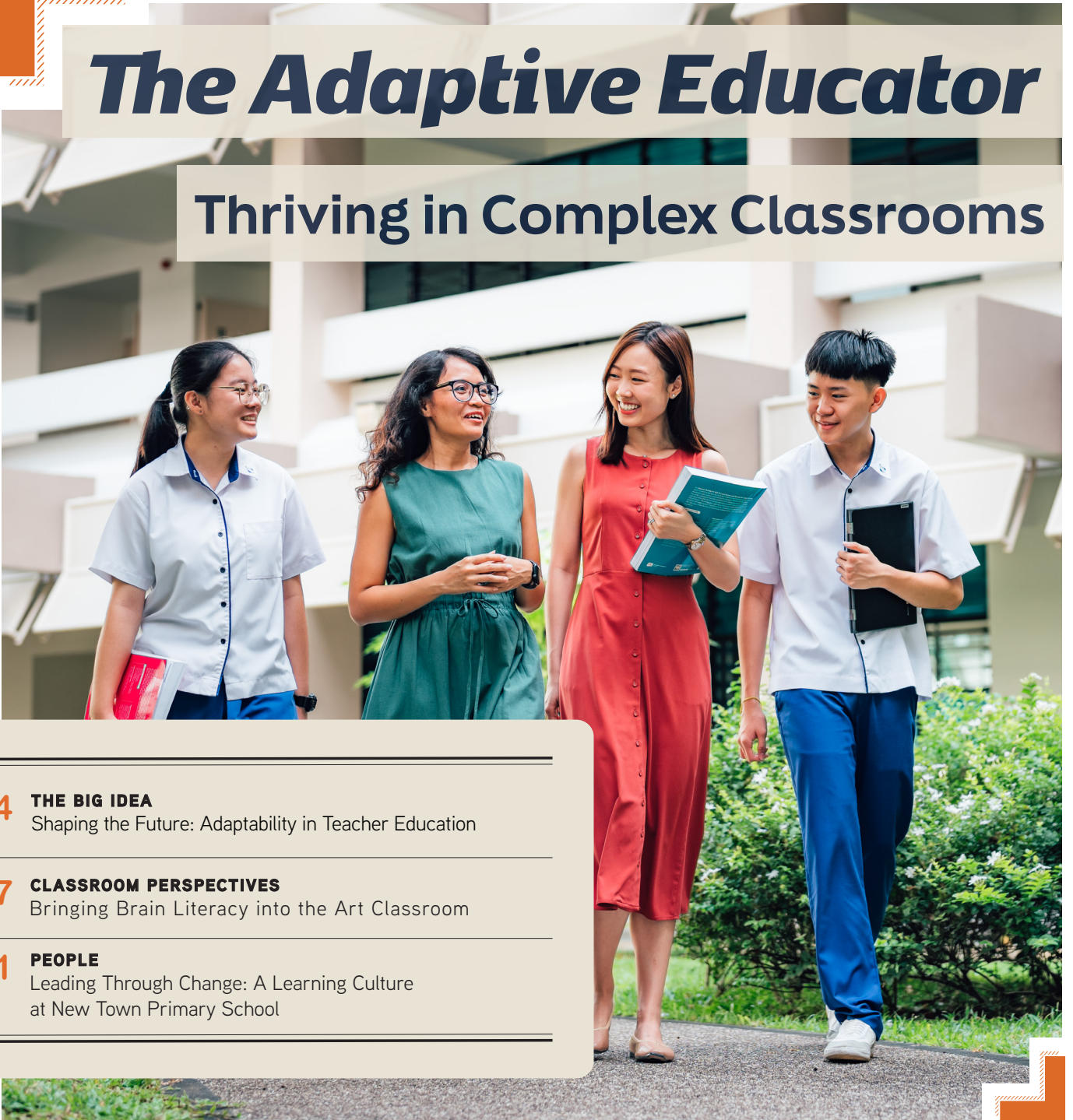


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# *The Adaptive Educator*

## Thriving in Complex Classrooms



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## Adaptability: More than Coping with Change

Adaptability, resilience and reflection are often spoken of as separate qualities, but together they define the kind of professional teachers need to become in today's dynamic educational landscape. In an environment marked by shifting curricula, diverse learner profiles and rapid technological change, adaptability is no longer something to be seen as “good to have”. Instead, I see adaptability as a core disposition that allows teachers to navigate uncertainty with confidence and purpose.

At NIE, research and practice consistently point to adaptability as a journey rather than a trait. Adaptable teachers are willing to question assumptions, try new approaches, fail forward and see uncertainty as a resource for growth rather than a threat. This mindset is closely intertwined with resilience, understood not just as “bouncing back” from difficulty, but “bouncing forward” – using challenges, daily hassles and even setbacks as catalysts for new insights, identity growth and professional renewal, a perspective highlighted by Associate Professor Fang Yanping in the “Research in Action” online exclusive article.

