



In Conversation with

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When one thinks of a school, the role of teachers usually comes to mind. However, the ecosystem is a vibrant community which consists of interaction between teachers, administrators, leaders and other support staff to provide an effective and conducive environment for students.

As Dean of Teacher Education, you have played a crucial role in shaping the Singapore Teaching Practice and have advised the Ministry of Education (MOE) on various aspects of teacher education. Can you share your insights on how the role of a teacher has evolved over the years, specifically with regard to how their role as a collaborative team player has taken on greater importance?

The role of a teacher is dynamic and ever evolving, shaped by the changing educational landscape. At the National Institute of Education (NIE), the Enhanced Teacher Education for the 21st century (TE21) Model defines educators as **Shapers of Character, Creators of Knowledge, Facilitators of Learning, Architects of Learning Environments, and Agents of Educational Change**—

reflecting the multifaceted nature of teaching today.¹

Teachers do not work in isolation; they are integral to a broader ecosystem that includes schools, the MOE, and the wider community. One of the key values of the TE21 Model, **Commitment to Community**, underscores the collaborative nature of teaching. Educators are essential connectors within this system, working alongside peers, students, and stakeholders to drive meaningful learning experiences.

Given the increasing complexity of the role, teachers must cultivate **adaptability and innovation**. Adaptability in responding to diverse classroom needs, problem-solving, and engaging effectively with stakeholders. Innovation in advancing pedagogy, integrating new learning technologies, and refining teaching practices to enhance student outcomes.

The **Singapore Teaching Practice (STP)** provides a structured framework for effective teaching and learning in

¹ <https://www.ntu.edu.sg/nie/about-us/programme-offices/office-of-teacher-education-and-undergraduate-programmes/te21>

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Singapore schools. It articulates a shared set of beliefs about how students learn and how teachers teach, supported by key knowledge bases essential for high-impact instruction. By establishing these common principles, STP fosters a culture of professional inquiry, collaboration, and continuous improvement—empowering teachers to refine their craft and elevate student learning.

Teacher leadership is a wide-ranging term which refers to the ability of teachers to serve as a leader both within and outside the classroom to improve student learning, teaching practices and school processes. What do you think are the attributes necessary for such a leader to possess? Is it correct to assume that teacher leadership can only be executed by teachers with formal hierarchical authority?

Teacher leadership extends beyond formal positions of authority—it begins in the classroom and can emerge at any stage of a teacher’s career. The TE21 Model emphasises Leadership and Agency as a key competency domain,

recognising that effective teacher leaders:

- Communicate and collaborate with fellow educators, stakeholders, and the wider community, exercising their agency and autonomy to enhance student learning and well-being.
- Think systemically and consider multiple perspectives on national and global issues.
- Take initiative as agents of educational change, actively influencing their environments and driving progress within their schools and communities.
- Identify with the educational community and contribute to a strong professional identity as they shape and define their roles within the educational landscape.

Teacher leadership is not confined to experienced educators; it starts at the student-teacher level. Through Teacher Leadership programmes, we develop educators with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to lead effectively—whether in classrooms, schools, or the broader educational landscape. These programmes also help teachers

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embody the three core values of the TE21 Model: Commitment to the Learner, the Profession, and the Community, ensuring they make a lasting impact on both their students and the education system as a whole.

Artificial intelligence (AI)'s impact extends to many aspects of our lives—from the way students learn to the way the workplace functions. Given the potential of AI in augmenting the way education is carried out, including automating administrative tasks, marking student work and the gamification of learning through video games, do you feel that the role of a teacher will ultimately move on to one that facilitates learning rather than direct teaching?

A teacher's role goes far beyond delivering content—it is about facilitating meaningful learning experiences. As Facilitators of Learning and Architects of Learning Environment (as outlined

in the TE21 Model), educators guide students in developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability—key competencies for the 21st century. They also design both physical and virtual learning spaces to create engaging learning experiences while encouraging interactions and collaboration among students.

The integration of AI in Education and for Education presents immense opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. AI-powered tools can deepen students' learning, personalise learning, provide real-time feedback, and automate administrative tasks, allowing teachers to focus more on student engagement and deeper learning. By leveraging AI effectively, educators can better support students in acquiring 21st Century Competencies (21CC), preparing them for a more complex and inter-connected world.

As a follow-up to the earlier question, what do you think remains uniquely the preserve of a good teacher in an AI-enabled learning environment?

