

Learning from others

While making a difference to the lives of his students, teacher Benny Lim learns from them as well

by april chong

AS A teacher, Mr Benny Lim, 35, has kept himself updated on the lives of students he has taught over the past decade: their challenges, their inspiring efforts, and their ups and downs.

While he has had the opportunity to mould the lives of many students, he has also learnt much himself.

He says: "I believe the true impact of a teacher is how the students turn out 10 years later."

He is proud to hear that his first few batches of students have been able to find their niche in Singapore society and pursue their aspirations in life.

For instance, Mr Lim fondly recalls a former student who doubted his leadership potential. However, Mr Lim observed that the student was sincere and good-natured, and got along with others.

Mr Lim nominated the student, Saddam Haque, to join the student council. He eventually became the council's vice-president and at 26 today, the Singapore Management University graduate is an entrepreneur who runs two kebab stalls.

"I like to think that his student councilor days helped in shaping him to be his own boss today," says Mr Lim.

Inspired since army days

As head of department at Cedar Girls' Secondary School, Mr Lim juggles teaching history with managing the school's Integrated Programme.

His passion for education stemmed from his army days, where he oversaw a platoon of cadets not much younger than him.

Then, he learnt the importance of fostering collaborative relationships and building strong rapport, and this heightened his interest in teaching.

Winning a Local Merit Scholarship (Teaching) meant he could pursue his passion while easing his parents' financial burden.

After completing his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in history from the National University of Singapore, he went on to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the National Institute of Education.



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The local scholarship comes with a four-year bond.

As a scholarship recipient, he had the opportunity to go on a 20-day leadership development course at Outward Bound (Slovakia) and a semester-long exchange programme at the University of California (Berkeley).

"It is about expanding one's horizons and seeing oneself as part of a big picture of the ministry and the Singapore Civil Service.

"It is also a good time to build and maintain a professional network as the participants are likely to be from different ministries. You can never tell when the network

will come in handy in future," he says.

Mr Lim has also gone on professional development courses and taken on varied designations and roles during his career.

His postings took him from Millennia Institute to the gifted education branch at the Ministry of Education headquarters and to his current position.



EDITOR Leong Phei Phei **PROJECT EDITOR** Lai Yi Ming **WRITER** Sheryl Quek **CONTRIBUTORS** Aaron Tan, April Chong, Douglas Chew, Hazel Tan, Narendra Aggarwal, Seow Kai Lun **CHIEF SUB-EDITOR** Uma Venkatraman **SUB-EDITOR** Jac Woo **ART DIRECTOR** Chris Tan **ART AND DESIGN** Kimmie Tan, Lynnette Chia, Steve Thompson, Vikki Chan **PHOTOGRAPHER** Chong Jun Liang **ADMIN MANAGER** Zain Afridi
PRINT CLASSIFIED MANAGEMENT Tan Ooi Boon, Desmond Kan
ADVERTISING SALES Adrian Neo (Project Manager), Adeline Sim, Jean Koh, Michael Yim, Cassandra Lim, Tricia Yu (6319-6169)

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"Out-of-class programmes and activities teach students various knowledge, skills and values. But to get them started, I need to perform administrative duties like planning and budgeting," says Mr Lim.

For instance, a leadership camp he organised for 80 students needed a lot of extra effort, but he found it rewarding to see students learn and have fun at the same time. It left such a deep impression on them that they still talk about it years down the road.

He also observed that when given the opportunity to engage in community work that was of interest to them, students can be passionate about the world around them.

He says: "It gave me faith and reason to believe that they are not necessarily the 'soft' and 'individualistic' image painted of their generation. By and large, there are societal issues which are of interest to them. What they need is a platform to engage them deeper in these issues."

Such was Mr Lim's passion for the education service that he was a finalist in last year's Outstanding Youth in Education Award.

For those still seeking out their career path, Mr Lim feels that while interest, organisational culture, salary and promotion prospects form the basic checklist, potential for personal and professional growth is also important.

Over the years, the teaching profession has evolved into three distinct career tracks where an educator can pursue a track according to his aspirations and inclinations.

"At the end of the day, teaching is a 'human' job. You work with people at every moment.

"Since every individual is unique, you always find yourself learning something from everyone, be it a student, a parent or the principal.

"As you make a difference to the lives of the students, they and others make a positive difference to your life as well," he says.