Heart of a Teacher Exhibition

Introduction

"The people that I remembered most in my life were the people who made the greatest impact on me as a student. Not [because] they were the best-equipped, qualified teachers in their line, but because they really gave of themselves and took a personal and particular interest in all their pupils and in me personally, which was the part [that] I remembered."

Lee Kuan Yew
Singapore's founding Prime Minister

Many of us have fond memories of our teachers. We remember them for different reasons – the passion for their subjects; how they ignite our interest in learning; their pet phrases and inimitable style; their sense of humour; or the heartfelt conversations. The list goes on. But beyond all these, our most vivid and heartwarming memories of our teachers may be their heart for us, their students.

What lies within the heart of a teacher?

What empowers a teacher to guide students in the discovery of their strengths and identity? What inspires the fraternity of teachers and spurs them on?

Journey with eight teachers in Singapore from the 1950s till today – meet a profile for each decade you traverse. Through their eyes, experience how teaching looks and feels like during their time, and the timeless values and beliefs that anchor them.

As you browse through the pages of this exhibition styled like a book, discover what it means to be a teacher in Singapore through the passage of time, and the collective sense of purpose and mission that drives our teachers through the decades.

This exhibition is presented by:

HERITAGE CENTRE

Academy of Singapore Teachers
lead. care. inspire.

Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

MOE Heritage Centre

1950s – Mrs Ethel Dorothy Desker

I am the Principal of Playfair Afternoon School, a one-storey primary school surrounded by squatter huts in the heart of Tai Seng, an area known for gangster activities. This is my first posting as a Principal, and I have nearly 550 pupils under my care.

	Mrs Desker (1910 – 2005) started teaching in 1926 just before she turned 16, and retired as the Principal of Haig Girls' School in 1965. She was the Principal of Playfair Afternoon School from 1953 to 1956. *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.*

	*Janet and John*, Book One (Cover) *Janet and John*, Book Two (Spread) c. 1950 *Reproduction of the MOE Heritage Centre Collection.* The *Janet and John* series of early reading books for children teach English through a "look-and-say" approach. Children read and recognise whole words instead of syllables.

A Day in My Life

	Standard II class in Playfair Afternoon School, 1952. *Chang Kwang Seh Collection, courtesy of the National Library Board.*

I started out as a Principal in 1953, new from my teaching job. I did not have a clerk and had to handle the school myself. There were times when I felt lonely because I wanted to know if my decision was right, but there was no one for me to consult. When I was a teacher, I had friends whom I could ask if I did something or taught something correctly. Thankfully, I made friends with other Principals soon enough.

MOE Heritage Centre

I spend a lot of time supervising the children to eradicate their bad habits of littering, misusing and not keeping the toilets clean, and stealing from one another. I always believe in the gentler way of correction. I don't like to say things harshly, even to school children. Some people have hidden talents – we can learn so much by observing them.

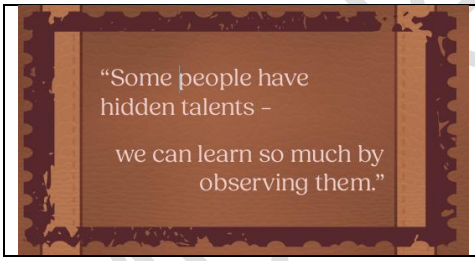
Caring for My Pupils

	Standard IV pupils in Playfair Afternoon School, 1954. *Chang Kwang Seh Collection, courtesy of the National Library Board.*

Every day, I go to the tuckshop to check that the hawkers give fairly good food to our pupils and do not charge too much. I advised a hawker to buy big bones to cook gravy so that our pupils can be strengthened by the bone marrow.

My inspection rounds absorb my time when I should be in the office. But there is no way out. Children have to be looked after first. Primarily, it is the most important thing for me to do.

Some of my pupils are from very poor families. To get them clean clothes, I make their uniforms. It takes a bit of my time, so I get the teachers to help. When I have spare time, I'll cut textiles for the uniforms in three sizes: small, medium and large.

	"Some people have hidden talents – we can learn so much by observing them."

A Frightening Task

	A view of Paya Lebar Road, near Playfair School, 1955. *F. W. York Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*

What frightens me very much is the collection of school fees. By the time I collect them, it is late and I can't go to the bank. I have to bring the money home instead. One day, I was

Heritage Centre

nearly robbed. I caught the gangsters looking at me, but I just walked on as though there was nothing in my handbag.

Once home, I hide my handbag in the soiled linen basket so that burglars wouldn't discover it if they break into my house. Who would want to touch dirty linen? The next morning, I would go to the bank and deposit the money. No matter how afraid I am, I have to keep up a brave front.

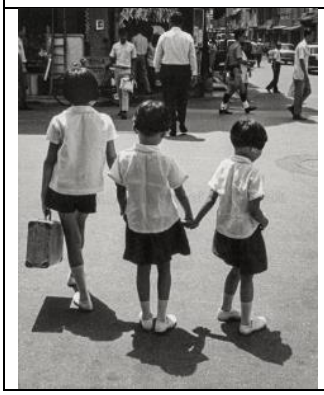
<u>Precious Memories</u>

	Playfair Afternoon School pupils on an excursion to the beach, 7 June 1954. *Chang Kwang Seh Collection, courtesy of the National Library Board.*
	Girls getting ready to sprint at the Playfair Afternoon School Sports Day, 27 May 1954. *Chang Kwang Seh Collection, courtesy of the National Library Board.*

Until recently, my pupils have never been to the beach at Katong even though it is nearby. They did not know any place outside of their own neighbourhood. I requested my teachers to organise a seaside picnic. My pupils could not afford a picnic, so I called the Inspector of Schools and obtained permission to tap on my school funds. Off the pupils went, with the nasi lemak and drinks provided! They were so excited, it was really a joy to see them go off in buses.

Another experience my pupils have never had till recently was a school Sports Day. They were happy when I organised one. We chose not to give trophies, but what was useful to the pupils. We presented them with rubber shoes, socks, shirts, school bags and handkerchiefs.

