



Outstanding Youth in Education Award

WHEN PASSION LEADS TO YOUR DREAM JOB

By Wong Yi Fong

Mr Wong Yi Fong's wish for his students is that they find work that gives them as much joy as he gets from teaching Geography.

Knowing the options

When I was in university, I knew someone who had no interest in what he was studying – he only wanted to get a degree. When I asked him why he chose this course, he said it was the “best” one that he qualified for. Subsequently, he interned in a company in a related industry because it was “the practical thing to do”. When he graduated, he got a job in that company.

I remember his telling me, “Be realistic! How many people actually like their jobs?” I felt very sad about the values he was espousing. Are we driven only by pragmatism and economic stability? As an aspiring teacher at that time, I asked myself: “What can I do to help my future students so that they would not end up as uninspired? How can I help them discover their interests and passion?”

I discussed this with a group of like-minded friends, and we thought that one way to help students explore would be to expose them to the many different careers in the world at a young age. To do this, instead of merely giving career talks, we would get volunteers who would be willing to mentor students. Through “mini-apprenticeships”, these mentors would share their stories of how they found their passion, conduct activities to give students an opportunity to experience their profession, and most importantly, guide students to reflect on what motivates them in a career.

With this idea, my friends and I set up a non-profit organisation to partner schools and bring the programme to students. When we ran the programme in my own school, I was heartened by how inquisitive the students were about different professions. They actively asked questions and had thoughtful reflections about what they wanted to do in the future.

One student told me he had thought a computer programmer must be a genius who is very intelligent; however, through the apprenticeship, he realised that computer programming was about having a logical

thinking process, and most importantly, it was something he could possibly do with practice. Another student, upon the completion of the programme, told me how grateful he was for the mentors who had spent so many Saturdays helping him find his passion. Though he was a quiet student, he felt at ease asking his mentor why she is so passionate about her job. These moments give me great joy and satisfaction when I see my effort benefitting my students and their future.

My own journey of discovery

So how did I come to choose my own profession? As a child, I was fascinated by the destructive power of nature, in the form of natural disasters like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. I found myself wanting to learn more. I read books and watched documentaries, and even studied my elder siblings' Geography textbooks. When I had to pick a subject combination in school, it was obvious that Geography had to be in it.



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When I was in university, learning about geography ignited a streak of wanderlust in me – I wanted to visit other countries in order to experience their physical environments and learn about the unique culture of each place.



Mr Wong believes in making learning authentic

Making sense of the world

As a teacher, I want to share my passion for Geography with my students. It is a discipline that helps us make sense of the world – how both the physical and human environments interact with each other to make up the world we know today. Geography also teaches us to appreciate our world. It imbues in us a sense of social justice; we know that the world we live in is imperfect, yet it is our duty to make it a better place.

In class, I draw heavily on my travel experiences. From talking about environmental degradation in the context of Easter Island, to the melting of Antarctica's azure glaciers due to global warming – a lesson in Geography is not just about cognitive knowledge, but also an emotional response, a desire to do something about the world. I truly believe in bringing the world to my classroom.



Mr Wong transforming his travel experiences into learning opportunities for students

“It is my wish that through my role in education, I can help my students define their own meanings of success.”

I count myself fortunate to have discovered early in my life two things that enraptured me for years – my passion for Geography, and my passion to teach. I enjoy the work I do and find it tremendously meaningful to be able to contribute to society in my own way. I know that each person finds motivation and meaning in different ways and fields. That is why it is my wish that through my role in education, I can help my students define their own meanings of success – that one day, they will find something that offers them the joy that I get from teaching Geography.

