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### SPED Teachers Share Strategies

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#### Better Learning through Design

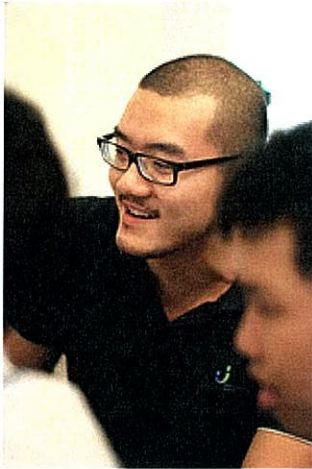
For Innovative SPED Teacher awardee Victor Ong Tai Leng, it's off to design school for creative students. Specifically, it's off to Pathlight Design Studio, which was started the year he joined the school as a full-time teacher in 2005. Today, Mr Ong is Head of IT and Design in Pathlight School, the only special education school that teaches the mainstream curriculum to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

From its role in supporting the then newly-formed school in its collateral and communication needs, the studio's role has rapidly expanded over the last two years. Now it is where "talented

Pathlight School teacher Victor Ong teaches design studio skills to better engage some of his students.

students learn commercially viable skills that might allow them a chance to work in the creative industry," elaborates Mr Ong. "In 2007, we started a formal training plan called Pre-vocation, for learners with higher levels of autism." The school currently conducts daily training curriculum periods called Design Worksite, Cafe Worksite and Office Worksite.

Design Worksite commenced with two students in January 2007, who made "remarkable progress that surprised even me," says Mr Ong. "By mid-2007, we had six students. In 2008, we expect to have a total of nine design trainees." Typically, the students "learn the tools for designing, for example, Flash Animation, Print layouts and handwork skills needed in an actual design studio for an advertising agency," he explains. As a former art director of a local advertising agency, he is able to spot latent talent among his students, and customises his teaching style to maximise their creative potential.



At the Pathlight Design Studio, teacher Victor Ong looks out for budding talent among students.

Skills learning aside, being engaged in what they are good at has helped modify the students' behaviour. Zina Chia is an ASD student with high self-agenda and a tendency to throw tantrums when her demands are not met. Her strength in comic drawing and IT work, and interest in Japanese anime and 3D modelling make her good candidate to train as a designer, and sustain her motivation for learning. She now "produces impressive Flash Work", points out Mr Ong.

Not only that, "she now comes to school with a clearer sense of purpose because along with her design skills, she acquired a higher self-esteem. She is more compliant and sees more purpose in communicating and listening. When she experiences success in

learning design, she is more inclined to try to succeed in improving her behaviour in other subjects and classes too," reflects Mr Ong.

Another success story is Tong Qin Yuan, who is learning to use print design software like Adobe InDesign. A highly anxious student, he is very dependent on step-by-step instruction. "The marked change is his ability to work independently with visual and written instructions," says Mr Ong. "His work stamina has increased greatly too. He is a success story of how enjoying one's learning produces excellent work."