



FUN, THE ONLY CONSTANT

By Mr Goh Poh Huat Martin

Mathematics teacher Mr Martin Goh believes in bringing out the joy of learning through having fun in the classroom.

The journey of life and learning

I cannot draw well, but I love looking at paintings.

A colleague introduced me to renowned French painter Claude Monet's 1877 work, the *Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare*. I was immediately drawn to it. The depiction of a steam locomotive pulling into a crowded train station reminded me of what children go through each time they reach a new milestone in their learning.

Students are very much like the train entering the station at *Gare Saint-Lazare*. It is smoky, and things are unclear at the beginning. Meeting new friends at each junction are like new passengers entering the train; whilst new teachers are the new train operators, doing their best to lead the direction of the train. Parents may have laid the tracks for the trains to go through; but essentially the children need to take this journey and the different experiences on their own. Parents, teachers, and friends are only a part of the child's journey.

Mathematical fun

Before my posting to Temasek Primary, I taught Mathematics in a secondary school. I realised the need to have a different repertoire of teaching strategies to cater to the primary school students. What did not change, however, was the students' desire for fun in the learning of Mathematics.

Hence, I embarked on the creation of the Multiplication Challenge. It began as a simple flash card activity to help students recall their multiplication tables. I then decided to inject an element of fun by having students challenge themselves.

I would set up a challenge area in the canteen during recess, and say 'each of you are given this deck of cards, you have 60 seconds to challenge yourself!' I would then shuffle the cards featuring several multiplication tables, and quickly give them out at

random. This activity generated a lot of interest among the other students in the canteen. The students started to gather near the challenge area, interacting with one another and trying to remember as many multiplication facts as possible with my students.

To motivate my students' interest in Mathematics further, I decided to set up a game corner in my Mathematics class.



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Mr Goh guiding students to play the multiplication flash card game

I selected educational games related to Mathematics for the corner. Word spread, and students from different classes soon gathered before each school day, simply to have some fun at Mathematics together with my students at this corner.

'Mr Goh, it's very inconvenient for all of us to gather at one place to retrieve the games,' lamented one of the students. I therefore transformed the game corner into a Mathematics Mobile Games Cart. The students began taking ownership of the cart, keeping track of the movement of the cart and the games that motivate them in the learning of Mathematics. It was also an opportunity for them to develop their sense of responsibility. By being exposed to these educational games, my students were also inspired to create some of their own for the school's annual Mathematics Games Day.



Students learning through play with the Mathematics games

Joy of teaching

Even as we teach children all about life, they too teach us what life is all about — like the one who made me realise the inconvenience of having a fixed games corner. I often ask myself whether I am doing enough for them, and whether I am an inspiring role model for my students.

At times like these, I remind myself of what the late Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, once said: 'Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.'

'Teaching is a lot of hard work, and a lot of heart work.'

This has been my philosophy in guiding my work as a teacher. I must have the joy in teaching before I can ignite the joy in learning in my students. Teaching is a lot of hard work, and a lot of heart work. To encourage and instil in my students the love for learning, every student who passes through my hands will be presented with a signature token, which is a specially designed handmade 'heart' from me.



A handmade 'heart' token from Mr Goh

