**Straits Times Forum Letters**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2013 THE STRAITS TIMES

MYPOINT

## Life stories offer gems of wisdom

THE unruly and destructive actions of the Little India rioters were uncalled for, and I commend the police for their efficient response.

However, I am disappointed by the other "riot" – the flood of insensitive remarks and invidious comments on social media.

I visited Little India just a week before the riot, on a learning trail to understand more about the needs of the community and the foreign workers.

The most important lesson I learnt was to let go of my preconceived notions.

I spoke to a Bangladeshi worker at the end of the trail. I was initially apprehensive, but we were conversing like friends within minutes.

Hearing his life story and his dream of ensuring that his son gets educated was an eye-opening experience for me.

Foreign workers like him have played a pivotal role in building our city. While we enjoy comfortable lives, they have to constantly worry about their families miles away.

Instead of expressing our gratitude, most of us ignore the foreign workers in our midst. Some of us are quick to point fingers and spread malicious remarks when an incident like the riot occurs.

Listen to the stories of those around us, especially the underprivileged. Their narratives may be different but their stories may hold gems of wisdom, and it is the sharing of this wisdom that makes a community.

**Melissa Tan Siew Ting (Miss)**

Life Stories Offer Gems of Wisdom – 18th Dec 2013

## Help students develop communication skills

THE Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme, which allows students to enter a school of choice based on qualities other than academic results, has become very popular.

Many parents send their children for special preparatory programmes to prepare them for the DSA selection process.

These programmes can range from interview preparation classes to helping students boost their portfolio.

Students from less privileged backgrounds will likely not be able to afford such programmes.

Such students may already be academically disadvantaged compared with their more well-to-do peers who have tuition and enrichment classes.

With these DSA preparatory classes, these students face yet another hurdle in identifying their potential in non-academic areas.

Six years ago, I attempted to enter a popular Integrated Programme (IP) school via the DSA.

However, I was rejected after the interview stage, probably because of my poor communication skills.

In hindsight, I might have been successful had I the opportunity to attend preparatory classes.

Two years later, I once again tried to enter an IP school and succeeded.

The difference in outcome was not because of an interview preparation class.

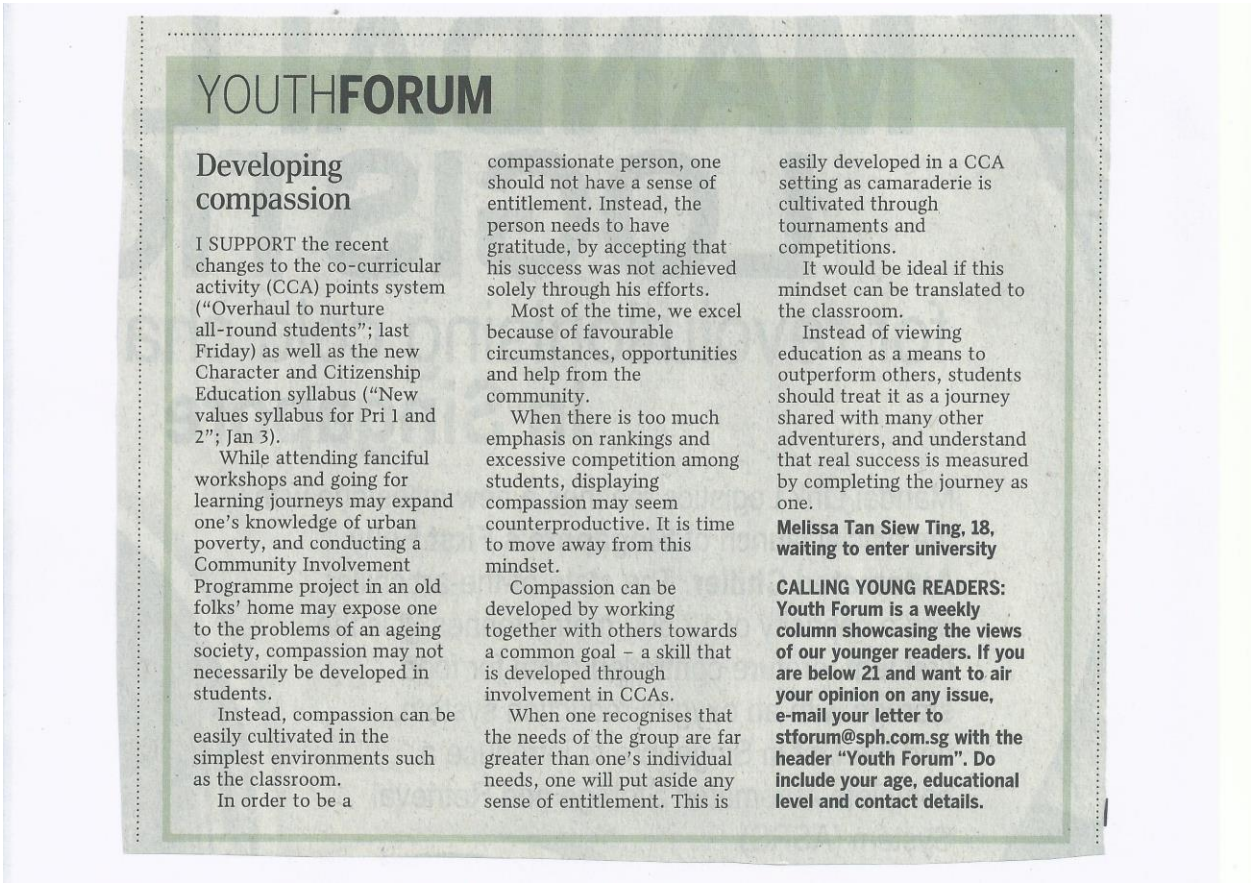
Rather, it was because I was given the opportunity to develop my public speaking and communication skills in secondary school.

