

SPECIAL FEATURE

Reflections of Outstanding Economics Teachers



First established in 2016, the Outstanding Economics Teacher Award (OETA) has been awarded annually to outstanding secondary school or junior college/centralised institute teachers who have exhibited excellence in the teaching and learning of Economics. The OETA is presented by the Economic Society of Singapore with the support of the Ministry of Education.

In this issue of *Economics & Society*, we commemorate the 10th year of the establishment of the OETA by inviting past winners to share their reflections on Economics education. We thank all featured past winners for their insightful sharing on the following pages.

Quotes from past year OETA winners

“Being the first OETA recipient in 2016 remains a humbling milestone. I love seeing students light up as they connect daily business strategies or public policies with Economics concepts, challenging one another’s understanding. Teaching Economics empowers students to think critically, view issues from multiple perspectives, and make informed, evidence-based decisions about real-world challenges. I hope they walk away with a mindset of inquiry—and like merit goods, becoming valuable contributors to society, creating positive impact. To new teachers: spark curiosity and bring concepts to life. As AI reshapes education, our role is to cultivate critical and adaptive thinking, ethical reflection, and discernment to make sound judgements.”

Ms Deborah How, 2016 OETA Winner

currently a Deputy Principal (College) at Hwa Chong Institution

“I’ll always remember one question my Economics team deliberated over back in 2021 (with equal parts excitement and trepidation!), as we returned to face-to-face lessons after the pandemic: Having moved so much of our content delivery on to the Student Learning Space, an online learning portal, what do we do with our freed-up class time? Surely not more case study questions and essays, right?

That question sparked a reimagining of Economics education to build a strong sense of intrinsic motivation, with more simulations to foster relatedness, more mini live-writing exercises to build competence, and more autonomy for students in shaping their learning experience. It was a creative, collaborative chapter I’ll always treasure.

Today, with AI advancing rapidly (a self-marking tool for diagrams soon, perhaps?), the same question remains: What’s next for our face-to-face lessons? The possibilities are endless, and I’m confident our vibrant, forward-thinking Economics fraternity is more than ready to embrace them!”

Mr Koh Weining, 2019 OETA Winner

currently a Vice-Principal at Victoria Junior College

“In the age of rapidly improving generative AI models, trained on vast amounts of human knowledge, it is tempting to think that investing time to gain expertise in a discipline like Economics is no longer worthwhile. On the contrary, as Dr Ethan Mollick eloquently puts it, ‘Expertise is going to matter more than before, because experts may be able to get the most out of AI co-workers.’ For educators, that means doubling down on conceptual clarity, teaching students to understand and question assumptions, and modelling the disciplined curiosity that even the smartest models still lack.”

Mr Gilbert Ng, 2019 OETA Winner

currently a Subject Head (Educational Technology) at Hwa Chong Institution

“Economics isn’t just about graphs and models—it’s alive in every decision we make. When students spot economic concepts in daily news or family discussions (#whereisthecons), that’s when real learning happens. While we teach about trade-offs and opportunity costs, we should emphasise that economic decisions aren’t coldly rational; they’re deeply human, affecting communities and lives.

To fellow Economics teachers starting out: let your passion for the subject shine through. Students can tell when you’re genuinely excited about a concept. Don’t hesitate to experiment with new teaching approaches—whether it’s using current affairs, games, or real-world case studies. Most importantly, lean on your colleagues; their experience and support are invaluable resources in your teaching journey.”

Mr Kevin Tan, 2021 OETA Winner

currently a Senior Curriculum Planning Officer at the Ministry of Education

“As AI reshapes every aspect of life, critical thinking and intellectual curiosity are more important than ever. Economics is an excellent subject for developing these skills. It offers tools to understand real-world issues while encouraging us to ask why, question assumptions and explore how the real world really work. As much as theories provide useful frameworks, it is our ability to apply them thoughtfully that leads to real learning. By engaging our students actively with current events, they become better equipped to navigate complexities and respond effectively to the rapid changes shaping our world.”