Such growth does not happen in isolation. Teacher resilience is strengthened in supportive ecosystems where colleagues, mentors and school leaders create safe spaces for risk-taking, meaning-making and honest conversations about the struggles that teachers face. Within these spaces, reflection becomes the bridge connecting experience and learning. As shared by Dr Lee Shu Shing, when reflection is not treated as a mere form-filling exercise, but as a disciplined, evidence-informed inquiry into real classroom dilemmas, teachers can deepen their pedagogical reasoning and refine their practice in context.

In this issue, we also hear directly from educators who are learning to adapt in their own classrooms, schools and communities. Their stories – including Principal Ms Hannah Chia's conviction that growth is forged through “productive struggle” and grounded in authentic, in-situ professional learning – remind us that adaptability is cultivated over time, in real classrooms with real students. Together, these voices show that when teachers adapt, “bounce forward” and reflect with curiosity, they do more than cope with change; they help shape it, modelling for their students what it means to keep learning and growing through complexity.

### **Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi**

Dean, Teacher Education & Undergraduate Programmes  
National Institute of Education

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“Bouncing Forward”: What Research Says About Teacher Resilience



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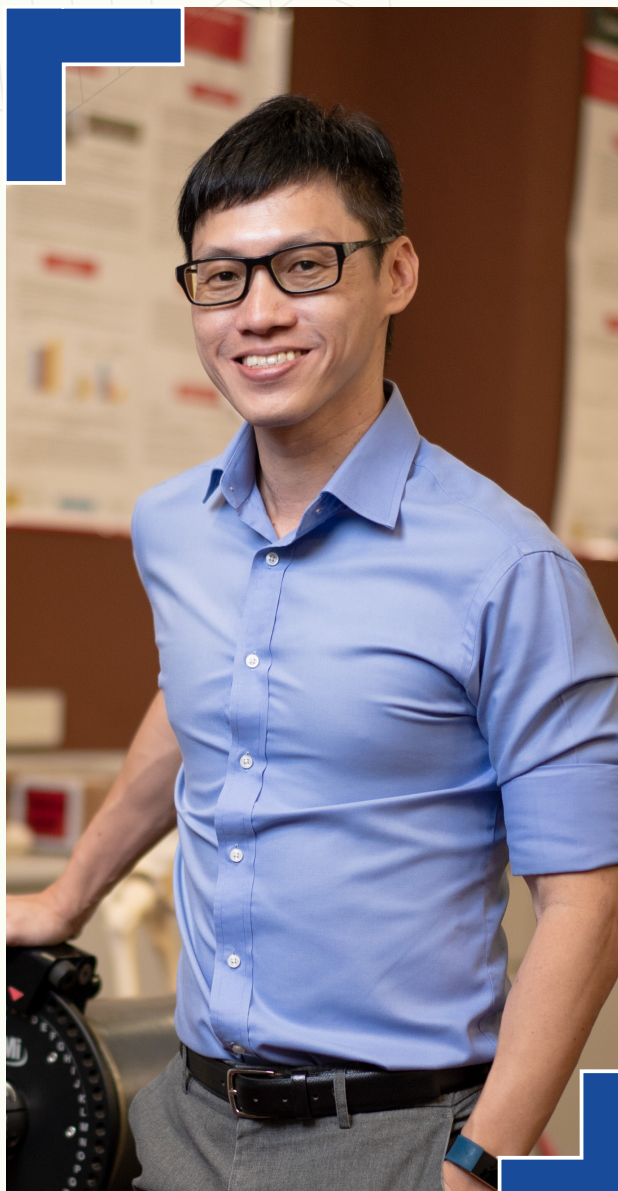




# Shaping the Future: Adaptability in Teacher Education

**A**daptability is one of the cornerstones of effective teaching, especially in a profession where change is both inherent and constant. The capacity to respond thoughtfully and purposefully to evolving demands is essential – not only within the classroom, but across the broader professional landscape. *SingTeach* speaks to NIE Director, Professor Liu Woon Chia and Dean of Teacher Education & Undergraduate Programmes (TEUP), Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi, who is also the guest editor of this issue, on the importance of adaptability and how NIE prepares educators to navigate complexity with confidence.

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Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi

## DEFINING ADAPTABILITY IN EDUCATION

Adaptability in education is often misunderstood as merely the ability to cope with change or respond quickly to new demands. In reality, adaptability goes much deeper.

“Adaptability is about the capacity to find different ways to navigate challenges confidently,” Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi shares.