MOE Heritage Centre

	School bag c. 1950s – 1970s *Collection of the MOE Heritage Centre.* This school bag used to contain a student's textbooks and stationery. Before backpacks were widely used in Singapore, students carried school bags like this to school.
	Three school children in uniform waiting to cross the road. The oldest (leftmost) is carrying a school bag typical of the period, c. 1965 – 1970. *George W. Porter Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*

I Am What You Made Me

Growing up, I did not have any thoughts of becoming a teacher. But I soon realised that teaching gives me a lot of satisfaction. I love being with the children, and it makes me very happy when pupils come up to say, "I am what you made me."

Adapted from:
Interview with Mrs Ethel Dorothy Desker by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 000436, 1984 – 1985.

MOE Heritage Centre

1960s – Ms Nanda Bandara

I am a newly certified teacher of Science and Mathematics in Haig Girls' School at Katong. On my first day in 1960, I stepped into a Primary 6 class, watched by 44 pairs of eyes. At 22, I was only around 10 years older than my young charges – how could I manage them?

	Ms Bandara (1938 –) started her teaching career in Haig Girls' School in 1960 at 22 years old. In 1975, she was promoted to Principal of Haig Girls' School. Ms Bandara retired at the end of 1998. *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.*

Every Possible Way to Enhance Learning

	Haig Girls' School pupils with the rabbits they reared in school, c. 1981. *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.*
	Germination of seed specimen box 1950 *Collection of the MOE Heritage Centre.* This specimen box shows various stages of seed germination of a kidney bean, Indian corn grain and pea. The descriptions point out features of the seedlings at each stage, and their heights relative to the ground level.
	Ms Bandara (seated in centre) and her Primary 3 pupils, 1972. *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.*

MOE Heritage Centre

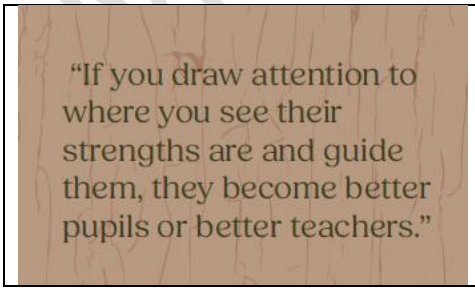
I try to make my lessons as interesting as possible. It's best if I have teaching aids, but if not, I resort to handmade charts. My colleagues and I collect stones, bottle caps and even saga seeds to help the children with counting. I try to use every possible way to help the children understand what they learn, so they can remember.

When I was growing up, I saw flowers blooming, trees growing and frogs developing because I lived in a place surrounded by them. Most of my pupils cannot imagine that. That is why I came up with the idea of having a Science Garden, so the children can see these things for themselves. During lessons, I bring the children there to grow and observe plants. We learnt how to make incubators using light bulbs so we can see how chickens and ducks develop from eggs.

We didn't have a pond, so pupils couldn't see the difference between tadpoles, frogs and toads. An opportunity came when I was moving out of my house to a HDB flat. I saw a big bathtub discarded at the void deck, and thought that we could bury it in the ground. It'd be just nice as an eco pond. The school bookshop man and gardeners came to help me over the weekend. We collected water plants from Chung Cheng High School, and introduced the frogs and toads. It is good fun to see the children learning in an environment where they can see live specimens in an ecosystem.

We have rabbits too, and the children fell in love with them. When one of the rabbits died, the children started crying and could not concentrate on their lessons. What could I do? I conducted a burial ceremony after class. The children brought lots of flowers, and cried so much that their handkerchiefs were wet.

	Teaching aids exhibited at the Teachers' Training College, 1956. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*

	"If you draw attention to where you see their strengths are and guide them, they become better pupils or better teachers."

Museum Heritage Centre

Helping and Caring for One Another

There are pupils who come to school without breakfast. We boil hot water, stir in milk powder from big sacks provided to the school, and serve skimmed milk to them. After recess, the children brush their teeth along the drains. We teach them how to brush their teeth correctly so they have good oral hygiene.

Some children come from families that do not find school important. Some of my pupils have to help their hawker parents in the morning before rushing to school. They don't have time to rest or do their homework. I appealed to their busy parents to come and see me. We take pledges to help each other so that their children would at least get a primary school leaving certificate.

I always teach my better pupils to look after the weaker ones. At first, it can be difficult because they feel that they will lose out by sharing what they have. But I tell them that they will learn and improve as they teach others. Gradually, the stronger pupils learn, and the weaker ones don't feel left out. They develop as a team, and we manage to maintain a higher standard.

	Early Days of Teaching (02:26) Making Learning Come Alive (03:49) *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.* In these two videos, Ms Bandara looked back on her days as a young newly qualified teacher in Haig Girls' School. She described her Principal Mrs Ethel Dorothy Desker, and the use of teaching aids. Ms Bandara recounted using an old bathtub to create an eco pond, and conducting a burial ceremony for a rabbit she and her pupils reared in the Science Garden.

Making Progress

If I set my mind to do something, I make sure that I do it to the best of my ability. I get a sense of achievement from getting things done for the benefit of my pupils and colleagues. It's not so much for my gain, but to see others learn and blossom.

I like to see people make progress. If you draw attention to where you see their strengths are and guide them, they become better pupils or better teachers. As long as they put in effort in their work, I salute them.

MOE Heritage Centre

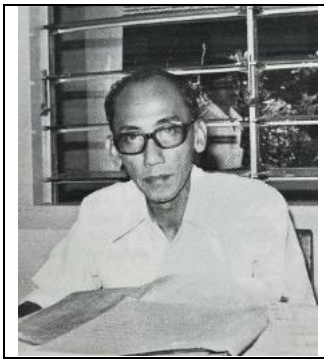
	Children receiving skimmed milk during recess, 1950s. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*
	Haig Girls' School pupils brushing their teeth after recess, c. 1981. *Courtesy of Haig Girls' School.*

Adapted from:
Interview with Nanda Bandara by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 004583, 2020.
Nanda Bandara, "Every child can achieve", PSD Challenge*, 26 Nov 2014.*
Haig Girls' School 70th Anniversary Publication, 2021.