Mr Simon Quek, 2021 OETA Winner

currently the Head of Department (Economics) at Raffles Institution

“Teaching Economics is deeply meaningful to me as it nurtures thinking that helps students make sense of the world around them. I find joy in guiding them to uncover hidden logic behind everyday experiences, like why bottled water costs more at Universal Studios than at supermarkets. It is in these small moments of curiosity that real learning takes root. What inspires me most is watching students grow in understanding, confidence and purpose. In a world increasingly shaped by AI, it is more important than ever to teach students to think deeply, question boldly, and judge wisely. My hope is that through this journey, students grow into thoughtful and compassionate individuals empowered to shape a better world.”

Ms Zeng Wenjie, 2022 OETA Winner

currently a Curriculum Planning Officer at the Ministry of Education

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ECONOMISTS

**Insights from
Ms Loh Xin Min
from Eunoia Junior College (EJC),
winner of the
Outstanding Economics Teacher
Award (OETA) 2024**

Through the OETA, ESS celebrates educators who inspire a love for Economics and shape the thinkers of tomorrow. In this interview, we shine the spotlight on Ms Loh Xin Min, Lead Teacher at EJC and winner of the OETA. Ms Loh shared her thoughts on how she makes Economics come alive for her students, the role of Economics education, and the fulfilling aspects of a career in Economic education.



The OETA recognises teaching excellence in the field of Economics. Could you share an example of a particularly memorable lesson or classroom experience that resonated with your students?

One particularly memorable lesson was when I set up a role-play in which students acted as key decision-makers in Singapore's economy—policymakers, business owners, and households, where they had to allocate resources while considering various trade-offs (e.g. prioritising education, healthcare, infrastructure, or social welfare). It was incredible watching my students realise the complexities and interconnectedness of economic decisions, react as new information came up, and truly experiencing the weight of decision-making.

What role do you see Economics education playing in empowering the younger generation?

By understanding economic forces at play, young people can make more informed choices about everything from career paths to voting responsibly in elections. I see Economics as a lens that enables students to interpret what's happening around them—locally and globally—and equips them with the tools to make positive change.

What has been the most fulfilling part of your career in Economics education thus far?

Watching students gain confidence as they grasp challenging concepts and start to connect them with the world around them. Seeing them grow from confusion to clarity, and from reluctance to enthusiasm, has been deeply rewarding. I've seen students who initially struggled in Economics later develop a real passion for the subject and even pursue careers in public policy and related fields.

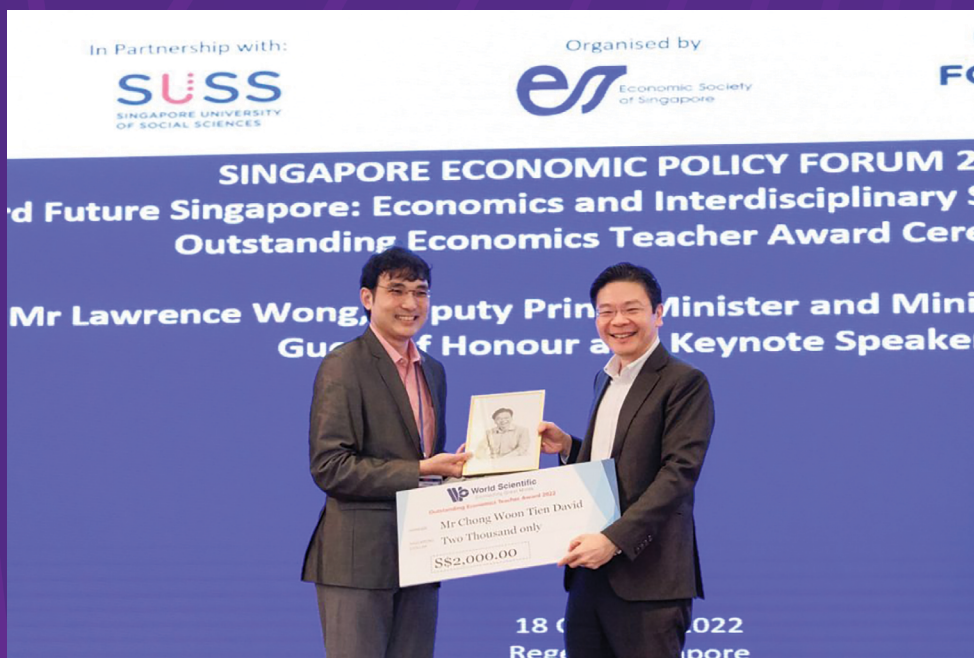
The ESS thanks Ms Loh for her outstanding contributions to Economics education and looks forward to continued collaboration to advance the field and empower Singaporean youth.

