

(Part 1) My Teachers Taught Me To ...

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Ms Michelle Chin Mei Foong and Jerryl Ong Zi Wei at the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School's Year End Graduation Ceremony cum Prom. (Photo taken before COVID-19.)

This Teachers' Day, alumni of Special Education schools share life lessons they learnt from their teachers. This is the first of a two-part series.

Never give up

By Jerryl Ong Zi Wei

Back in Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School, I used to fear the travel-training sessions, afraid to bump into people while on my motorised wheelchair. When I first began the sessions, my former teacher Ms Michelle Chin Mei Foong waited for me in the wee hours of the morning at the bus stop near my home, just to support me in the commute. Because she believed in me, I never gave up. Now, I am able to travel independently and confidently.

Ms Michelle also believed we should embrace digital technology in today's world, and taught us ICT skills like developing an online resume and e-portfolio. Whenever we faced difficulties, she always encouraged us to learn at our own pace, and created opportunities for us to work in small groups so we could help each other in our work.

When I encountered difficulties with my design work during the School-to-Work Programme with Junior Art Lab, I recalled Ms Michelle's advice, which I still remember today: 'Always try and try and never give up.' With that in mind and many drafts later, I turned in my final design—a big step in pursuing my passion for graphic design.

Even after graduation, Ms Michelle kept in touch with us. Recently, she organised a virtual meet-up for the graduates of 2019 and the current batch of graduating students to encourage us to stay strong during the COVID-19 situation. It was heart-warming to meet my teacher again, and to remember how her lesson of perseverance had guided us through past obstacles, and continue to do so through current and future ones.

Jerryl Ong Zi Wei graduated from Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School (CPASS) in 2019. He is now a first-year trainee in the SG Enable S2W Transition Programme.



Mdm Salamah Salleh (right) and Phua Kia Yi (left) at Metta School. (Photo taken in strict accordance with safety and hygiene guidelines.)

Move on from failure

By Phua Kia Yi

My schooling years was not an easy time for me. When I was in the ITE Skills Certification in Food Preparation course in Metta School, although I worked hard, I was unable to meet the course expectations and failed in Year One. The feelings of desperation and uselessness brought me to the verge of giving up. However, Mdm Salamah Salleh's belief in me never wavered. She spent hours and hours coaching and encouraging me, and with that, I was able to regain my confidence and finally move on from that setback.

The challenges multiplied when I was on On-the-Job Training though. Mdm Salamah noticed my frustration, and paid frequent visits to my parents and employers. She listened to them, then shared with them more about me, to help them understand what support I would require. She then discussed possible solutions to allow me to get the support needed.

I remember something Mdm Salamah once said: 'Never scold a student for their disabilities. Can we scold a blind man for not being able to see?' I learned to not dwell on what I could not or failed to do, and to instead focus on what I can do or can learn to do better.

Today, I hold a full-time job and lead an independent life. It has been a long journey to get to where I am, and I am thankful that Mdm Salamah was there to help me move on after each time I stumbled on the way.

Phua Kia Yi graduated from Metta School in 2014. She is now working as a Therapy Aide at Metta Rehabilitation Centre for the Elderly.



Miss Sukvinder Kaur (left) and Muhd Danial Affandy Bin Mohd Johari (right) at MINDS Towner Gardens School. (Photo taken in strict accordance with safety and hygiene guidelines.)

Manage my anger

By Muhd Danial Affandy Bin Mohd Johari

In my earlier years in MINDS Towner Gardens School, I had low self-esteem, difficulty expressing my thoughts, and often threw temper tantrums and threatened to leave school when things didn't go my way. However, my teacher Miss Sukvinder Kaur, better known as Mrs Gill, never gave up on me.

Mrs Gill has taught in the school for 37 years, and taught me for three years. She taught us hard and soft skills, how to be independent and contributing individuals to society and kept us engaged meaningfully in her lessons through role-play, group work and discussions. She taught us project work at public places so we could generalise our learning. Most importantly, though, she taught us how to cultivate good attitudes.

At that time, I angered easily, even threatening to hurt others. Mrs Gill spoke to my mother and me to find out more details and share tips on how to help me overcome my anger, to ensure that I got as much support as I could get.

I remember telling Mrs Gill one day about my desire to work hard and to support my mother so that she could have a better life. Mrs Gill encouraged me to use that as motivation to work on managing my anger, so that I could develop good work habits and accomplish my goal.

Today, I work in the hotel industry. I was really proud when my colleagues and manager described me as 'proactive', 'confident', and 'responsible'. I am defined no longer by my anger, but by my other positive traits. For that and more, I am grateful to Mrs Gill. I wouldn't be where I am now if not for her.

Muhd Danial Affandy Bin Mohd Johari graduated from MINDS Towner Gardens School in 2017. He is now working as a steward at Pan Pacific Hotel.

For more stories like these, check out the second article in this series: [https://www.schoolbag.edu.sg/story/\(part-2\)-my-teachers-taught-me](https://www.schoolbag.edu.sg/story/(part-2)-my-teachers-taught-me)