

Going beyond the classroom to ensure every child loves what he is learning.

ISSUE 62 APR-JUN 2017

EXPERIENCE SINGAPORE



A Call To Teach
PASSIONATE EDUCATORS WHO GO THE EXTRA MILE



Sharing Expertise
BUILDING TIES WITH MYANMAR THROUGH TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Learning, The S'pore Way
HELPING TO ENRICH THE GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL ECO-SYSTEM



Education, EVOLVED

Teaching Singapore students to excel beyond academics



EDUCATION, EVOLVED

Education played a crucial role in Singapore's third-to-first world transition; and a flexible education system now in place aims to keep its citizens relevant amid a competitive global landscape.



TEXT BY PHYLLIS HONG




↑ Clockwise from above: Students role-play as part of their retail operations module; Technology gadgets are used for a more engaging learning experience; Outdoor education hones students' character and leadership skills; Students learn first aid during their Co-Curricular Activities.

** FINDINGS FROM THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN 2012 FOUND THAT GREATER NATIONAL WEALTH OR HIGHER EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION DOES NOT GUARANTEE BETTER STUDENT PERFORMANCE. THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND THE EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES BEAR SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE TOO.

CONTENTS

-  **3 FOCUS**
Education, evolved
A flexible education system has kept Singaporeans relevant amid a competitive global landscape.
-  **6 REFLECTIONS**
Building ties through sharing Singapore's expertise in technical education
Singapore shares skills and knowledge for the Singapore-Myanmar Vocational Training Institute.
-  **8 IN SINGAPORE**
A call to teach
Award-winning teachers talk about their passion for education.



-  **10 JOINING HANDS**
Learning, the Singapore way
Singapore is constantly collaborating with other nations to enrich the global education ecosystem.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SINGAPORE

Copyright © is held by the publishers.
All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers.
www.timesprinters.com. ISSN: 0219-2896

Experience Singapore is a publication of the Public Affairs and Technical Cooperation Directorates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore. The Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, and is aimed at sharing Singapore's developmental experience with other developing countries.

Publishing Consultant
Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Cover Photos: Ministry of Education, Singapore, National Youth Council

Photos: Ministry of Education, Singapore, National Youth Council

Dear readers,

Change is the only constant that keeps Singapore's education system effective – as the nation progressed after it achieved Independence in 1965, a flexible and nimble approach in educating its citizens has equipped them with the skills needed to ride the economic winds of change and remain competitive. **Education, evolved** takes a look at how education played a critical role in Singapore's first-to-third world transition.

Singapore did not go it alone, education-wise, in those early years of nation-building; it benefitted from assistance provided by other countries. To pay it forward, Singapore now collaborates with other nations to enrich the global educational ecosystem. **Learning, the Singapore way** features three initiatives in both the public and private sectors.

Building ties through sharing Singapore's expertise in technical education shows how the Singapore-Myanmar Vocational Training Institute (SMVTI) – a joint project between Singapore and Myanmar – is helping Myanmar to train and upgrade its workforce. The SMVTI is modelled after Singapore's Institutes of Technical Education.

Needless to say, teachers are the backbone of Singapore's education system. As of 2015, there were 33,105 teachers in active service. **A call to teach** highlights three award-winning teachers who have been recognised for their passion for imparting knowledge – in cultural, musical and early childhood education – to different groups of students.

We hope this issue of *Experience Singapore* will prove 'educational', and provide food for thought.

Teo Lay Cheng

Director
Public Affairs Directorate
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore

Keep
in touch!

Share with us your memories,
photos and experiences in
Singapore under the Singapore
Cooperation Programme.
Email us at mfa@mfa.sg





Scan QR Code to
read magazine online


NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

TO PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION, EDUCATION IS HEAVILY SUBSIDISED FOR SINGAPOREAN STUDENTS, WHO DO NOT PAY ANY SCHOOL FEES FOR THE SIX YEARS OF COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION. FINANCIAL AID IS ALSO AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES.