For adaptability to take root, a mindset shift must first occur – a willingness to question assumptions, remaining open to possibilities and seeing uncertainty not as a threat, but as a resource for growth.

“Of course, it is expected that one will face unknowns and frustrations that will surface during the process of coping with change,” he says. “However, it is through new challenges that new insights can be developed – insights that ultimately strengthen one’s resilience and adaptability.”

## STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS OF TEACHING

One of the most pressing challenges facing schools today is the increasing diversity of learning contexts, pathways and learner profiles. Learning no longer happens solely within traditional classroom structures, nor is it confined to a single discipline or mode of delivery.

At NIE, frameworks such as the Enhanced Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century (TE<sup>21</sup>), NIE’s blueprint for strengthening teacher education, and the Enhanced V<sup>3</sup>SK Model, which refers to the three professional values of *Commitment to the Learner*, *Commitment to the Profession*, and *Commitment to the Community*, articulate not only the knowledge and skills teachers require, but also the values and dispositions that guide professional judgment.

“These frameworks reflect our conviction that teaching in today’s world requires more than technical competence,” Professor Liu Woon Chia says. “By grounding teacher preparation in strong values, deep knowledge and adaptive expertise, we prepare our graduates not just to cope with change, but also to lead learning confidently.”

Jia Yi echoes this perspective. “Teaching should be more broad-based and interdisciplinary in nature. Just ‘knowing’ is not enough – instead, it is about making connections and applying knowledge in authentic settings that count,” he remarks.

This shift calls for educators to rethink how learning experiences are designed. “At TEUP, we recognise that one of the key challenges that educators face today is the ability to design – and at times co-design with students – learning experiences that reflect how competencies are applied beyond the classroom,” he comments.

## THE ROLE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teacher professional development (PD) plays a critical role in navigating an evolving educational landscape. At NIE, teacher preparation and professional learning extend beyond traditional knowledge transmission. “Our teacher preparation and professional learning programmes emphasize critical thinking, curiosity, creativity and collaborative problem-solving – capacities



Scan to read more about TE<sup>21</sup>.



Scan to read more about the Enhanced V<sup>3</sup>SK Model.

that our students and indeed our teachers, must embody,” Prof Liu shares.

PD should not be a one-way approach to download information from experienced educators to colleagues. Instead, it should involve dialogue, co-design and the autonomy for educators to contextualize new insights within their own school settings.

“No two schools are exactly alike,” Jia Yi remarks. “Educators must make sense of what they learn and apply it meaningfully to their contexts.”

School leaders too, play a vital role in calibrating levels of risk – creating safe spaces for innovation while encouraging thoughtful experimentation.

“When supported in this way, teachers are more likely to build the confidence and resilience needed to refine their practice over time,” he says.

## BRIDGING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Adaptability in teaching is further strengthened when research and classroom practice inform one another. One of the distinctive strengths of Singapore’s education system lies in the close partnership between policy, teacher education and schools.

“The tripartite collaboration between the Ministry of Education, NIE and our schools ensures that policies are not conceived in isolation,” Prof Liu notes. “Continuous dialogue, co-developed programmes, and alignment around common goals are essential for supporting our learners.”

Jia Yi is also an advocate for stronger research–practice culture. “Research provides insights into the ‘why’ behind educational approaches – why certain pedagogies work, under what conditions and for whom. Without the ‘why’, it is difficult to determine the ‘how’ and ‘what’ that support effective teaching and learning,” he shares.

In the absence of this deeper understanding, he cautions, teachers may fall into a copy-and-paste approach – adopting strategies without fully grasping their underlying principles or contextual limitations. What works in one classroom may not necessarily translate into another.

“Research insights can provide that level of understanding that supports innovation and greater adaptation for teachers’ PD,” he explains. “At the same time, a deep understanding of practice can surface gaps that perhaps research can then explore and address.”



*Research provides insights into the ‘why’ behind educational approaches—why certain pedagogies work, under what conditions and for whom. Without the ‘why’, it is difficult to determine the ‘how’ and ‘what’ that support effective teaching and learning.”*

*– Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi*

By connecting research and practice, teachers grow more reflective, professional learning deepens and the teaching profession becomes more adaptable and informed.

## THE JOURNEY TO ADAPTABILITY

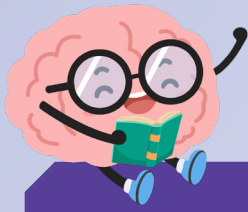
Jia Yi emphasizes that adaptability is not an endpoint to be achieved, but an ongoing journey – one that invites teachers and learners alike to remain curious and open to possibilities.

He encourages educators to see themselves as facilitators of learning and designers of practice, reminding them that they do not always need to provide ready-made solutions for their learners.