Developing these skills through real-life experiences is more impactful than a one-off interview class, as these experiences stay with you for life, while the class just prepares you for an interview.

I hope primary school teachers will help identify potential DSA pupils, and develop their personal voice and communication skills through real-life experiences, especially for those who may not have the resources to attend such programmes outside of school.

**Melissa Tan Siew Ting, 18, waiting to enter university**

Help Students Develop Communication Skills – 1st Jan 2014



YOUTH**FORUM**

## Developing compassion

I SUPPORT the recent changes to the co-curricular activity (CCA) points system ("Overhaul to nurture all-round students"; last Friday) as well as the new Character and Citizenship Education syllabus ("New values syllabus for Pri 1 and 2"; Jan 3).

While attending fanciful workshops and going for learning journeys may expand one's knowledge of urban poverty, and conducting a Community Involvement Programme project in an old folks' home may expose one to the problems of an ageing society, compassion may not necessarily be developed in students.

Instead, compassion can be easily cultivated in the simplest environments such as the classroom.

In order to be a compassionate person, one should not have a sense of entitlement. Instead, the person needs to have gratitude, by accepting that his success was not achieved solely through his efforts.

Most of the time, we excel because of favourable circumstances, opportunities and help from the community.

When there is too much emphasis on rankings and excessive competition among students, displaying compassion may seem counterproductive. It is time to move away from this mindset.

Compassion can be developed by working together with others towards a common goal – a skill that is developed through involvement in CCAs.

When one recognises that the needs of the group are far greater than one's individual needs, one will put aside any sense of entitlement. This is easily developed in a CCA setting as camaraderie is cultivated through tournaments and competitions.

It would be ideal if this mindset can be translated to the classroom.

Instead of viewing education as a means to outperform others, students should treat it as a journey shared with many other adventurers, and understand that real success is measured by completing the journey as one.

**Melissa Tan Siew Ting, 18, waiting to enter university**

**CALLING YOUNG READERS: Youth Forum is a weekly column showcasing the views of our younger readers. If you are below 21 and want to air your opinion on any issue, e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg with the header "Youth Forum". Do include your age, educational level and contact details.**

Developing Compassion – 15th Jan 2014

# Prolonged gadget use harmful to toddlers

Published on Jan 27, 2014



TODDLERS watching cartoons on tablets while lying in their strollers and children playing games on smartphones are now a common sight in public places such as restaurants, malls and the MRT network.

While the electronic devices are convenient sources of entertainment for the young, overexposure and prolonged usage can lead to harmful effects.

Overdependence on electronic devices at a young age may lead to learning difficulties in future. The smartphone or tablet interface may be cool and intriguing, especially the "slide-to-unlock" function. However, these convenient swipe-and-respond features may narrow the scope of perception of a young child's experience of the world.

If the child is exposed to virtual interfaces early in life, he may start adopting similar behaviour towards physical objects. This may result in confusion, especially if the child is still in the midst of understanding his interactions with his environment.

Once the child has adapted to the virtual environment, it will be difficult to wean him off the devices, further exacerbating the problem.

There are many applications that are suited for children, such as introductions to the alphabet or mathematics quizzes, which may aid in the child's learning. However, such applications should be used only when the child is of appropriate maturity, when he is able to distinguish between virtual and physical environments well.

It is another matter if the devices serve only as sources of entertainment. Children do not have a strong sense of self-discipline or understanding of addiction, and exposing them to electronic gaming at an early stage in life may lead to gaming addiction in future.

Research has shown that extreme gaming addiction can have a detrimental impact on social interaction, studies and mental health.

As children become more comfortable with their devices, they may grow up shunning social gatherings, preferring to tap away on the device for leisure instead.