MOE Heritage Centre

1970s – Mr Mok Chack Eng

I joined Bukit Panjang Government High School in 1976 as an English Language and Geography teacher in the English stream. In 1978, I crossed over to the Chinese stream to teach Physics and Mathematics.

	Mr Mok (1934 – 2005) was born in Muar, Malaysia. He taught in Johor before migrating to Singapore in 1975. He served in Bukit Panjang Government High School from 1976 till 1991 when he retired as Vice Principal. *Courtesy of Bukit Panjang Government High School.*

Best of Both Worlds

	Bukit Panjang Government High School, c. 1970. *Bukit Panjang Government School Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*

I studied in a Chinese-medium primary school and an English-medium secondary school in Muar, Malaysia. When I transitioned from the Chinese to English stream, subjects such as History, Geography and Literature were difficult for me. I had to rely on the English-Chinese dictionary all the time to look up words. My textbooks were crammed with my handwritten translations!

On my first visit to Bukit Panjang Government High School – Singapore's first integrated school comprising English and Chinese streams – I took a liking to the school immediately. When I heard both English and Chinese being used, I felt that I was in the right place. The school is well-known for its good discipline, and I found the teachers quite effective.

Tools of My Trade

	Bukit Panjang Government High School's first school library, 1970s. *Courtesy of Bukit Panjang Government High School.*

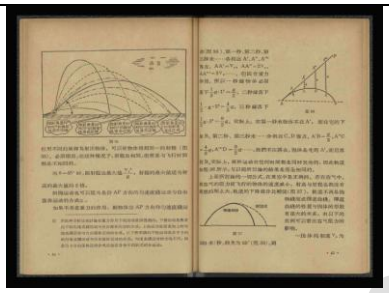
MOE Heritage Centre

I rely on the blackboard and chalk to teach. For Mathematics lessons, I use the wooden triangle, ruler and compass to draw diagrams on the board. Without the compass, it's not easy to draw a circle freehand. But some teachers with many years of experience can do it!

Preparing test papers can cause me a lot of physical pain. While papers in the English Language can be typewritten, I have to write my papers by hand in the Chinese Language. I do this on a waxed paper stencil placed on a stainless steel frame, before placing the stencil in a cyclostyle machine to manually churn out duplicates.

Often, I write till the middle of the night, till my hand aches and my eyes hurt. Sometimes the stencil gets torn while I'm writing, and I have to start all over again! We have to be careful with the cyclostyle machine (not too fast!) in case the stencil gets torn or the machine breaks down.

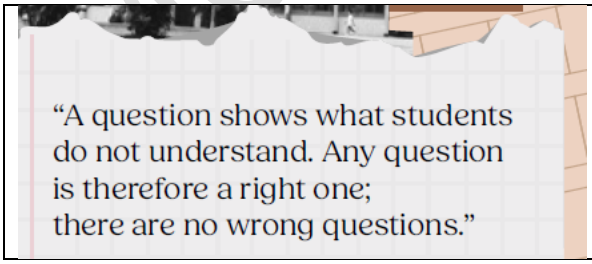




《代数学习指导》[Algebra Study Guide] (Cover)
《曲线运动万有引力》[Circular Motion and Gravitation] (Spread)
c. 1960s – 1970s

Reproduction of the MOE Heritage Centre Collection.

The study guides for Mathematics and Physics displayed here were written for secondary school students from the Chinese stream. Prior to the implementation of the unified national stream in 1987, students in Singapore could enrol in a vernacular stream where the medium of instruction was Chinese, Malay or Tamil.



"A question shows what students do not understand. Any question is therefore a right one; there are no wrong questions."

MOE Heritage Centre

I Will Not Laugh at You

	Class photograph showing Bukit Panjang Government High School's first uniform design, 1966. *Courtesy of Bukit Panjang Government High School.*

To me, learning is a joy when I'm in the company of good teachers. In primary school, my teachers' stories of predecessors who contributed much to society spurred me on to strive and do good. Under the influence of my teachers, I learnt the values and principles of life. I believe that good teachers make a huge impact on a student's life, and I want to learn from my teachers never to make fun of my students.

When I attended Hull University, I was impressed that my professors never laughed at my questions. A question shows what students do not understand. Any question is therefore a right one; there are no wrong questions. We must give due consideration to our students' questions, and let our students feel that they can be nurtured, not "useless" or "stupid".

I get along very well with my students, and I tell them that I will never make fun of them. I believe that all of them are teachable. I encourage my students to try their best in every endeavour, and not shift the blame to anyone if they fall short.

Something Difficult to Teach

	Funfair to raise funds for new facilities in Bukit Panjang Government High School, 1970s. *Courtesy of Bukit Panjang Government High School.*

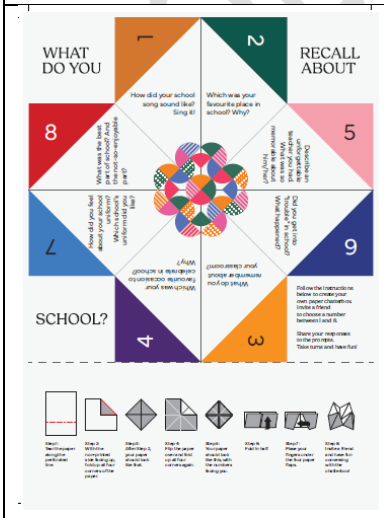
It is important for students to have an all-rounded education. I am guided by the "Five Ways of Life" framework to develop students in the aspects of morality, intelligence, physique, social skills and aesthetics.

I worry that schools might focus too much on intellectual development at the expense of other aspects such as morality and social skills. How useful would such students be to our society?

Heritage Centre

	"Five Ways of Life" framework for education

What I find really difficult is the nurturing of morality. How do we teach values? Surely, we cannot just nag at the students. Moreover, reading about values is one thing, and applying them is another. How do we assess if we have succeeded in inculcating values? Not through examinations, for sure. As an educator, I often ruminate on these questions that are close to my heart.