SINGAPORE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM IS REGULARLY REVIEWED AND REFINED TO ENSURE INCLUSIVITY.


 Children with moderate to severe special education needs will no longer be exempted from the Compulsory Education Act from 2019. As Minister for Education (Schools) Mr Ng Chee Meng said: "This is a reaffirmation that every child matters, regardless of his or her learning challenges."

 The Tanah Merah Prison School was opened in 2000 for inmates, who are admitted based on factors including level of literacy and conduct. The building houses facilities such as classrooms, a science lab, an IT lab and a library. Its students study an academic curriculum that is similar to that set by the MOE.

 SkillsFuture, a national movement, was launched in 2016 to foster a culture that supports lifelong learning and mastery of skills. All Singaporeans aged 25 and above receive S\$500 credit to enrol in a wide range of approved skills-related courses, from computer to culinary and design classes.

 Students perform a cultural dance for the Singapore Youth Festival.



 Participants of Outward Bound Singapore do team sports such as rafting.

LEARNING TO SURVIVE

The education system in Singapore – post independence in 1965 – was in a survival-driven phase and the government's first order of business was to make education accessible to all. A basic curriculum was developed and schools were rapidly built. In 1966, a bilingualism policy, which enforces the study of a second language in all government or government-aided schools, was implemented. The policy was made to establish social cohesion and practicality. While the English language would enable citizens of different races to communicate and compete in the global marketplace, the learning of a mother tongue was enacted to retain cultural identity. All school lessons were conducted in English by 1987.

In the 1970s, education was the key to producing a trained workforce to drive Singapore's industrially-based economy. Specifically, technical and vocational education was expanded to produce more skilled workers. "Imparting knowledge to pass examinations, and later to do a job, these are

important. However, the litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and cooperate in a civilised way," wrote the late Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in his response to an Education report in 1979.


Towards this end, various programmes have been introduced in schools to inculcate good values and habits in students. The latest is the Character & Citizenship Education (CCE) syllabus, which was rolled out in 2014. CCE focuses on developing students' core values to help them become a confident person, self-directed learner, concerned citizen and an active contributor to the country. To further instil a sense of personal and social responsibility, it was made compulsory (by end-2016) that all students (from primary through to secondary and junior college levels) learn the common spaces in their schools daily.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the 1990s, Singapore transitioned to a knowledge-based economy. This required a paradigm shift in the education system; to focus more on creativity and research over technical knowledge. MOE's vision "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation", introduced in 1997, was based on the idea that its citizens' capacity to learn, innovate and adapt to changes are fundamental to Singapore retaining its competitive edge. The curriculum was revised to boost creative thinking skills while cutting down on the amount of factual content students had to memorise. Teachers and principals were encouraged to hone their thinking skills too, and were given more autonomy to design their schools' curriculum and co-curricular activities for better learning outcomes.

Information and Communication Technology has been integrated into the "thinking" curriculum to encourage collaborative and self-directed learning. One such way is conducting some lessons in computer labs, where students use the Internet and computer software during class. As Singapore moves towards its Smart Nation vision – where people are empowered by technology to lead meaningful and fulfilled



 Technology is integrated into the curriculum to encourage collaborative and self-directed learning.

lives – schools are engaging and enhancing their students' learning with technology that is increasingly sophisticated. Educational technology now includes mobile gaming applications and augmented reality. Some schools have also adopted technology-enabled pedagogies, like the Flipped Classroom approach, where students do online research independently before sharing the information with peers in class.

To reinforce the importance of education and prepare citizens for a knowledge-based economy, the Compulsory Education Act was implemented in 2003. Singaporeans aged between 7 and 14 have to minimally complete Primary education in a national primary school, unless exempted on a case-by-case basis.