This interview was conducted by the ESS Young Professionals (ESSYP) and was originally published as a LinkedIn post. It has been edited for clarity.

TEACHING ECONOMICS AS A LIVING WEB

Weaving a Living Narrative

By **Mr David Chong**, 2022 OETA Winner



It is an irony that Economics—arguably one of the most real-world subjects—is often perceived by junior college (JC) students as abstract, theoretical, and difficult to apply. Yet this irony is precisely what makes it one of the most valuable subjects in the 21st century: The real world is complex and offers few black and white answers, and Economics (even at the JC level) demands that students interpret information, understand contexts, exercise critical judgment, all while drawing from textbook theories taught within the somewhat artificial boundaries of the classroom.

Our goal should be not just to explain theories, but to help students experience how those theories interact, clash, and adapt in the real world.

Then and Now: A Shift in Syllabus, A Shift in Thinking?

Compared to my own JC days in the early 1990s, the syllabus has expanded significantly to reflect a broader range of concerns today beyond just actual and potential growth—inclusiveness, sustainability, equity, and global interdependence. Taught within a challenging span of two years, students often experience Economics as a series of disconnected topics. Many turn to rote learning, not because they're unmotivated, but because they struggle to see the parts connect in any meaningful way. Sometimes, it feels like being given a set of Lego bricks, but not given an image of what you're building.

From Theory to 3D Narrative Web of Meaning: A Cognitive Shift

My personal belief is, therefore, that Economics education must shift from delivering content in a linear fashion to crafting a multi-layered, spatially connected narrative—one that resembles a 3D web, or even a 4D map unfolding over time.

Think of it this way: a child might forget a list of 10 isolated definitions, but when those ideas are embedded in a story world—with characters, consequences, and connections—they become memorable and meaningful. The same principle applies to Economics. Our goal should be not just to explain theories, but to help students experience how those theories interact, clash, and adapt in the real world.

In such a narrative, concepts like opportunity cost, externalities, market failure, and government intervention don't live in separate silos. Instead, they intersect and reappear across contexts—climate policy, digital platform economies, geopolitical conflict, inequality. A well-told economic story does not proceed chapter by chapter—it spirals, weaves, and loops back.

And just as importantly, students should be encouraged to build their own conceptual webs—adding strands as they encounter new ideas, revising links when the real world challenges prior assumptions. This fosters adaptive thinkers, not just exam-ready ones.

AI as Assistant and Co-Builder, Not Answer Source

Schools are already making efforts to bridge classroom learning to the real world through learning journeys, exhibitions, conferences, and forums for teachers and students alike. But we are now at the cusp of a new frontier: AI and digital tools offer the potential to do far more.

In a world where knowledge is literally at our fingertips, the goal of Economics education should not be mere content retention. Rather, the focus should shift towards applying these concepts in authentic, meaningful contexts—where global literacy, adaptive thinking, and creativity matter more than ever.

AI is already flexing its potential to function as a powerful assistant to reinforce basic concepts, provide real-time feedback, enable data analysis, and help students explore ideas. It can even simulate dialogic thinking (which I'm having fun deploying as games in class), allowing students to bounce off and refine their understanding without dependence on pre-scripted answers. This will certainly support and expedite students' learning in their two years' JC curriculum.