	Cyclostyle machine c. 1960s – 1970s *Reproduction of MOE Heritage Centre Collection.* Turn the handle for a surprise! Prior to the invention of photocopiers, cyclostyles were used to reproduce documents. A waxed paper stencil would be wrapped around the drum of a cyclostyle. When the handle is turned to rotate the drum, ink would be forced through the stencil to print on paper.
	What do you recall about school? Fold this sheet along the dotted lines. Invite a friend to choose a number between 1 and 8. Share your responses to the prompts. Take turns and have fun! 1) How did your school song sound like? Sing it! 2) Which was your favourite place in school? Why? 3) Describe an unforgettable teacher you had. What was so memorable about him/her?

MOE Heritage Centre

	4) Did you get into “trouble” in school? What happened? 5) What do you remember about your classroom? 6) Which was your favourite occasion to celebrate in school? Why? 7) How did you feel about your school uniform? Which school’s uniform did you like? 8) What was the best part of school? And the not-so-enjoyable part?

Adapted from:
Interview with Mok Chack Eng by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 001998, 1998.

MOE Heritage Centre

1980s – Mr Rudolph William Mosbergen

I am the Principal of the newly founded Raffles Junior College (RJC). Since our establishment three years ago, we have weathered through two campus moves and several challenges.

	Mr Mosbergen (1929 – 2015) began teaching in 1955 and served as Principal in several secondary schools from 1965 onwards. After a stint at MOE HQ and the Institute of Education, he was appointed the first Principal of Raffles Junior College from 1982 to 1987. *Courtesy of Naval Base Secondary School.*

On a Tight Rope

RJC started off in 1982 with newcomers and existing students and teachers from the Pre-University classes of Raffles Institution (RI), moving over from RI's Grange Road campus. Running the school was like walking on a tight rope. Our site at Paterson Road, formerly used by the Institute of Education, was not adequate for our needs. In the first year, our Science students had to travel back to RI for their Science practical. You can imagine the chaos on a rainy afternoon.

Back then, we also operated on two systems – the lecture-tutorial and classroom systems – to smoothen the transition for graduating classes preparing for exams. We had to protect the interests of our students and staff, while making adjustments to become a junior college.

These were the fledgling years when we were short of almost everything except courage and the determination to succeed. At our weekly school assemblies, I encouraged the students, telling them that I was confident that they were going to endure and achieve. Our slogan was "The impossible we do at once; miracles take a little longer." It worked. We pulled together and overcame problems swiftly.

It didn't strike us that a second move would occur so quickly. When we received news that RJC was to relocate to a new campus at Mount Sinai by late 1983, many students were not happy. They felt pushed around and that the umbilical cord between RJC and RI was being cut; the child was being separated from its parents. Almost all of them – a thousand four hundred in total – signed a petition against the move. The Minister of State for Education, Dr Tay Eng Soon, and I made a serious attempt to explain why the move was necessary and beneficial. After that, it was full steam ahead at RJC.

MOE Heritage Centre

Rising Up to Challenges

Changes can be awfully disturbing. And yet, teachers should be agents of change. As the ones helping students to learn, teachers are themselves the first among learners. That is why I keep telling teachers to look at every task as a challenge to be met and overcome. Soon, they will love challenges because it gives them a sense of purpose and achievement.

	Staff and students carrying tables during the move out of RJC's Paterson Road campus, 1983. *Courtesy of Raffles Institution*.

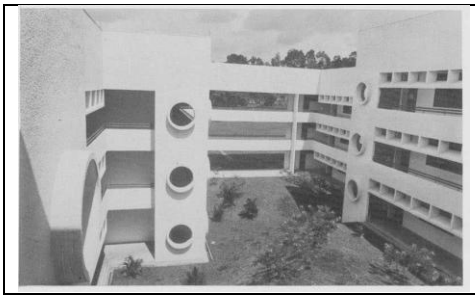
Do I feel pressure? If you ask, I'd say that I prefer the word "challenge". If you have a challenge to meet, you study, plan and overcome it. A disappointment is just a temporary setback that makes you look at the challenge more carefully. "Pressure", on the other hand, is self-inflicted. Perhaps half the pressure on you has been put on by yourself.

Facing up to challenges is very rewarding to me. The achievement is not just personal, but collective. It gives me satisfaction in my job.

	Mr Mosbergen playing the school piano, 1982 – 1983. He wrote the song *Rafflesians Salute Your Alma Mater*, as well as the school songs of Naval Base Secondary, Pasir Panjang Secondary and Swiss Cottage Secondary, where he also served as Principal. *Courtesy of Raffles Institution*.

	Raffles Junior College at the Paterson Road site, 1982 – 1983. *Courtesy of Raffles Institution*.

Heritage Centre

	Raffles Junior College at the Mount Sinai site, 1984 – 1985. *Courtesy of Raffles Institution*.

A Spirit of Excellence

My philosophy in running the school is that all students have to be stretched and given opportunities to extend their capacities academically, morally and physically. All-rounded development is very important. My staff and I see the need to organise arts and drama festivals every year so that students can express themselves. It means extra work, effort and time, but when the concert is over and of good standard, there is a feeling of satisfaction. This is what I call a spirit of excellence.

How do we achieve excellence? By solid hard work, and there are no two ways about that. It means giving up and sacrificing.

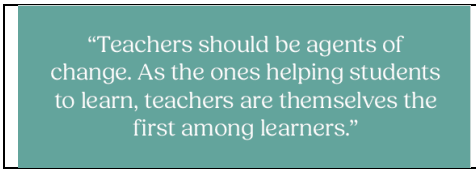
 	Scenes from RJC's Arts Festival, 1982 and 1985. *Courtesy of Raffles Institution*.

What Makes a Good Teacher?

There are many qualities that make a good teacher. But I think it is most important to have human values – qualities of care, love, understanding, wanting to share with people and having great concern for the needy. A teacher is a role model for the students. You have to be it yourself, and that speaks volumes more than anything else.