GOING BEYOND GRADES

As early as almost two decades ago, MOE saw the need for a holistic education – beyond academics, students should also develop their character, leadership abilities and understanding of the world around them. As Minister Ng said recently, during a Parliamentary debate in 2016, "good character, social-emotional competencies and other skills like critical thinking and effective communication are necessary foundations for work and life". An example of efforts to achieve that is a S\$250-million Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) campus on Coney Island in north-eastern Singapore. To be ready in 2020, the campus (a bigger version of an already-existing OBS) will promote outdoor education via nature trails and develop attributes like a sense of adventure in participants.

Examinations and assessment methods have been reviewed to reduce reliance on rote learning. The Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme was introduced in 2004 to allow some secondary schools to select potential students based on their achievements and talents before the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results are released. From 2021, the PSLE will use scoring bands ('Achievement Levels' from AL1 to AL8) instead of aggregate scores, in a move to encourage students to focus on their learning instead

Photos: Ministry of Education, Singapore; National Youth Council



EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING WILL BE INTEGRATED AS ONE. THIS WILL MAKE US LOOK AT EDUCATION FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE – ONE THAT IS NO LONGER JUST CONFINED TO SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING, BUT IS A LIFELONG PURSUIT OF MASTERY AND EXCELLENCE FOR EVERYONE

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS) MR ONG YE KUNG ON THE SKILLSFUTURE MOVEMENT THAT PROMOTES LIFELONG LEARNING

of being preoccupied with the achievement of stellar grades and peer competition.

Besides reducing excessive focus on academic results, this move also recognises the importance of intrinsic motivation. "We believe in nurturing the joy of learning so that every child can discover his interests, grow his passions, and love what he is doing. School should not just be about doing well in exams. It should be an exciting place to acquire knowledge and skills, where learning is fun and with the necessary rigour," said Minister Ng in March 2017. To do so, schools encourage learning through play, such as organising field trips and outdoor games.

To encourage learning after formal schooling, the Lifelong Learning Institute was launched in 2013 under SkillsFuture Singapore (see sidebar) to promote continuing education. Training and professional upgrading programmes are available to help adults develop or update skills that can boost their employability. ●

STELLAR RESULTS

HERE ARE TWO RECENT INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING TESTS WHERE SINGAPORE STUDENTS

★ **TOPPED BOTH SUBJECTS** in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2016, beating students from 63 other education systems. TIMSS is conducted every four years and evaluates Primary 4 and Secondary 2 students.

★ **TOOK FIRST PLACE** in reading, mathematics and science in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Dubbed the "World Cup for Education", PISA is a global study of 15-year-olds and is coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development every three years.

STARTING YOUNG



The Singapore government recognises that the early years are crucial for a child's development – that quality pre-school education can help young children nurture positive attitudes towards learning, develop strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills, as well as build confidence for a smoother transition to formal education in primary schools.

Thus, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) was set up in 2013. It is responsible for the development and regulation of the pre-school sector, which comprises kindergartens and childcare centres.

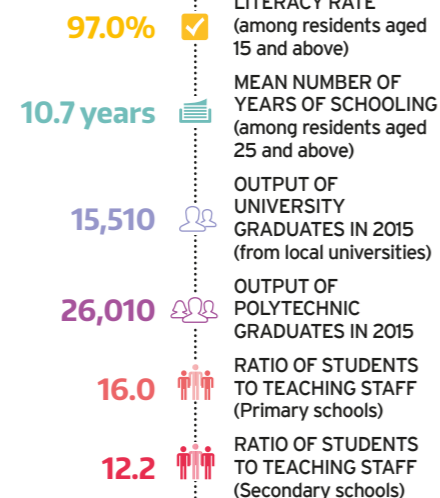
DRIVE QUALITY AND UPLIFT SECTOR'S PROFESSIONALISM

ECDA offers Continuing Professional Development courses to raise the standards of early childhood educators, who are advised to clock at least 20 training hours each year. Pre-schools are also encouraged to participate in a quality assurance certification scheme. The Early Childhood Development Centres Bill was passed in February 2017 to ensure consistent standards across the sector. All pre-schools have to be licensed under a common regulatory framework and all staff must be approved by ECDA.

