



TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOU

By Mr Lim Chuan Li

Whether it is through mentoring or the teaching of mathematics, Mr Lim Chuan Li hopes to make learning a personal and inclusive journey for his students.

Connecting through Mathematics

'Did you know that the study of conics (shapes like ellipses and parabolas) can help you understand certain weather patterns and predict comet sightings because of Earth's elliptical orbit?'

Mathematical concepts in the 'A' level syllabus can appear abstract to students. So, I often think about how I can relate these concepts to real-life contexts so that my students can better understand them.

In an attempt to better convey concepts to students, I put together five-minute videos for students' learning. One of them is the 'Maclaurin Series', which helps to approximate functions with polynomials—a topic that may sound relatively dry to many. Hence, to enthuse students, they role-play as 'spies' to solve the problems when viewing the video. Complete with spy music, I transformed the lesson into a training programme to prepare the spies for a top secret mission.



Mr Lim building safe spaces for his students to learn and grow.

And when all my fancy tricks fail? 'Just try, won't die' is the refrain that I found myself echoing to students during mathematics classes. I hope to build safe spaces for students, where it is acceptable to make mistakes

and try again—that they may not only be sharpened cognitively, but grow in character.

Outside of the classroom, I establish rapport by joining them for lunches or even PE and CCA training at times, or simply by asking them "How are you?". These are invaluable opportunities where I can learn more about a student, especially if he or she appears to be struggling in class. Sometimes, where appropriate, I will share my challenges with them too. This gives them the assurance that they are not alone in their fight, and encourages them to find their own source of strength and motivation to overcome their struggles.



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When I was a student in Temasek Junior College (TJC), I did not perform as well as my peers academically. I lost my hearing in my left ear earlier due to an illness which hindered my learning in class. On some days, I worked part-time after school. These life experiences have enabled me to empathise better with students who struggle to keep up academically in school despite trying their best in the midst of their difficulties.

My then Civics Tutor, Mr Low Kian Seh, motivated us with his stories on how he overcame his challenges, and sought to understand us as individuals. His personal touch and genuine care was exceptionally impactful. In fact, Mr Low was the first tutor whom I shared my challenges with. In retrospect, my experience with Mr Low had inspired me to be an educator, and also greatly influenced the way I relate to my students. For being a recipient in OYEA 2019, I suppose we have come a full circle as Mr Low was an OYEA 2013 recipient!

Growing values to be a leader of self

As a child, my mother modelled generosity through her countless acts of giving. I observed her frequently giving away clothes, food, or her time to anyone who needed it, despite our family's financial struggles. She taught us to look beyond our circumstances and that we should be sensitive to and help those who may be in greater need. Even though we would have qualified for financial assistance in school, my mother withheld our application as she considered that others may need the support more.

Beyond my role as a Mathematics teacher, I take on a personal mission to inculcate and anchor the values of resilience in my students. Annually, TJC organises Defy Camp, where participants defy their own limits and challenge themselves to be better. Once, in the lead up to the camp, one student did not submit his work despite multiple extensions, right up to the day of the camp. With the support of his parents and the camp organisers, I kept him back in school to complete his assignment while his classmates left for their adventure. We had an introspective reflection about the importance for being responsible for his own decisions. 'This is your Camp Defy journey: to defy who you used to be and become someone more accountable and committed. Complete your work and you can join your friends tomorrow.' Caring for my students means helping them to step out of their comfort zones, to wrestle, and eventually overcome their problems.

Growing empathy to be a leader of others

As a teacher mentor to student leaders, I have had the privilege of creating opportunities for students to serve the college and give back to the wider community.

In 2017, I led a group of student leaders on the Overseas Leadership Immersion Programme in Hong Kong. To consolidate students' learning from the programme, I challenged them to propose ideas for the College community. Eventually, after surveying the student population, they sought to organise the inaugural mega House event involving all six levels of students in the College through diverse activities facilitating inter-level interactions in 2018. In their leadership undertakings, my student leaders faced various challenges, which promoted inventive thinking and tenacity through problem-solving.



Mr Lim taking time to mentor his students beyond lessons.

Beyond the College, the student leaders were also challenged to serve other communities, in particular, children from single-parent families, the elderly and those with special needs. It is heartening and humbling to witness how a school-initiated project can prompt students to look beyond themselves and ignite their passion to serve others, with some choosing to serve in the Youth Executive Committees in Community Clubs to continue their service.

As I continue my journey as an educator, I hope for my students to pursue excellence in all that they do, extend kindness to those around them, and to always rise above their circumstances. Go forth with the confidence to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life ahead of you!