Heritage Centre

	School building designs and facilities have evolved noticeably from the 1950s till today. Try your hand at this folding activity to recreate the typical H-shaped primary school design of the 1960s!

	"Teachers should be agents of change. As the ones helping students to learn, teachers are themselves the first among learners."

Adapted from:
Interview with Rudy (Rudolph) William Mosbergen by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 000510, 1994 – 1995.
Raffles Junior College, The Rafflesian 1984 – 1985.

MOE Heritage Centre

1990s – Ms Tan Siok Cheng

	"Everything I've done is worth my while."

I am an officer from the Educational Technology Division (ETD), a new division set up to implement Singapore's first master plan for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education rolled out in 1997.

	Ms Tan (1947 –) started her career in 1970 as a Biology teacher in St. Joseph's Institution (SJI). After her MOE HQ postings in the 1980s and 1990s, she served as a Principal prior to retiring in 2009. *Courtesy of Raffles Girls' Primary School.*

MOE Heritage Centre

IT and its "What Ifs?"

My team in the information Technology (IT) Training Branch trains primary school teachers to integrate IT into lessons as a value-add. We explore many kinds of software that can enhance teaching and learning.

	Computer lesson at Victoria School, 1986. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.*

Some teachers are understandably hesitant about using IT. What if the machines don't work? How are they supposed to teach using IT, when they are still figuring it out for themselves? What's more, the students seem so much better and faster at IT. That is why our training syllabus comprises a lot of troubleshooting and classroom management skills. It will take time to convince teachers about the value of IT in the classroom.

Similarly, I was myself grappling with IT. Before joining ETD last year, I didn't even know how to email! I was floundering in uncharted territory, doing a lot of things I had never done before. Now that I'm in my second year, I've found my footing and enjoy what I'm doing. Why am I in ETD if I'm not IT savvy? I am told that I'm here because I am strong in pedagogy, and the point is to make IT effective by integrating it into pedagogy.

Minimum Words, Maximum Impact

Pedagogy is something I think about frequently. In my previous posting as a Biology specialist writer in the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS), I was tasked to write the Normal (Academic), Lower Secondary Science and Normal (Technical) textbooks. The Normal syllabus is unique to Singapore; there are no overseas materials we can reference. I tried to write as simply as possible and incorporated as many hands-on activities as I could. Having been a teacher for many years, I was very familiar with the content I have taught. I could anticipate the students' questions and problems, and how to make learning easier for them.

What goes on behind the scenes in the writing of textbooks? I had to consult many books and people, source for photographs and visit relevant places. My teammate visited the prison to speak to prison officers when she wrote the chapter on drugs. We had to use very specific words to avoid causing offence. My team conducted trial lessons in schools for the topics that we felt might be problematic. Subsequently, we scrutinised, reviewed and edited the text many times (six to eight times even!), before it goes to the publisher, where further edits continue to be made.



Discovering Science: Web of Life, 1969 (04:00)
Life in the Sea, 1980s (03:02)
Home Sweet Home, 1996 (02:14)

Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.

Explore these videos that show the transformation of educational technology in the form of videos from the 1960s to 1990s!

Discovering Science: Web of Life for Secondary Two students explains how different lifeforms depend on and affect one another.

Life in the Sea introduces Secondary One students to different organisms found in the seas and reefs.

Heritage Centre

	Home Sweet Home is part of an English Language lesson created for Sec 4 Normal (Technical) students to discuss the pride that people have in their homes.

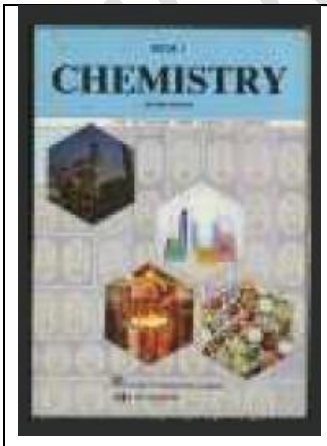
Always Learning, Always Changing

The syllabus is akin to a work-in-progress. Every eight to ten years, we repeat the rigorous process of revising textbooks and learning materials to keep up with the changing times. In line with new brain-based research on multiple intelligences and how we learn, my team sat down and discussed how the materials should be designed using current pedagogical approaches. We wove in process skills such as doing experiments, observing, organising and recording facts, inference and communication into the Science syllabus.

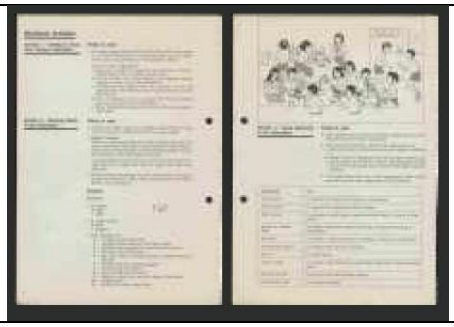
Everything I've Done is Worth My While

	Ms Tan Siok Cheng (seated in centre) with her Secondary 4 Form Class, 1977. Courtesy of St. Joseph's Institution.

I didn't think that I would be in HQ for so long. When I first left St. Joseph's Institution where I had taught for more than a decade for CDIS in 1983, I told the Principal that I would be back. I was very happy teaching the boys. They had a good sense of humour. I was strict and my students resented some things that I did. But when they became parents or even teachers, they understood why I did so, and appreciated that I taught them right from wrong. This appreciation is what I find most rewarding about teaching as a career.

	*Chemistry for Secondary Three Normal (Academic)* (Cover) *Science – Lower Secondary Syllabus for the Normal (Technical) Course* (Spread) 1996 *Reproduction of MOE Heritage Centre Collection*. These instructional materials were developed by the team led by Ms Tan Siok Cheng in the 1990s.

MOE Heritage Centre

Adapted from:
Interview with Tan Siok Cheng by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 003812, 2013 – 2014.

MOE Heritage Centre

2000s – Mrs Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama

I am the Head of Programme at Rainbow Centre – Balestier Special School, with over 40 teachers under my care. My colleagues and I teach students aged 7 to 12 who have moderate-to-severe special educational needs, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and multiple disabilities.