There are about 16,000 pre-school educators in Singapore and an estimated 4,000 more are needed by 2020. To meet the manpower crunch, an Early Childhood Manpower Plan has been unveiled to attract more to join the sector. The plan comprises more training options for mid-career switchers and clearer career paths for the various job roles. From July 2017, the Singapore University of Social Sciences will be the first public local university to offer a full-time degree in early childhood education.

Improving the accessibility of pre-schools was also highlighted in the Singapore Budget 2017. Childcare places have increased by over 40 per cent in the past five years to about 140,000. To meet the growing demand, the capacity of centre-based infant care will also increase to over 8,000 vacancies by 2020 for children under 18 months of age.

At a glance



SOURCES: DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS SINGAPORE; EDUCATION STATISTICS DIGEST 2016

BUILDING TIES THROUGH SHARING SINGAPORE'S EXPERTISE IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The Singapore-Myanmar Vocational Training Institute is modelled after Singapore's Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

Located on the grounds of the former Nat Mauk Polytechnic High School in Yangon, the Singapore-Myanmar Vocational Training Institute (SMVTI) is a joint project between Singapore and Myanmar, to help Myanmar train and upgrade its workforce. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in April 2014, with Singapore's Institute of Technical Education Services (ITEES) as the principal consultant, overseeing areas

such as pedagogy and curriculum.

The Institute was officially launched by Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong on 9 June 2016. Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Mr Ong Ye Kung, who co-chairs the SMVTI's Board of Institute, explained Singapore's role: "Myanmar is going through a very special period in its history. A lot of transitional issues – the democratisation as well as liberalisation of

its economy to be more market-oriented. It is meaningful for Singapore to contribute to Myanmar in this period, especially since it has experience in training workers."

Modelled after Singapore's Institute of Technical Education (ITE), the Institute conducts 10 six-month courses across four schools, namely Hospitality and Tourism, Electrical and Electronics, Facilities Management, and Engineering Services. The Institute enrolled its inaugural batch of 400 students, consisting of 160 H&T students and 240 E&T students respectively. This batch graduated by April 2016, and most of the graduates secured employment within six months.

OPPORTUNITIES AWAY FROM HOME

Starting from December 2016, the top 20 SMVTI graduates of each year will be offered internships with various companies in Singapore. These internships serve as learning journeys for the graduates by exposing them to real work environments. They learn new skills and knowledge relevant to the respective trades while on the job.

Then-CEO (ITEES) Mr Tan Seng Hua welcomed the first batch of interns at the ITE Academy on 14 December 2016. For

Briefing of SIP interns at ITE HQ on 14 December 2016.



“MYANMAR IS GOING THROUGH A VERY SPECIAL PERIOD IN ITS HISTORY. A LOT OF TRANSITIONAL ISSUES – THE DEMOCRATISATION AS WELL AS LIBERALISATION OF ITS ECONOMY TO BE MORE MARKET-ORIENTED. IT IS MEANINGFUL FOR SINGAPORE TO CONTRIBUTE TO MYANMAR IN THIS PERIOD, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT HAS EXPERIENCE IN TRAINING WORKERS

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS) MR ONG YE KUNG, WHO CO-CHAIRS THE SMVTI'S BOARD OF INSTITUTE

Prime Minister Lee, with then-Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Mr Ong Ye Kung at the SMVTI Official Launch.



Thu Ya Win, a graduate from the SMVTI course "Residential Air-conditioning" during his internship at the Fairmont Hotel in Singapore.

some, this was their first time being away from home, and outside of Myanmar. At the welcome ceremony, the interns were introduced to their mentors, who would guide them along the way throughout their internship.

The first batch of graduates are set to complete their internships in June 2017. Apart from the professional experiences, they also took home new friendships from Singapore.