Over the years, I have experimented with existing traditional and digital tools not only to build spatial narratives for students, but to empower them to build their own. With generative AI, I have been able to take it even one step further, incorporating game master-style and personas in short story gamification. Now with evolving generative digital storytelling tools and evolving mindmap technology, turbo-charged by AI, I believe we have powerful tools to leverage on to promote more beyond linear learning.

Towards a Living Curriculum

Ultimately, Economics should not be taught as a fixed body of knowledge, but as a living curriculum that reflects the dynamic, interdependent world we inhabit, which is anything but linear. As educators, we must nurture not just economically literate students, but economically *thoughtful* ones—able to navigate ambiguity, interrogate assumptions, and see both the forest and the trees through their interconnections.

Mr David Chong is currently a Senior Teacher at Hwa Chong Institution.





Reflections of an Economics Educator

By Mr Toh Jin Tian, 2018 OETA Winner



As educators, we are architects who design learning experiences that enable our students to learn at their best. Yet, in our role as Economics educators, we constantly grapple with the following thoughts:

- Beyond the perceived didactic delivery, how might Economics lectures be designed to promote a greater level of participation?
- How can economic concepts be taught more authentically?
- In the current educational landscape, how can we make the most of AI to improve the teaching of Economics?

Economics offers us insights into how individuals, producers, and nations interact and make decisions. Through Economics, students develop an understanding of stakeholders' behaviours, from local market dynamics to international trade relations. While understanding economic theories, terminologies and trade-offs is essential, the subject's true value lies in cultivating critical thinking skills that empower us to make better decisions. To deliver this value, the most impactful learning often emerges when we explore opportunities from both within and beyond the school.

When asked about my most memorable lesson, I recall the Economics lecture where I partnered with our



school's alumni on the topic of International Trade. Together with the department, we redesigned the conventional, content-driven lecture on International Trade into an interactive dialogue with industry practitioners, where we shifted students' roles from passive recipients to active participants. By leveraging school partnerships, we invited alumni who held positions in multinational companies and international trade sectors to co-lecture and participate in a panel discussion that brought theoretical concepts to life. The lecture explored the impact of globalisation and Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) through the lens of real-world practitioners. Students witnessed how theories are applied in real-world business decisions and market dynamics, which enabled them to think more deeply and draw connections between theories and real life. When students understand the concepts taught, they naturally raise inquisitive

questions, such as "With higher operational costs, why is Singapore still able to continue to attract FDIs?", an excellent question which our industry practitioners readily address through their lived experiences. The lesson not only reinforced economic concepts but also provided nuggets of wisdom that students could use as evaluative comments in their essays. Our alumni contributed by enriching the curriculum, while our students deepened their learning. That is the win-win that we seek!

In the age of AI, our role as educators has become more relevant, and not less. Compared to previous generations who learned without AI assistance, we can expect students to begin with a higher knowledge baseline nowadays. Against this backdrop where our students, as digital natives, can easily access Economics content and analysis through AI platforms, how do we add value to their educational journey? The solution lies in repositioning ourselves from content providers to skilled facilitators of learning. With AI, we can leverage Adaptive Learning Systems, where students can learn independently based on their strengths and learning needs, curate questions that encourage students to sharpen their analytical skills or generate different paragraphs that require students to compare and improve their evaluations through contextualisation. AI is here to stay, and we should take the opportunity to understand its capabilities and embrace it as part of our teaching pedagogies. Our continuing role is not to compete with technology, but to guide students to use AI responsibly, ensuring that they do not weaken their "reasoning muscles". While AI is capable of processing existing data and identify patterns, it is unable to effectively replicate human judgement in analysing complex economic issues or navigate the ethical dimensions of economic decision-making in our ever-evolving landscape. This is where our evolved relevance as Economics educators lies—in developing students' critical thinking and ethical reasoning capabilities alongside the technical knowledge they possess.

Mr Toh Jin Tian is currently a Vice-Principal at Rulang Primary School.