	In 1987, Teacher Sha (1965 –) joined the then newly established Margaret Drive Special School. In the 2000s, she served as Head Teacher and later, Head of Programme at Balestier Special School (now renamed as Rainbow Centre – Yishun Park School). Today, she is Principal Trainer at Rainbow Centre Training and Consultancy, focusing on developing beginning teachers, empowering stakeholders and advocating for awareness and inclusion for Persons with Disabilities. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

A Sense of Wonder

I have been a Special Education (SPED) teacher since 1987. When I first told my father that I was going for an interview at a special school, he said, "I don't think you're ready. Only the brave teach in special education." By the third day at work, I conceded that he was right. It was not easy at all, because our students have diverse needs and challenges. They also exhibit many behaviours that interfere with learning.

	Engaging a student using varied objects during a one-to-one lesson, 2000s. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

As SPED educators, we carefully craft and design an individualised learning plan for each and every student. We unpack our students' daily routines and develop the skills they require. Communication with our students is personalised too – some students use pictures, communication boards or iPads to express themselves. What we teach and how we teach must be person-centred. This is the "science" of a SPED class, and what makes it so innovative, exciting and meaningful.

NIE Heritage Centre

	Creating a welcoming space at Balestier Special School, 2000s. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

When I plan lessons, I ask myself, "How do I add a sense of wonder in the class? How do I inject curiosity in my kids?" I do my best to embed fun elements to make my kids smile and want more of that. This process takes time and effort, but it is so worthwhile when I can connect with the kids. When I inject a sense of wonder and create the element of joy, I smile at the end of the day and don't get tired.

Learning with Parents

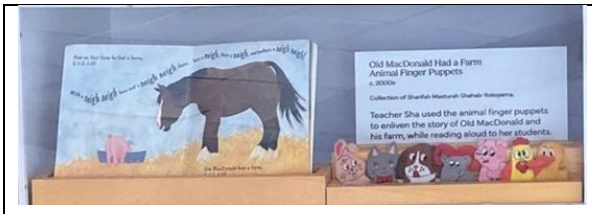
As a mother of three young daughters, I find myself learning from my students' parents. Sometimes, they get discouraged when they compare their children with those in mainstream schools. But these parents love their children and appreciate them just as they are. It dawned on me that comparison is a thief of joy. I have learnt to appreciate and make time for each of my children.

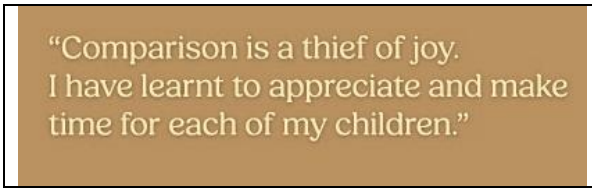
	A moment of joy in the classroom, 2000s. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

My work with families is catalysed by some difficult moments when parents hit the wall and really don't know what to do. There are times when I don't have the answers too, and I'm not embarrassed to say that. I ask for more time to figure it out, and my students' parents are kind not to judge me. If we spend time to unpack the situations we face, we can solve the issues step by step. It's not impossible.

	Making Literacy "ALIVE" through a themed party at Balestier Special School, 2000. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

MOE Heritage Centre

	*Old MacDonald Had a Farm* Animal Finger Puppets c. 2000s *Collection of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*. Teacher Sha used the animal finger puppets to enliven the story of Old MacDonald and his farm, while reading aloud to her students.

	"Comparison is a thief of joy. I have learnt to appreciate and make time for each of my children."

<u>Battling SARS</u>

When the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) broke out in 2003, we had to close our school, like all other schools across Singapore. The hardest hit were our students' parents because they had to manage their children at home.

	Teacher Sha (left) with her colleagues, preparing teaching materials with students' special interests in mind, to be mailed out to students during the SARS pandemic, 2003. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

Staying at home was difficult for our students with autism, because they wanted to head out, and were used to their schedule of going to school. My team came together because we knew that the parents needed help and learning could not stop. We prepared teaching materials such as shoeboxes with items within, and sent them to parents, to teach students skills like sorting, numeracy and literacy. In our little ways, we became quite creative.

NIE Heritage Centre

A Champion for Students

When I was a beginning teacher, I focused only on what was happening within my class. Later, when I started bringing my students out for excursions, I observed that some people avoided them. It was a painful situation for me. I thought that what drove this behaviour was really a lack of information and understanding about my students. I stayed positive and started advocacy work for people with special needs.

	Bringing students out for a ride on the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) train, 1999. *Courtesy of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama*.

My team organised open houses as opportunities for the community to share space and connect with my students. With greater awareness and understanding, truly, we are moving towards a more inclusive society where our students can be empowered, included and thrive!

Every day, I wake up knowing for sure that I want to continue contributing as a SPED teacher. There are so many more smiles that I can help to bring into our school. This conviction keeps me going despite the difficulties I face.

	*The "Feeling Tone" at Rainbow Centre* Harish, Jerome, Raees and Shahfiq c. 2000s *Reproduction of the Rainbow Centre's collection*. This artwork was produced in response to Teacher Sha's instruction to draw a school. Instead of physical objects and buildings, the group of 16-year-old students from Rainbow Centre's Yishun Park School decided to draw the different emotions they felt in school.

Heritage Centre

	*My School is a Happy Garden* Lim Bing c. 2000s *Reproduction of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama's collection.* This drawing by a 7-year-old student depicts Yishun Park School as a beautiful garden, and the teachers – including Teacher Sha – as lovely flowers.
	Communication aid c. 2000s *Collection of Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama.* This word-and-picture communication aid for non-verbal students is made by Teacher Sha. Each page comprises words and illustrations of different kinds for students to express their needs and wants. To communicate, students paste the laminated cards on the velcro strips. For example, the message conveyed here is: Teacher Sha, I want Milo.

Adapted from:
Interview with Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama by the MOE Heritage Centre, 7 June 2024.

