

# INSPIRING YOUNG MINDS TO ACHIEVE SOARING ASPIRATIONS

**D**ika celebrates its 17th anniversary this year, a milestone made possible through the hard work of many. Children are the bedrock upon which a nation builds its future; our collective commitment empowers young learners with the mindset to become global citizens who will create a better tomorrow for themselves, their families, their communities, and the planet.

I am especially proud of our alumni. It makes me very happy to see you realise your dreams, and while you strive to be your best, remember that you too are an instrument for young learners to discover theirs.

"It takes a village to raise a child", and in much the same vein, many have come together to make Dika College the reputable institution that it is today. For this, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to staff (present and past), partners, advisors, advocates, parents, students, and alumni. You all have much to be proud of.

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Nelvianna was handpicked in 2017 to participate in the Sabah Community Transformation Project, aimed at making available and improving standards of early childhood education in the interiors of Sabah.

## CHANGE, THE ONLY CONSTANT

I want to share an experience that is as vivid now as when it happened in 1964. I was fourteen. I was at school, attending a career motivational talk delivered by one of my teachers, a gentleman who taught Science. Suddenly, I hear my name. Unsure what would happen next, I went on stage. The next thing I remember was my teacher's hand on my shoulder, and the words, "This young man writes almost impeccable English", words I will remember for the rest of my life. But my English prior to that moment was anything but "impeccable".

Just a year before, I knew only three words, "She is beautiful". Just a year earlier, I languished at the bottom positions in examinations. Just a year prior, my mother passed unexpectedly. Overnight, I felt uprooted. Amid this, it dawned on me how much I had taken school for granted.

To this day, I am unsure what prompted me to buy an Oxford Learner's Dictionary; but I got myself one and made every effort to master the English language. Everything else seemed to follow and within a year, I topped the entire form.

After my form three, I did what I thought would be impossible; I left my hometown of Pontian, Johor, for Kuala Lumpur. In the ensuing years, I completed a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, worked, and without formal classes, passed Part 2 of the UK Council in Engineering Examinations (CEI) and became a professional engineer.

My story represents many other stories, and it is Dika's story, too, brought about by the only constant - change.

“My story represents many other stories, and it is Dika's story, too, born out of the only constant - change.”



The young Sim Quan Seng (far right) with school mates at the Technical Institute at Maxwell Road, Kuala Lumpur. In 1969, Sim left the school a high achiever.

## THE DIKA STORY

Dika was 'born' in 2004 for a passionate purpose, to nurture aspiring educators to inspire children below six. In 2005, we welcomed the first batch of students into our Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme. Thus began an unstoppable journey to uplift ECE standards in the country.

Today, our success with the education of young children paves the way for us to navigate and affect ECE education functions with greater breadth and depth. Our experiences of witnessing our students and alumni improve the lives of others constantly inspire us to push the boundaries of our commitment to ECE. Our vision, "Inspire to Aspire", is a beacon that empowers us to be, as Mahatma Gandhi said, the change we want to see.



Nurturing friendships. Sim greatly values his relationships with family, friends and staff.

## GAME-CHANGING ECE

Through the years, Dika has never shied away from championing change within the ECE sector. Our efforts, amongst others, led to the launch of the first Diploma in Special Education in Malaysia, enabled through our collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

Diligence led us to work with the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) to map out strategies for the Pre-School Education Lab, a National Key Economic Area (NKEA) initiative. We advocated for better trained ECE educators under the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025).

We challenged ECE benchmarks, a milestone marked with the country's first 3+0 pathway to an accredited degree from the New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). Our Smart Collaboration with BAC Education in 2021 resonates with our uncompromising commitment to increase ECE educator numbers and create better support for the industry.

“I hope that you will be a hand on someone's shoulder and a voice for uplifting words, for there are thousands of reasons for us to soldier on.”



Dika graduates at their Graduation Ceremony. Many go on to be leaders in the industry.

## EQUITABLE ECE

Each milestone that Dika achieves inspires further aspirations for an equitable ECE. Our graduate, Nelvianna Masandul, works with an organisation to establish kindergartens in the interiors of Sabah. It warms my heart to hear of this, and I invite our alumni to connect with the Alumni Office to keep in touch.

Through our partnership with the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), we continue to empower young people like Nelvianna with the opportunity to bring change to their communities. It is my sincere hope that we continue to reach out and do more.

## CHANGE, THE ONLY HOPE

The changes we face in current times will test our commitment to the ECE sector. Covid-19 and its Variants of Concern (VOC) continue to keep Malaysia's 8 million students (pre-primary to higher education) out of school. The Pandemic further exacerbates existing severe inequalities in education, and remote learning remains a wish list for many despite the promise of technology.

As educators, we empathise with emotions of fear and uncertainty. Dig deep within ourselves to embrace the trends at our disposal, and more importantly, join our hearts as we do our hands. The country must come together to put the child at the core of our hearts and efforts.

Call it the new norm. Call it by any other name; the world we live in is forever changed. What remains unwavering is our goal to inspire young minds to achieve soaring aspirations. We must be a hand on someone's shoulder and a voice for uplifting words, for there are thousands of reasons more for us to soldier on.

## THANK YOU

Dr Sim Quan Seng  
**A Teacher at Heart**

**SIM'S ADVICE:** I wish I had kept in touch with the teacher who profoundly impacted my life. Make sure you don't make that same mistake.