



Aspiring  
Woman  
Entrepreneurs  
2019/2020



A woman plays multiple roles in different stages of her life. Motherhood is one of the tipping points of many women's lives. It usually brings out the best in them and changes their attitude to strive for a better life than they had for their children. Deanne Chong-Duffield is no different from one of these many inspiring women and her son, was the main catalyst of her transformation.



*Ms Deanne Chong-Duffield*

Ms Deanne Chong, the founder of Growing Up Gifted, has just been awarded with the Aspiring Woman Entrepreneur's Award, and here is the inspirational story about her life. Before having her son, Deanne was trained as a lawyer in the United Kingdom. After which, she practiced law in Singapore for a short period yet she felt it was not her calling. Subsequently, Deanne left the law firm and tried working in Corporate Banking instead, but still she felt unfulfilled. She felt that she had not found her niche where she could excel and spread her wings.

It was while she was reading an article in the Straits Times Newspapers one day that she had an epiphany. The article talked about how the minds of children worked and this struck a chord within her. This drove her to further explore and research in depth on early childhood. She eventually got her Masters Degree in both Early Childhood and Gifted Education in the United States of America, specializing in Curriculum Development. With her knowledge in both fields, it further reinforced her belief that children at a tender age, can have their minds stretched and potentials unleashed with the proper exposure, techniques and content.

When Deanne returned to Singapore, she could not find the right business partner to start a preschool with, and so she shelved this dream because the project seemed too daunting. *"I was trained as a lawyer, and then a curriculum specialist. I didn't have the guts to start my own business because I thought I lacked formal training in business management, and I hadn't considered myself as an entrepreneur before."* However, her priorities shifted when her son was born. Wanting to give the utmost best to her first-born,

when he was 10 months old, she set out on a quest to look for a pre-school with a curriculum that could bring out the best in her child. None of the existing preschools during that time, 18 years ago, fitted her criteria. It was only then that she had a spark of inspiration and a bolt of courage to set up her own Preschool based on the concepts of gifted education but available to all children.

Her first student was her son. When her son was 14 to 17 months old, she started teaching him phonics and by the time he was 2 to 3 years old, he was reading magazines, newspapers. He was even featured on Channel News Asia twice in their Gifted Child programme.

Armed with her beliefs and newfound confidence in herself, and her own son as her best testimonial, she took her first step and opened a small school that only had two classrooms at United Square which offered weekend programs too. All of the English curriculum is created by Deanne herself, and is known as the **5-Point Intelligence Approach™** which has received several accolades and awards.

Deanne's school flourished and by the second year, she had her mother help her manage the operations of the school so that she could focus solely on the curriculum to make it better, and address all the issues with lesson plan delivery, like the resistance from teachers who refused to teach her curriculum to children that young. She imported a phonics technique and modified it for the youngest age groups of infants and toddlers but her teachers found it unorthodox. It is a common sentiment that toddlers are too young to learn phonics or how to read. However with Deanne's belief and training in gifted education, she knew of the possibilities that could be achieved with young children and so she pushed her teachers to strictly implement her techniques and lessons. She also started writing books in 2012 and has written over 200 phonics storybooks and activity books since.

In 3 years, her business grew from just 20 students to over 500 students. She hired a Chinese HOD to oversee and create the curriculum for Chinese reading and writing. She also hired a Music HOD for original songs, music and movement.

Deanne's primary business activity has been a kindergarten for children from 2.5 to 6 years old, and an enrichment centre for children 8 months to 2.5 years old. Enrichment lessons are 1.5 hours per session.

She also has another business called Book & Pen Masters, provided by U Excel that caters to students from 3 to 7 years old, focusing on developing reading and writing skills.

Over the years, many investors have approached her to invest in her business and overseas clients even tried to get franchise rights to open franchises overseas. At the time, she felt that she was not ready for such an expansion yet as there was much to do locally.

Deanne recently opened two full-fledged preschools with childcare facilities. This is her current business goal. *"We are now expanding and reaching out to more children with full-time working parents. Being a curriculum specialist, it is important for me that GUG Preschool is still about providing stellar education for children and ensuring that they are prepared for the challenges of primary schooling. Proper routine childcare services should already be a given."*

Looking back at her journey from the time she became a mother and stepping out of her comfort zone to embark on this education endeavour, Deanne is thankful for all the trials and tribulation. Her son, who is now 18 years old, is a clear testimonial of a child who benefitted from her techniques. She has touched and changed more than 15,000 little lives and hopes to impart her knowledge to many more children in time to come.

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