What has happened to spending quality time with childhood friends in the neighbourhood playground or having an interesting conversation with the family while waiting for dinner to be served?

Placing an iPad in front of a bored toddler may reduce the probability of embarrassing tantrums in the short run, but parents risk raising a withdrawn child who is more comfortable with playing games than conversing with his loved ones.

**Melissa Tan Siew Ting (Miss)**



Forum Letters

'No win, no fee' arrangement worth considering (/premium/forum-letters/story/no-win-no-fee-arrangement-worth-considering-20140128)

Making a case for contingency fees (/premium/forum-letters/story/making-case-contingency-fees-20140128)

Singaporeans not short on empathy (/premium/forum-letters/story/singaporeans-not-short-empathy-20140128)

Accept apology and show magnanimity (/premium/forum-letters/story/accept-apology-and-show-magnanimity-20140128)

Efficiency shouldn't be at expense of safety (/premium/forum-letters/story/efficiency-shouldnt-be-expense-safety-20140128)

Too many risks with bitcoins (/premium/forum-letters/story/too-many-risks-bitcoins-20140128)

Necessary to adapt to fast pace of life (/premium/forum-letters/story/necessary-adapt-fast-pace-life-20140128)

Prolonged Gadget Use Harmful to Toddlers – 28th Jan 2014

# Boost scientific literacy in today's info-laden world

WE NEED to encourage students to take an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem) fields, not just for the sake of increasing the number of Stem graduates but also to improve the scientific literacy of the general public ("Teach technology's role in shaping society" by Mr Ronald Chan Wai Hong; Tuesday).

Receiving rigorous Stem training in early life is beneficial, even if one decides not to pursue a Stem degree.

Having competent scientific literacy and critical thinking skills helps one sieve out fact from fiction in the deluge of information in the media and on the Internet.

The habit of questioning and critiquing everything one reads comes from the practice of scientific inquiry.

There are many factors that may encourage a child to take an interest in science.

Parents need to dispel their own notions that Stem fields are not as glamorous as finance, law or medicine.

Children are born scientists and are naturally curious.

More often than not, parents unwittingly stifle their children's curiosity by failing to answer their relentless questions about nature or, in the other extreme, send them for too many tuition classes.

My interest in science came about because my parents recognised my insatiable curiosity about the world and bought me a set of encyclopaedias to keep me occupied.

Instead of sending me to a multitude of science enrichment classes, my parents gave me the freedom to explore various "cool" science topics on my own.

Teachers, too, have to encourage students to learn science for its intrinsic value, rather than for examinations.

My teachers encouraged me to read beyond the curriculum and were open to questions which were beyond the lesson material.

Hands-on experiences, field trips and research projects help students understand how various scientific concepts apply in real-world situations, as well as help them better appreciate the great impact that Stem has on their lives and the world.

The various research projects I took up in school enabled me to apply scientific concepts in novel ways to solve problems.

These opportunities also gave me a glimpse of the exciting potential in Stem fields.

It is the confluence of many factors that play a part in encouraging more young people to embark on a Stem career and persevere in it.

**Melissa Tan Siew Ting (Miss)**

Boost Scientific Literacy in Today's Info-laden World – 11th June 2015

# High IQ does not guarantee success

PUBLISHED JUN 22, 2015, 5:50 AM SGT

I AGREE with Mr George Lim Heng Chye ("Risky to gauge potential based purely on IQ"; last Friday) that there are many indicators of success other than IQ.

In fact, the knowledge of one's IQ could have a detrimental effect on one's growth if one puts too much stock in it.

Psychological research from Stanford University has shown that children who perceive intelligence as something innate and fixed perform poorly as compared to their counterparts who perceive intelligence as something that can change with hard work and experience.


Children who were praised for their intelligence instead of their effort were more likely to shun difficult tasks, for fear of looking stupid.

On the other hand, those who were praised for their effort were more likely to take on challenging tasks so that they could learn from their mistakes.

Children who know that they have higher than average IQ levels may become complacent and think that they need not put in much effort to learn new skills.

These "gifted" children may perform splendidly early in life but may falter when tasks become more challenging and when relying purely on intelligence is not sufficient.

Conversely, children who have been tested and appear to have middling IQ levels may carry the misconception that their success in life is limited by their genes.

There have been many cases of late bloomers who struggled during their early years but later rose to success because of other attributes, such as their tenacity and resilience.

Decades of research have shown that those with a growth mindset are more successful in school, work and relationships than those who hold on to a fixed mindset.

In this day and age, the ability to adapt and learn are far better indicators of success than IQ.

Children are already subjected to rigorous standardised tests in schools. Instead of sending them to yet another test, why not inculcate in them the importance of hard work, resilience and integrity?



High IQ does not Guarantee Success – 22nd June 2015