“Be courageous enough to offer a safe space for learners to experiment with failure and discomfort. Do not be too eager to ‘correct’ or ‘prescribe,’” he advises. “Remember, there is so much to explore together with your students.” ■

## ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

*Professor Liu Woon Chia is Director of National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore. Associate Professor Chow Jia Yi is Dean of Teacher Education & Undergraduate Programmes (TEUP) at NIE. For his excellence in teaching, Jia Yi was awarded the Nanyang Education Award (College) and inducted as a Fellow to the NTU Teaching Excellence Academy in 2017. He was also awarded the Nanyang Education Award (University, Gold Medal) and was accorded the NTU Educator of the Year in 2018.*



# Bringing Brain Literacy into the Art Classroom

**A**s educators seek to better understand how students learn, professional development that bridges research and practice can offer valuable insights. For Mrs Yeoh Teh Ting Ting, Lead Teacher for Art at Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School, participating in a brain literacy project, led by Assistant Professor Alicia Goodwill from NIE, provides a meaningful opportunity to deepen her understanding of how neuroscience can inform everyday teaching. In this article, she shares how insights from neuroscience – particularly the concept of neuroplasticity – have deepened her understanding of learning and shaped her approach to teaching, from fostering a growth mindset in students to making more intentional, evidence-informed decisions in the classroom.

## FROM CURIOSITY TO CLASSROOM APPLICATION

Originally developed for clinicians and cognitive neuroscientists, BrainMap is an open-source database that consolidates findings from cognitive neuroscience and links them to learning-relevant tasks. To make these insights more accessible to educators, a research team led by Assistant Professor Alicia Goodwill from NIE, developed a parallel taxonomy using terms familiar to teachers. Through workshops, guest lectures, masterclasses and keynote presentations, the project aims to equip teachers with up-to-date, research-informed insights to better support the diverse learning needs of their students.

Participating in the project has deepened Mrs Yeoh Teh Ting Ting's understanding of teaching and learning from a cognitive and neuroscience perspective. As Lead Teacher for Art at Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School, she finds that it has helped her connect theoretical concepts more meaningfully to classroom practice.

"As an art teacher, I want to explore how insights from brain research could inform more intentional teaching strategies and learning processes," she shares. "The workshop that I attended has a focus on bridging

research and practice, which resonates with my interest in evidence-informed teaching."

One of her key takeaways was the concept of neuroplasticity – the idea that the brain is not fixed, but can change and develop through practice, feedback and experience. "This reinforces the fact that students' abilities are not fixed but can grow over time," she reflects, highlighting the importance of cultivating a growth mindset where effort and persistence are seen as essential to improvement.

This idea was brought to life through a particularly memorable example that was discussed during the workshop: how London taxi drivers develop a larger hippocampus after years of memorizing routes. "It is a powerful reminder that the brain can grow with sustained effort, regardless of age," she explains, adding that this insight has strengthened her belief that all students, regardless of their starting point, have the potential to improve when given the right support and opportunities.



Scan to learn more about BrainMap.

## SHAPING PRACTICE THROUGH BRAIN-BASED INSIGHTS

These insights have since influenced how Ting Ting approaches her art lessons. Moving beyond a focus on final outcomes, she now places greater emphasis on the learning process, encouraging experimentation and reflection.

“I encourage students to see mistakes as part of the learning process rather than something to avoid,” she explains. By normalizing trial and error, she aims to create a classroom environment where students feel safe to take risks and explore new ideas.

She has also become more intentional in designing learning experiences that allow for iteration. “Students are given opportunities to revisit their work, reflect on feedback and refine their ideas over time,” she says. “This aligns with the idea of strengthening neural pathways through repeated practice and supports a spiral approach to learning where concepts are revisited and deepened progressively.”

Although she did not directly use the BrainMap software introduced in the workshop, the theoretical grounding has shaped how she frames both instruction and feedback. She notes that it has helped her understand the “why” behind learning, and not just the strategies.

“This deeper understanding has allowed me to make more purposeful decisions in my teaching, ensuring that my practices are aligned with how students learn best,” she remarks.

## FOSTERING GROWTH FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

The workshop has prompted Ting Ting to reflect on the importance of adaptability in teaching. “Teaching should be adaptive and responsive rather than fixed,” she shares.

Since students learn in different ways and are influenced by a range of cognitive and environmental factors, teachers need to continuously adjust their approaches to meet diverse needs.

At the same time, the workshop reinforces that teachers themselves must embrace a growth mindset. Just as students are encouraged to learn from experience and feedback, teachers too must be open to refining their practice. This mindset shift has encouraged her to view professional learning as an ongoing journey rather than a one-time event.

