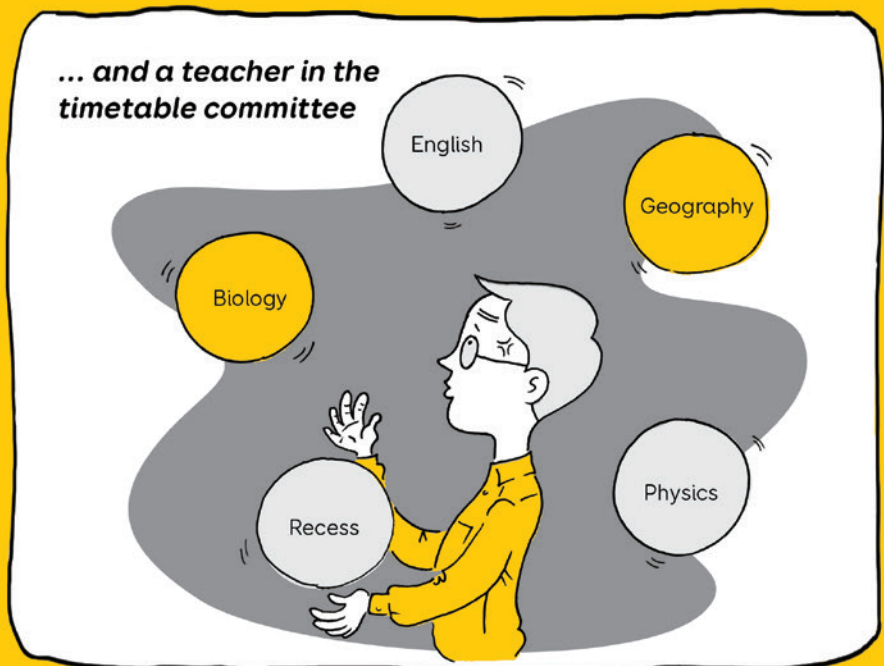


ILLUSTRATION GARCÓN DESIGN

By Dr Charles Chew, Principal Master Teacher, Academy of Singapore Teachers

## #CONTACTBACKCOVER: STORIES BY CONTACT READERS

Each issue, we publish a comic on the back cover – and it could be written by you! Your assignment: In 6 to 8 lines, tell us your funny story, inside joke, or even share a poem. Send your submissions to [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg). Please include your full name, school, designation, NRIC and contact number in your email. We'll choose one winning entry to illustrate, and the winner will receive an attractive prize.