MOE Heritage Centre

2010s – Mdm Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi

I am a Malay Language teacher at MOE Kindergarten (MK) @ Tampines. While I have served as a preschool educator for over two decades, these are pioneering years for us – MK just started operations in 2014!

	Cikgu Raudhah (1968 –) embarked on her journey as a preschool educator in 1990, serving in welfare organisations and the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) Centre. She was one of the pioneering teachers when MOE Kindergarten (MK) began operations in 2014. Today, Cikgu Raudhah is a MK Senior Teacher at MOE Kindergarten @ Horizon. *Courtesy of MOE Kindergarten*.

Stepping into the Children's World

My day starts at 7:50am, when I receive the children and greet them. I do a health and visual check and speak with their parents. Do the children look OK? Is there anything bothering them? We keep an eye out for the children's physical and emotional well-being. The children know that I'm a Malay Language teacher, so even the Chinese and Indian children greet me in Malay, "Selamat pagi, Cikgu!"

Children are intrinsically curious and joyful. They always want to know more, and enjoy what they do. I try to adopt their mindset as I support their holistic growth. When they are playing or working on a task, I take time to interact with them, using it as an opportunity for teachable moments.

I heard many Malay folk stories in my childhood, when I was growing up as the youngest of 10 children in a kampong at Geylang. I often retell these stories to interest and immerse the children in the Malay language, culture and values. To create authentic learning experiences for the children, I infuse songs, games and dances into my Malay Language lessons.

To me, a lesson is akin to a beautiful piece of tapestry, woven together using varied colourful elements that appeal to the curious, joyful and active nature of the children.

Hard Work, Heart Work

Every year, I meet a different cohort of children and their parents. The initial stages of getting to know each other and collaborating may be challenging. But such challenges are part and parcel of life. I tell myself not to dwell on them, but to look on the positive side and persevere.

MOE Heritage Centre

I feel a sense of accomplishment when the children share with their parents what they have learnt in school. A child I taught pointed out to her mother when they were cooking that the Malay term for a fishball is *bebola ikan*. These instances show me the impact of my teaching.

Teaching is "heart work" – it requires the touching of hearts. Without that, teaching is just another job. As teachers, we have a moral compass. We educate not just to disseminate knowledge, but to share ideas and grow empathy. Whatever comes from our hearts will be very beautifully translated into words and actions.

	Learning how cooking was done in the past using a charcoal stove, 2015. *Courtesy of Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi.*
	Cikgu Raudhah playing the *kompang* with the children, 2016. *Courtesy of Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi.*

	*Silat* c. 2010 *Collection of MOE Kindergarten @Horizon.* After reading this big book in class, Cikgu Raudhah's students were inspired to learn *silat*.

	Outdoors with the children to learn about the banana plant, 2015. *Courtesy of Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi.*

NIE Heritage Centre

Weeks of Wonder

Twice a year, the children and I embark on a two-week inquiry project during the school's "Weeks of Wonder". We start by gathering topics of interest to the children, before voting to choose the most popular topic to work on. I go with the flow of their curiosity. When the children ask me questions, I say, "I wonder about this too. Let's find out." Then, I encourage them to observe what happens at home and speak to their parents to find the answers.

As part of a project, we found out more about *kompangs*, then made and decorated our own using cereal boxes. We also invited professionals to teach the children how to play the *kompang*. There was another time when I read to the children a big book titled *Silat*.

	Using cereal boxes to make *kompangs*, 2016. *Courtesy of Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi.*

That captured their attention, and they wanted to learn more about the martial art. I managed to get *silat* practitioners to teach the children some basic moves. The children were delighted, and some wanted to sign up for *silat* classes!

	A *silat* practitioner teaching the children some basic moves, 2015. *Courtesy of Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi.*

I always try to create a very supportive environment in my classroom. I refer to a child who requires additional support as "our learning friend". I encourage the children to embrace and support our learning friends, using kind and gentle words to help them where needed. No child should be left behind. To go far, we must walk together.

"Teaching is "heart work". As teachers, we have a moral compass. Whatever comes from our hearts will be very beautifully translated into words and actions."	"Teaching is "heart work". As teachers, we have a moral compass. Whatever comes from our hearts will be very beautifully translated into words and actions."

Heritage Centre

Adapted from:
Interview with Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi by the MOE Heritage Centre, 26 June 2024.
Ministry of Education, "Exploring culture and traditions at MOE Kindergarten", Schoolbag: The Education News Site*, 19 Aug 2017*.
Early Childhood Development Agency, "Through the Language Lens", in My Teacher, My School*, July – Sep 2021*.

MOE Heritage Centre

2020s – Mr Melvin Chan Joo Seng

I am a Lead Teacher in History at Chua Chu Kang Secondary School. It is my 15th year in teaching.

	Mr Melvin (1984 –) began teaching in Ping Yi Secondary School in 2010, before joining Teck Whye Secondary School in 2015. Following the school's merger in 2023, Mr Melvin is currently Lead Teacher (History) in Chua Chu Kang Secondary School. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

The Community that Led Me to Teach

	Emoji calendar created by a student from Mr Melvin's form class, 2020. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

My late mum sparked my interest in teaching. When I was a kid, she commented on the different learning styles that my younger sister and I had. My sister preferred hands-on activities, while I loved to read. Mum suggested that I read to my sister, while she taught me how to repair things. That got me thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if I were a teacher and knew how to utilise the strengths of each individual?" Later in life, my interactions with my teachers and the youths around me – my community, in other words – developed my calling to teach.

Speaking to the Heart

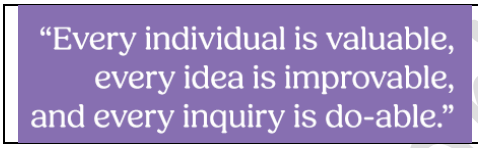
	Mr Melvin having an in-depth conversation with his form class during Circle Time, 2023. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

I believe that all learning is social and emotional. At the start of each lesson, even when time is tight, I do not delve into the content right away. Instead, my class spends time talking about our feelings, using emoji calendars that we made ourselves. Once our emotions have settled, we are ready to learn.