This mindset shift, reflected in both teachers and students, has brought about noticeable changes in her classroom. Students are more willing to take risks, try new approaches and persist through challenges.

“When the focus is on growth and process rather than perfection, students become more confident in their learning,” she observes. “During art discussions,

students are also more open to sharing their ideas and receiving feedback from peers.”

Drawing from a previous critical inquiry project on growth mindset, she has seen how students can improve over time when they believe in their ability to grow. The workshop further affirms this belief, reinforcing the role of teacher practices in shaping students’ attitudes towards learning.

## STARTING SMALL WITH BRAIN LITERACY

For educators interested in incorporating brain literacy into their teaching, Ting Ting emphasizes the importance of starting small. “You don’t need to fully understand all the science before beginning,” she says. Even simple ideas, such as recognizing that learning develops over time or that effort shapes outcomes, can make a meaningful difference in how lessons are designed and how feedback is given.

She encourages teachers to try out strategies within their own context, observe how students respond and make adjustments along the way. Rather than striving for perfection, the focus should be on being intentional and reflective in supporting student learning. “It’s less about getting it right and more about being mindful of how we support our students,” she adds.

Her experience highlights how insights from neuroscience can enrich classroom practice in practical and meaningful ways. By grounding teaching in an understanding of how the brain learns, educators can create environments where students feel empowered to experiment, reflect and grow. In doing so, classrooms become spaces where both teachers and students continue to learn, adapt and thrive together. ■



### ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

*Yeoh Teh Ting Ting is Lead Teacher for Art at Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School. She is passionate about evidence-informed teaching and explores how insights from neuroscience and cognitive science can enhance student learning, creativity and growth in the classroom.*



# Reflection That Transforms: Rethinking Teacher Learning in Context

**R**eflection is often seen as a routine part of teaching. But what if it could become a powerful, structured form of professional learning rooted in real classroom dilemmas? NIE Education Research Scientist Dr Lee Shu Shing shares how teacher reflection, when treated as disciplined inquiry, can deepen pedagogical reasoning and strengthen practice.

## REFLECTION IN TODAY'S SCHOOL LANDSCAPE

Reflection is not new to teachers in Singapore. From pre-service preparation to in-service professional learning initiatives such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and mentoring conversations, educators are regularly encouraged to reflect on their practice. Yet, in the busyness of school life, reflection can sometimes become compressed into brief post-lesson summaries or documentation exercises.

"Reflection is part of teachers' practice and teacher learning," Dr Lee Shu Shing explains. "It happens in real classrooms. It is not abstract because it forms teachers' pedagogical reasoning and decisions."

However, teachers today face constant challenges and distractions. Administrative responsibilities, curriculum demands and the immediacy of classroom management can crowd out mindful pauses. Reflection may be construed as an inward-looking, individual task, triggered by everyday challenges, rather than a meaningful avenue for professional growth.



Dr Lee Shu Shing

When reflection becomes episodic or compliance-driven, its potential diminishes. Instead of serving as a tool for deep inquiry, it risks being reduced to answering familiar prompts such as what worked and what did not. Shu Shing's research asks a timely question: how can schools reframe reflection so that teachers become inquirers and leverage it as a powerful way of learning from their classrooms?

## FROM REFLECTION TO SITUATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Shu Shing's study, *Teacher Reflection as Situated Professional Learning*, builds on earlier research into teachers' conceptions and uses of reflection. The study examines how teacher mentors design reflective processes, how teachers experience them and how contextual and individual factors shape reflective practice in schools.

At its core is a shift in understanding. Reflection is not a form-filling exercise. Nor is it a post-lesson recount of successes and failures. Instead, it is a principled and systematic inquiry anchored in authentic problems of practice.

"Reflection is not a post-lesson summary of what went well or what did not go well," Shu Shing explains. "It involves a closer examination that begins with problems of practice, teachers asking questions they are genuinely curious about, making changes and examining students' experiences and artefacts to glean professional insights."

This means grounding reflection in evidence. Teachers draw on lesson materials, student work and assessment data. They engage in inner dialogue as well as conversations with colleagues and mentors. The process is iterative and forward-looking, informing the next instructional move rather than merely describing the previous one.



In this way, reflection becomes situated. It is contextualized to the teacher's students, curriculum and school culture. It is not generic advice applied broadly, but disciplined inquiry rooted in lived classroom realities. Teachers learn from and with each other.

## WHAT MEANINGFUL REFLECTION LOOKS LIKE

What does this look like in practice?