DELIVERING THE FRUITS OF LABOUR

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which outlines the gradual handover of the SMVTI to Myanmar was signed during Emeritus Senior Minister (ESM) Mr Goh Chok Tong's official visit to Myanmar on 15 March 2017. As part of Singapore's skills and knowledge transfer to Myanmar, the local management team will be groomed to take over the operations of the Institute in three years.



Students and staff gather to take a fun selfie with Prime Minister Lee and SMVTI's management.

A call to TEACH

Three award-winning teachers from Singapore talk about their passion for education.

TEXT BY ASHUTOSH RAVIKRISHNAN

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Growing up in one of Singapore's last *kampongs* (villages) instilled the importance of community in Mrs **Munirah Eszham**, 33. As she recalled, "I saw people of different ethnicities coming together to celebrate each other's festivals, and I think this community spirit played a part in maintaining Singapore's social cohesion (in our early years)."

Today, as an English and Social Studies teacher at CHIJ St. Nicholas Girls' School (Primary), Mrs Eszham does her part to nurture this sense of community in her students, aged 11 and 12 years old. To do this, she creates immersive and innovative learning experiences, such as the mock Indian wedding she organised last year. That experience was to hone her students' cultural awareness and sensitivity. In 2016, she also led a scavenger hunt through Singapore's cultural enclaves to enrich her students' understanding of the heritage of different ethnic groups.

Her colleagues benefit from Mrs Eszham's commitment to learning too. A firm believer in lifelong learning, she also organises learning journeys for them. "For educators to teach with passion, they need to be immersed in their subjects," she said. On a recent journey, the teachers played tourist and explored Singapore to understand the historic significance behind different street names. "These are places we discuss in Social Studies



SMARTPHONES AND MOBILE APPS AREN'T JUST GREAT FOR ENTERTAINMENT – THEY CAN ALSO BE USED TO MAKE LEARNING FUN AND IMMERSIVE

MRS ESZHAM, WHO USES TECHNOLOGY TO BRING HER LESSONS TO LIFE

lessons. The excursion gave teachers a chance to share their own observations with students," said Mrs Eszham, who began teaching six years ago.

She is also committed to learning best practices from teachers around the world. Last year, Mrs Eszham had attended a professional development course on global educational strategies and practices in Canada. Her trip was sponsored by the Ministry of Education, after Mrs Eszham was conferred the Outstanding Youth in Education Award 2016. The annual accolade is presented to teachers below the age of 35 who have shown commendable enthusiasm, energy and active involvement in youth development.

◆ Mrs Eszham uses interactive models of teaching to nurture a sense of community in her students.



◆ A firm believer in the importance of musical education, Mr Tan is committed to making it more accessible to students.

WHY I MAKE MUSIC...

Instead of words, the pages of Mr **Philip Tan's** teenage diaries are filled with musical notes. "I would record everyday happenings in original music compositions," the 43-year-old said to *Experience Singapore*. "Music was my therapy and soulmate."

As a freelance musical educator, he hopes to share this power of music with Singapore's youths. Mr Tan teaches students of different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. One memorable stint was at a halfway house, where he worked with vulnerable teenagers. "I hope to widen access to musical education so that music becomes a companion of students," he said.

For his efforts to deepen students' appreciation for music, Mr Tan was nominated for the annual Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Prize in 2016. Dubbed the "Nobel Prize for teachers", the award is presented to teachers who make outstanding contributions to the profession. Mr Tan was nominated from more than 20,000 candidates. Although he did not clinch the award,



◆◆ Ms Kaur receiving the Leading Foundation Teacher Award 2016 (above) for her work in the early childhood sector (left).



◆◆ Mr Tan teaches students of different age groups and uses technology to enliven classes.

being nominated was an eye-opening experience. "It gave me an opportunity to meet other global educators, who share my passion for teaching. I interacted with a teacher who is honing the creativity of children in war zones – our exchange reminded me of the important role that teachers play."

I started teaching...at 15 for pocket money. My parents didn't have much then, and giving music and piano classes was an important source of income.