IOE Heritage Centre

My students need to be able to taste success at home. I partner parents and rally as many people as possible around our students. During Parent-Teacher Meetings, I encourage parents to answer any of these three questions: What's great about your child? What are you grateful for? What growth have you seen in your child?

It can be difficult for parents to respond to these questions because in our Asian culture, we tend to be less comfortable with verbalising our appreciation for our family members. But this moment for the family to speak from and to their hearts is a meaningful one of acknowledgement. For some students, it is the first time they have been praised by their parents.

	*World at War: Children of World War II* 2022 This History bulletin was produced by Mr Melvin's students from Teck Whye Secondary School, in collaboration with Clementi Town Secondary School. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*
	"Every individual is valuable, every idea is improvable, and every inquiry is do-able."
	*A Study on Facial Hair* 2022 This poster was created by Mr Melvin's Teck Whye Secondary School students for the Knowledge Building Design Studio national symposium. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

Heritage Centre

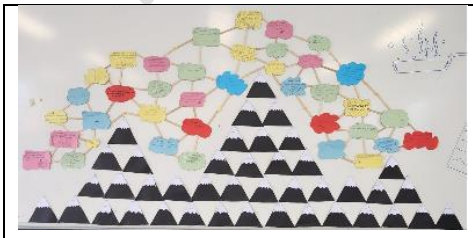
	Class newsletter produced by Mr Melvin's Sec 1 form class. 2023 *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

Every Individual is Valuable

	Mr Melvin sharing about Differentiated Instruction at the Cluster Level with other teachers, 2022. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan.*

I am a practitioner of Knowledge Building, a pedagogical practice that places students at the centre of the inquiry process, constantly engaging them in a collaborative building of ideas to rise above their starting points. My foray into Knowledge Building started off as a challenge from a student. He experienced the approach in his Science lessons, and wondered why it was not adopted in the Humanities. That fired me up. I promptly got to work with colleagues and professors to learn and introduce Knowledge Building in my classes.

It takes me a few lessons to establish the culture of Knowledge Building in each new class I teach. Once in place, my students imbibe the principles that "Every individual is valuable, every idea is improvable, and every inquiry is do-able"! Wherever they are in terms of readiness, students are included and empowered to contribute feedback to help their friends improve in thinking and writing.

	The approach of Knowledge Building comes naturally to students who have spent some time in Mr Melvin's class. His Sec 2 form class (2024) decorated the classroom by penning and building on their success stories. The bubbles-and-lines format is reminiscent of Knowledge Forum, an app used in class for Knowledge Building.

MOE Heritage Centre

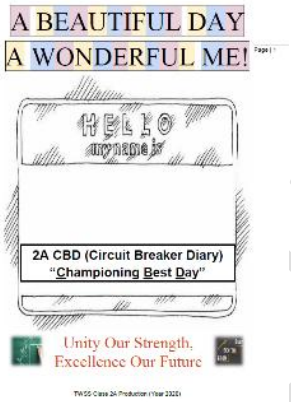
	Courtesy of Melvin Chan.

COVID – A Moment of Breakthrough

	Mr Melvin checking in with his form class on a Home-Based Learning (HBL) day, 2023. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan*.

The COVID pandemic resulted in many wow moments for me. I witnessed colleagues and students persevering, experimenting with technology and new ways of teaching and learning online. Using the Knowledge Building approach, my form class came up with a Circuit Breaker Diary to engage their classmates and encourage conversations while staying at home.

When we resumed physical lessons, my students and I started working with our counterparts in Clementi Town Secondary School to design a History bulletin on World War II topics of interest to them. The quality of my students' works deeply amazed me. I've learnt new content and perspectives from them too!

	*Circuit Breaker Diary* 2020 This diary was created by students in Mr Melvin's form class. *Courtesy of Melvin Chan*.

The Community that Keeps me Going

I love the quote "I am because we are". To me, having a community is important because it not only challenges me, but also affirms and develops me. It keeps me anchored in the world of teaching without getting burned out. That's the beauty of a community.

Adapted from:
Interview with Melvin Chan Joo Seng by the MOE Heritage Centre, 28 June 2024.
Ministry of Education, "The ideas never stop coming until the bell rings", Schoolbag: The Education News Site*, 31 Aug 2023.*

MOE Heritage Centre

Conclusion

"Every child deserves a champion. An adult who never gives up on them."

Rita Pierson on the role of teachers
Educator and counsellor

What lies within the heart of teachers?

Empathy and care for their students. A spirit of healthy excellence. Creativity and imagination to see possibilities. Courage and perseverance to adapt to change and make a positive difference. Collaboration and a sense of camaraderie in the fraternity. The list goes on, as demonstrated by the eight teachers we journeyed with, and the teachers around us.

At the core of a teacher's heart and identity is an authentic dedication to champion for and bring out the best in every student. Generations of teachers have worked together to stay true to this mission, and we salute them.

This exhibition is presented by:

HERITAGE CENTRE

Academy of Singapore Teachers
lead. care. inspire.

Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

Pen a message to a teacher who has touched your heart. What difference did he/she make in your life?

For more information, follow @moeheritagecentre on social media and scan the QR code below:

GO.gov.sg

https://go.gov.sg/hoat

OF Heritage Centre

Acknowledgements

The MOE Heritage Centre would like to express our appreciation to:

Melvin Chan Joo Seng
Nanda Bandara
Sharifah Masturah Shahab-Yokoyama
Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi
Tan Siok Cheng

Bukit Panjang Government High School
Chua Chu Kang Secondary School
Haig Girls' School
MOE Kindergarten @ Horizon
National Archives of Singapore
National Library Board
Pre-School Education Branch, MOE
Raffles Girls' Primary School
Raffles Institution
Rainbow Centre
Special Education Branch, MOE
St. Joseph's Institution

Due to the lack of documentation for earlier materials, some copyright owners were not traceable. If you have further information relating to the exhibition, please contact the MOE Heritage Centre.

MOE Heritage Centre