Shu Shing shares the example of a mentor who role models his thinking about practice within a community of teachers. Instead of presenting solutions, he positions his own classroom dilemmas as starting points for inquiry. He asks questions he is genuinely curious about. *Why are students not responding as expected? How are they experiencing a new instructional strategy?*

"He might ask students to understand why they are not following his instruction," Shu Shing explains. "He could also ask students whether the changes he made to his teaching have benefited them."

These student conversations become evidence. The mentor documents his pedagogical reasoning, tracing the changes made, the evidence gathered and the shifts in mindset that occur along the way. Through this process, reflection becomes visible and shared, rather than private and assumed.

The benefits extend beyond immediate student outcomes. Teachers develop clarity about why they make certain decisions. They build deeper empathetic understanding of their students. They become more intentional in linking theory and practice.

Importantly, reflection is no longer an add-on. "Reflection is not extra work," Shu Shing emphasizes. "It is a disciplined way of being curious and learning from my practice, and a way for teachers to make their thinking visible."

## CREATING CONDITIONS FOR AUTHENTIC REFLECTION

For reflection to move beyond compliance, school conditions matter.

Time is a key challenge. Without protected space, reflection remains squeezed, hurried and surface, between urgent tasks. Another hindrance lies in viewing reflection as a one-off effort to address numerous issues simultaneously. In contrast, disciplined professional inquiry requires sustained focus on a specific problem in an iterative manner. The focus is not solely on developing teachers' professional insights. Equally important in this progress relates to developing teachers' mindsets and beliefs. How they see themselves as agents in their professional learning and growth as a community.

School leadership plays a crucial role. Leaders, working hand-in-hand with School Staff Developers, set the tone and allocate resources so that reflection is treated as core professional work. This includes carving out time for reflective dialogue within communities and prioritizing pedagogical reasoning over efficiency alone.

A safe and non-judgmental environment is equally important. Teachers must feel able to surface uncertainties, tensions and dilemmas without fear. Documenting thinking through student work, assessment tasks and classroom artefacts helps ground conversations in evidence rather than opinion.

Existing structures such as PLCs and mentoring conversations can be strengthened by anchoring them in clear problems of practice. Instead of collegial sharing alone, communities can adopt disciplined inquiry structures that move from describing problems to analysing evidence and identifying instructional implications by tapping on the Singapore Teaching Practice.

For individual teachers pressed for time, Shu Shing suggests a simple but powerful mindset shift. Replace the question "How did my lesson go?" with "What did my students tell me about the lesson? What evidence do I have?" Instead of asking "What went wrong?", ask "What am I curious to learn from my class?"

Such questions reorient reflection towards curiosity and evidence. They invite teachers to slow down, examine their reasoning and learn from their own classrooms.

Shu Shing's study is on-going, the premise is to help teachers understand that when reflection is situated, dialogic and evidence-informed, it becomes more than routine practice. It becomes a meaningful pathway for professional growth, rooted not in abstract ideals but in the lived complexities of teaching. Shu Shing is open to sharing her ideas and encourages schools to reach out for conversations. ■

## ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

*Dr Lee Shu Shing is Education Research Scientist with the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. This article is based on her research study, "Teacher Reflection as Situated Professional Learning (ERFP 07/23 LSS)" funded by the Education Research Funding Programme supported by the Singapore Ministry of Education, which she is Principal Investigator (PI) of. The study is also supported by two other Co-PIs from NIE, Dr Alexius Chia (English Language & Literature Department) and Dr Lim Seok Lai (Asian Languages and Cultures Department).*



# Leading Through Change: A Learning Culture at New Town Primary School

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, where pedagogies shift, student profiles change and new demands constantly emerge, adaptability has become more than a desirable trait; it is essential. For Ms Hannah Chia, Principal of New Town Primary School, which also hosts the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence, adaptability begins with the educator. At the heart of her leadership philosophy is a deep conviction that professional learning is not episodic or event-driven, but personal, reflective and sustained over time.



Ms Hannah Chia and her students

## LEARNING TO ADAPT, LEADING TO ADAPT

Growth rarely happens in comfort. For Ms Hannah Chia, the most pivotal moments in her professional journey have been shaped not by ease, but by productive struggle.

“The journey of learning is not linear,” she reflects. “It depends on the willingness to keep trying, reflecting and developing self-efficacy in the face of new challenges and contexts.”

One defining chapter occurred when she was posted to a different school. Although she was teaching the same subjects and had invested significant time in building up her resources and methods, the new student profile called for something different. The temptation to rely on past successes was strong. Yet when she noticed signs of student disengagement, she recognized the need to recalibrate and adapt.

That experience sparked in her a deeper hunger for feedback and a growing curiosity about her students’ lived experiences of learning. It reinforced a powerful insight: students themselves are an essential source of a teacher’s professional development.