The most inspiring teacher in my life has been...my mother who gave up a career to nurture my siblings and I. She always had something positive to say, which is an inspiring attitude to have.

Music is an integral aspect of education because...it's more than just therapeutic; it communicates, fights prejudice and promotes understanding. Having a musical curriculum bridges, grows and shapes minds.



TEACHERS ARE THE BACKBONE OF SINGAPORE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM. AS OF 2015, THERE WERE **33,105** TEACHERS IN SINGAPORE.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

"I FOLLOWED MY PASSION"

Ms **Parvinjit Kaur**, 37, an educator at the PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Woodlands Blk 677, was one of five recipients of the Leading Foundation Teacher Award 2016. Presented by the National Institute of Education, the annual award honours passionate, dedicated teachers involved in early childhood and special needs education.

"I am following my passion (to teach), and receiving the award is just an added bonus. My educational journey began rather unexpectedly. I was an orthopaedic clinical support specialist for two years. During this time, I had a chance to interact with kids at hospitals and was intrigued by their thought processes, how their sense of curiosity affected the way they thought, acted and behaved. Interacting with them and their parents made me realise that I could make a positive difference in their lives.

I made the switch to the early childhood education sector six years ago. Transitioning from the healthcare to the education sector was not easy, but I had supportive leaders and colleagues who helped me apply the concepts I learnt in school. I've brought several skills with me from my previous job, like clear communication practices and sharp attention to detail.

A child's development is a two-way street between parents and educators. We're partners in this journey. That's why I make it a point to understand and connect with parents – so that they can help their children at home. I hold informal sharing sessions with parents on weekends, to show them how to sharpen their skills, so that they are better-equipped to help their children.

I'm also passionate about helping children with special needs, who can sometimes be left behind. As educators, it is important that we prevent this by understanding how to serve their needs. I signed up for a course to learn how to better support those with special needs, and today I share what I've learnt with parents and teachers." ●



TOP OF THE CLASS

Last December, OECD announced that for the first time, Singapore had topped its Programme for International Student Assessment. The triennial study tests 540,000 15-year-old students from more than 70 countries and economies, and is considered one of the most influential international scorecards for education systems.

Just before noon in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia, 100 teachers are gathered in a classroom to learn how to teach English effectively. The “teacher to the teachers” in this instance is Mr Prakasham Thangaveloo from Singapore, and he explains how cloze passages, a common language assessment tool in Singapore, can promote students’ comprehension skills.

This exchange of educational practices took place between 2013 and 2015, as part of a collaboration between Tatarstan’s Ministry of Education and Educare International Consultancy (Educare), a Singaporean education consultancy firm. Such collaborations are becoming increasingly common as more global organisations choose to learn best practices from Singapore’s education system, which has been named one of the world’s best by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (see sidebar).

Singapore’s public and private sectors, too, are eager to share their expertise with other countries, so that they can also enjoy the economic growth that comes with a well-educated population. As Dr Goh Chor Boon, Associate Dean of National Institute of Education (NIE) International, pointed out, it is a way to pay it forward. “In the decades after independence, Singapore’s education system benefitted from assistance provided by other countries. It is important that we now do our part (to help others),” he told *Experience Singapore*.



LEARNING, THE SINGAPORE WAY

How Singapore’s collaborations with other nations are enriching the global educational ecosystem.

TEXT BY ASHUTOSH RAVIKRISHNAN

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

NIE International, the consultancy arm of NIE, Singapore’s national teacher education institute, spearheads the Republic’s efforts to improve global education standards. One of its flagship programmes, the annual Leaders in Education Programme International, will return for a 12th edition in July. It is expected to attract nearly 40 school leaders and administrators from 20 countries. “Participants will brainstorm ways to lead schools of the 21st century and learn how to align school programmes with larger goals of national development,” said Dr Goh. Other highlights of the event include learning journeys to Singapore’s schools. “These give delegates an opportunity to understand how our school leaders and teachers are developing 21st century competencies in students,” he added.