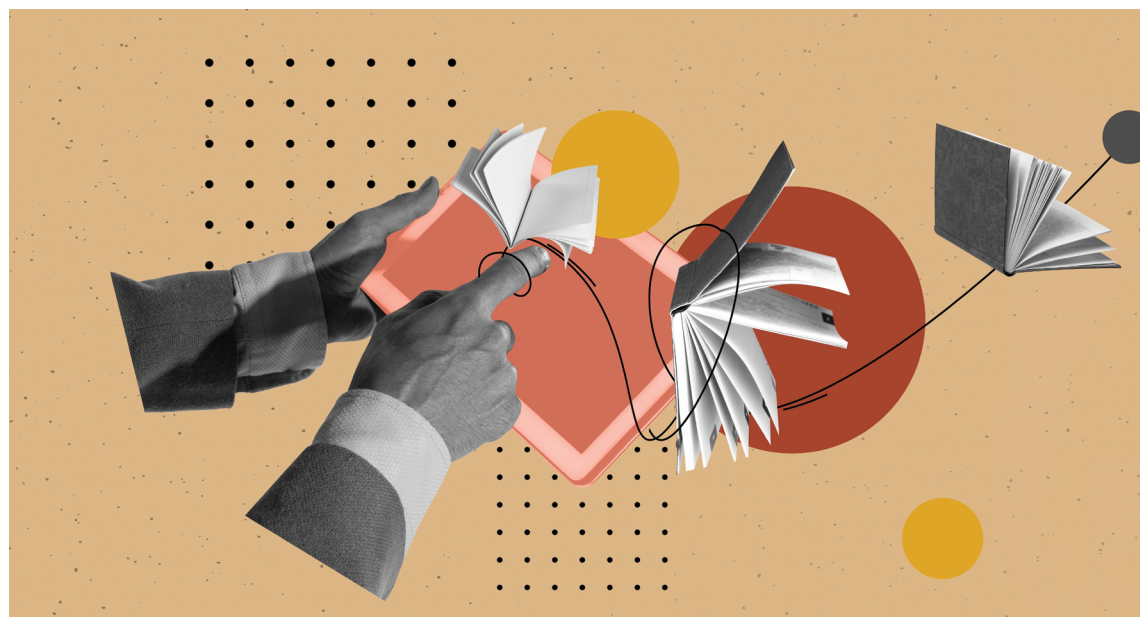
Education is ultimately about people. Even as AI becomes more integrated into teaching and learning, the human role remains irreplaceable. AI serves as a tool to enhance good teaching, but it is teachers who bring values, empathy, and context to the learning experience.

The TE21 Model defines teachers as Shapers of Character and Agents of Educational Change—roles that AI cannot fulfill. Educators play a critical role in value-based education, ethical reasoning, and preparing students for the complexities of an evolving world. While AI can support personalised learning and increase efficiency, it is the teacher's human judgment, adaptability,

and ability to care and inspire that truly shape future-ready citizens.

Singapore has a world-class education system, with its students consistently scoring top marks for Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Other than crediting Singapore's comprehensive education system and active parental involvement in their child's learning, what do you think are other factors which have worked well for Singapore?

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' learning experiences and holistic development. In Singapore, our focus is not on excelling in assessments like PISA, but on developing students with 21CC to thrive in an ever-evolving



world. Adaptable, caring, connected, and innovative teachers have been instrumental in driving meaningful and lasting impact in education.

A key strength of Singapore's education system is the tripartite partnership between NIE, MOE, and schools. This close collaboration ensures that our education system remains agile, forward-thinking, and responsive to the demands of the 21st century. It enables continuous innovation in pedagogical practices and educational policies, providing students with a strong foundation for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.

Moreover, this partnership allows for tailored programmes that meet the evolving needs of teachers, developing in them the skills, knowledge, and mindset to nurture future-ready learners effectively. This dynamic approach

ensures that Singapore's education system remains globally relevant while staying rooted in its commitment to holistic student development.

As co-founder of NIE's Motivation in Educational Research Laboratory, can you share some thoughts on the importance of student motivation, especially as younger generations face a more uncertain and complex global environment marked by technological disruptions and global conflicts?

Motivation explains the “why” behind our actions; it is a force that energises, sustains, and directs behaviour towards achieving goals. In a rapidly changing global environment marked by technological disruptions and global conflicts, the significance of student motivation becomes even more pronounced.

Motivation empowers students to take charge of their learning and adapt to new circumstances. Motivated learners are more likely to embrace change, seek out new information, and develop problem-solving skills that are essential in unpredictable situations. Encouraging motivation also helps foster a growth mindset, where students view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. This mindset is crucial as they encounter the complexities of a changing global landscape.

As technology continues to evolve, motivated students are more inclined to engage with and leverage new tools and



platforms for learning. This engagement not only enhances their educational experience but also prepares them for future careers in a tech-driven world. Motivated students are more likely to develop lifelong learning habits, essential for continuous skill acquisition in an era where technological advancements rapidly alter job requirements and industries.

Motivation fuels curiosity, which is vital for critical thinking and innovation. In a world facing global challenges—such as climate change, social inequality, and political instability—motivated learners are more likely to seek creative solutions and contribute positively to society.

As educators, we must create environments that fulfil students' basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. By doing so, we can help them develop intrinsic or more autonomous forms of motivation. It is our responsibility to provide learning experiences that prioritise student agency, real-world relevance, and problem-solving. When students take ownership and see purpose in their efforts, they remain engaged and committed.

In this rapidly evolving world, fostering student motivation is vital for preparing future leaders who can think critically, adapt to change, and create a positive societal impact.



To conclude on a more personal note, having dedicated your entire working career to working on Singapore's education system, especially in teacher education reform, what would you say is the most fulfilling aspect of your work? Would you have any advice that you would like to share with our younger readers?

The most rewarding part of my work has been witnessing the profound impact of education—not just on students, but on the educators who shape their journeys. Seeing teachers grow in confidence, skill, and passion, knowing that their influence will extend across generations, is incredibly fulfilling.

In this rapidly evolving world, fostering student motivation is vital for preparing future leaders who can think critically, adapt to change, and create a positive societal impact.

To our younger readers: Never stop learning. In a rapidly evolving world, adaptability, critical thinking, and a willingness to embrace new ideas are essential. Most importantly, find purpose in what you do. Whether in education or any other field, passion and perseverance will lead you to make a meaningful difference in society.