“When we listen to our students not only about successful lessons but also those that fall short, we gain meaningful insight into how our craft can be further honed and sharpened,” she shares.

She advises teachers to stay curious, be grounded and hungry to grow. “Professional development, is ultimately

a personal responsibility – one that students keenly observe. When teachers model joy in learning, students will embody that same spirit,” she emphasizes.

## BUILDING A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL COURAGE

Professional learning is most impactful when it is purposeful, context-responsive and rooted in the realities of the classroom. As the principal of New Town Primary School (NTPS), which also hosts the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE), Hannah places authenticity at the heart of her school’s professional development approach.

Rather than relying solely on event-based workshops, professional learning at the school often takes place in situ – through master and demonstration classes conducted with real students in live classroom environments.

Drawing on the famous phrase coined by Alfred Korzybski, a Polish-born American scientist and philosopher: “The map is not the territory.,” she highlights that while understanding pedagogical theory, i.e., the “map”, is important, teachers must also step into the “territory” of actual classrooms, where decisions unfold moment by moment.

“Observing how a fellow practitioner responds to students’ energy, navigates questioning techniques or adjusts facilitation in real time provides a uniquely grounded and embodied learning experience,” she explains.



“*Observing how a fellow practitioner responds to students’ energy, navigates questioning techniques or adjusts facilitation in real time provides a uniquely grounded and embodied learning experience.*”

It is within this dynamic space – the nexus between theory and practice – that professional growth truly takes root. “When teachers witness impact first-hand, their mindsets shift not only about pedagogy, but about students’ capabilities and potential,” she notes.

Equally central to the school’s professional learning ethos is a deeply collaborative culture. “Teachers engage in professional dialogue through Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) and during Timetabled Time which are scheduled every two weeks for level and subject-based discussions,” she shares.

However, she is quick to emphasize that structures alone do not create culture.

“These structures must be enlivened by teachers’ sense of responsibility, professionalism and deep care for their students,” she explains. “When teachers collectively own these platforms such as sharing strategies, tackling

challenges and refining practice together, collaboration becomes sustainable." It is through this shared endeavour, she adds, that courage and stamina for sustained learning are built.

## CONNECTING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

A key strength of the school's CTLE work lies in connecting research, theory and classroom practice. Through partnerships with Master Teachers and structured approaches such as lesson study, teachers critically examine research-informed pedagogies and test them in authentic classroom contexts. Rather than relying solely on anecdotal experience, they are encouraged to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative feedback to refine their practice.

"Research allows us to stand on the shoulders of giants," Hannah reflects. "It also helps us make sense of our own classroom findings in light of existing data."

This disciplined spirit of inquiry not only grounds innovation in evidence, but also empowers teachers to adapt their pedagogy thoughtfully and confidently in response to their students' evolving needs.

## LEARNING AND WELL-BEING: A VIRTUOUS CYCLE

In an era when teachers juggle multiple responsibilities, conversations about balance inevitably arise. For Hannah, however, professional learning and well-being are not competing priorities. "Learning is an indispensable part of well-being," she says. "All living things that are healthy experience growth."

As teachers deepen their personal mastery, their sense of motivation and purpose strengthens – setting in motion a virtuous cycle. To support this dynamic, the school ensures that professional learning remains coherent and purposeful.

"Each year, clear focus areas are communicated, and platforms for growth are intentionally aligned – from lesson observations and open classrooms to learning festivals and recognition systems," she shares.

Such coherence reduces fragmentation and mitigates overwhelm. She notes that when teachers understand the "why" behind initiatives, space is created for personal ownership and sustained growth.

It is also important for professional learning to be embedded across school life. "Staff meetings model facilitation



strategies, learning journeys broaden perspectives while reflection and sense-making are woven into programme reviews and school improvement processes," she shares. "Over time, these habits cultivate not just skilled teachers, but a resilient and reflective learning organization."

## A JOURNEY WITHOUT END

If there is one message Hannah hopes educators take away from NTPS's journey, it is this: learning never ends and that is something to celebrate.

"We are all works in progress," she says. "Learning is waiting to happen everywhere, every day, if we are open to it."

For her, the joy of teaching is inseparable from the joy of learning. When educators tap into that joy for themselves, professional development ceases to feel like an obligation. Instead, it becomes a sustaining force – one that enables teachers not only to adapt in a changing educational landscape, but to effectively nurture adaptable learners for the future. ■

## ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

*Hannah Chia is the principal of New Town Primary School, which also hosts the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence.*

## Beyond the Lesson Plan: Rethinking Adaptability



**A**daptability is more than adjusting lesson plans – it is also about responding thoughtfully to students’ needs, navigating uncertainty with confidence and continually refining one’s practice in a changing educational landscape. In this article, two teachers share their reflections on how adaptability has shaped their growth as educators and leaders, and how it continues to influence the way they support their students and colleagues.