Educators from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Bahrain are among those who have benefitted from NIE International’s programmes. The Institute employs a “training of trainers” approach, which allows programmes to maximise their reach. For example, in the late 2000s, 600 school leadership trainers from Vietnam visited NIE International for a series of seminars, presentations and school visits. These participants then went on to train some 30,000 Vietnamese principals.



↑ An international delegation at a session of NIE International’s Leaders in Education International programme.



“IN THE DECADES AFTER INDEPENDENCE, SINGAPORE’S EDUCATION SYSTEM BENEFITTED FROM ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY OTHER COUNTRIES. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE NOW DO OUR PART (TO HELP OTHERS)”

DR GOH CHOR BOON, ASSOCIATE DEAN, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (NIE) INTERNATIONAL



An EtonHouse classroom.



↑ EIC Chairman, Mike Thiruman, conducting a workshop at Kazan Federal University in 2013.

BEYOND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Private educational consultancy firms like Educare are also doing their part to promote the Singapore way of learning. Collaborative programmes like the firm’s partnership with Tatarstan’s government, are key to improving teaching outcomes, said Mr Mike Thiruman, Educare’s Chairman. “Sharing best practices is also essential because educators around the world face the same challenge of developing students’ critical thinking, creativity and problem solving skills,” he elaborated.

Educare was engaged by the Tatarstan government in 2011, when representatives from its Ministry of Education visited Singapore on a study trip. “We were invited to pilot a four-week programme for about 240 teachers,” said Mr Thiruman. Since then, Educare has run holistic professional development programmes for more than 33,000 teachers in Tatarstan. “The programmes impart teaching and learning strategies that transform mind-sets and classroom routines – teachers no longer just feed students with information, but have taken up more facilitative roles,” said Ms Liliya Mukhametshina, Educare’s Adjunct Director and its Chief Representative in the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States. This encourages students to be more independent and engaged learners.



AECES Overseas Exchange.

Photos: Shutterstock, NIE International

Photos: Educare, AECES, EtonHouse

EDUCARE HAS LED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR MORE THAN 33,000 TEACHERS IN TATARSTAN.

↑ As part of Educare’s training programme, Tatarstan teachers are invited to Singapore to visit local schools and institutions as part of the experiential learning process.



THE LEARNING NEVER STOPS

Despite its successful education system, Singapore’s educators in the private and public sector continue to learn best practices – both well-established and novel – from their global counterparts as well. Embarking on study trips and attending foreign conferences are among the most popular ways of doing this.

Early childhood educators from EtonHouse, which operates a chain of pre-schools in Singapore, have made study trips to Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. The city is the birthplace of the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasises early childhood learning through language, play, art, modelling and music. Since 2014, more than 30 teachers from EtonHouse have participated in these trips to better understand this approach. These learning journeys are funded by the company.

The trips inspire educators to be innovative in their classrooms. Ms Wong Wei Sum, a Kindergarten 2 teacher said, “We interacted with Italian teachers and learnt how they make the most of resources to help children express themselves. I hope to create a similar environment in my classroom as well. (My students) will soon be creating an animation on the life of caterpillars, complete with self-composed songs.” She added that such activities help children become more confident learners.

Professional organisations have also introduced study trips to support the development of its members. The Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) (AECES), a 1,050-strong body of teaching professionals, has conducted three study trips to Finland. “Early childhood education practices differ from country to country and we hope to give members a deeper understanding of global educational philosophies,” said Ms Ivy Kok, AECES’s General Manager. Members also visited Lithuania last year, where they attended the International Step by Step Association conference, an annual meeting of thought leaders from the early childhood sector. The experience left an indelible impression on Ms Sharon Quah, a Vice-Principal on her first study trip with AECES. She said, “I realised that we were all grappling with the same challenges. Knowing that we are not alone (as educators) gives me the tenacity to carry on.” ●



↑ EtonHouse educators during their study trip to northern Italy in 2014, where they learnt more about the Reggio Emilia approach.