**Roysmond Sim**  
Assistant Year Head  
Yuying Secondary School

### OVER THE COURSE OF YOUR TEACHING CAREER, HOW HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF ADAPTABILITY EVOLVED?

Early in my teaching career, I understood adaptability primarily through the lens of differentiated instruction. My focus was on adjusting my science lessons to accommodate students of varying readiness levels and interests. I

learned to modify my teaching pedagogy and used different experiments and approaches to make science concepts accessible, whether teaching Lower Secondary Science or Physics.

However, my understanding has significantly deepened, particularly after my stint as a policy officer at MOE HQ (University Policy Branch, Higher Education Group) and now as an Assistant Year Head at Yuying Secondary School. Adaptability today extends far beyond pedagogical differentiation. The digital revolution has fundamentally changed how students learn and interact with information. Students are digital natives who engage with social media, AI tools and instant information access daily. As educators, we must harness these technologies rather than resist them.

In my current leadership role, I recognize that adaptability also means helping fellow teachers navigate technological integration while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness. For instance, I recently conducted a professional development session to teach fellow teachers how to write effective success criteria for their respective subjects. To further support this initiative, I introduced them to a *Success Criteria Writer* AI assistant which I created using *Pair Chat*, demonstrating how AI can enhance our pedagogical practices rather than replace them. This evolution has taught me that adaptability is not just about adjusting to students but continuously evolving our entire approach to education while staying true to fundamental learning principles.

## CAN YOU SHARE A MOMENT WHEN YOU HAD TO SIGNIFICANTLY RETHINK YOUR TEACHING APPROACH?

Returning to classroom teaching at Yuying Secondary School after two years at MOE HQ was a technological awakening. I discovered that every classroom was equipped with Apple TV, teachers were equipped with iPads and students used Personal Learning Devices (PLDs) extensively for learning. Having been away from the classroom environment, I felt like a digital immigrant in my own profession.

The learning curve was steep. I had to quickly master iPad functionality, learn to use *AirPlay* for screen mirroring and *OneNote* for annotating worksheets and navigate various educational apps that enhanced my lessons. Managing multiple applications while ensuring seamless synchronisation of files across iCloud and OneDrive became a daily juggling act.

However, this experience taught me invaluable lessons about growth mindset and vulnerability in leadership. I was not afraid to ask my new colleagues and even students for help, which actually strengthened my relationships with them. I discovered that technology, when properly integrated, could make science concepts more interactive. Students could simulate experiments, access real-time data and collaborate more effectively.

Most importantly, I learnt that adaptability requires humility. As an Assistant Year Head, I now encourage teachers to embrace technological challenges together, demonstrating how these tools can streamline our work and enhance productivity. This experience reinforces that effective leadership means modelling the adaptability we expect from our students while showing how technology can make our teaching more efficient and impactful.



**Lee Max**  
Teacher  
Nanyang Girls' High School

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On a smaller, day-to-day scale, adaptability is equally important in classroom practice. Lessons rarely unfold exactly as planned, and educators need to think on their feet when unexpected challenges arise.”

## WHAT DOES “ADAPTABILITY” MEAN TO YOU AS AN EDUCATOR?

Adaptability, to me, is an essential quality for educators, operating both at the macro and micro levels. On a broader scale, contemporary society is often described as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, and these conditions shape educational contexts as well. With rapid technological advancements and constantly evolving societal demands, teachers must be lifelong learners who are able to adjust quickly. Staying updated ensures that students receive an education that remains relevant to current realities and prepares them for a future that is continuously changing.

On a smaller, day-to-day scale, adaptability is equally important in classroom practice. Lessons rarely unfold exactly as planned, and educators need to think on their feet when unexpected challenges arise. Whether it is responding to students’ learning needs, managing unforeseen classroom situations or balancing additional responsibilities beyond teaching, adaptability allows teachers to remain effective and composed.

## WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT HAVE HELPED YOU GAIN MORE CONFIDENCE IN ENHANCING YOUR PRACTICE?

The support systems around me have played a significant role in building my confidence to adapt my practice. Professional development in education is highly structured and provides a nurturing, step-by-step pathway for growth. Within my school, mentoring sessions offer valuable guidance, as mentors regularly share insights on how to refine pedagogy for new contexts.

In addition, professional learning courses and learning journeys help me strengthen familiar skills while also exposing me to new approaches. Collaboration with colleagues further creates a supportive environment where I can apply what I have learned, learn from others’ experiences and grow through shared challenges. Together, these forms of support reassure me that I am not alone in navigating change, and they empower me to continuously improve as an educator. ■

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