

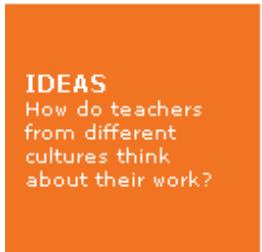


# ARCHIVES

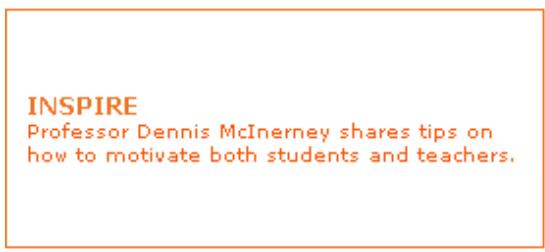
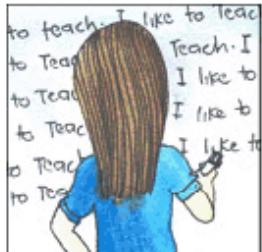


[Home](#) ▶ [Archives](#) ▶ Issue 10

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)**IDEAS**

How do teachers from different cultures think about their work?

**INSPIRE**

Professor Dennis McInerney shares tips on how to motivate both students and teachers.

**VOICES**

See how self-assessment can help motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning.



# ARCHIVES



Home ► Archives ► Issue 10 ► Inspire

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## INSPIRE

**Get to know the theories and issues that inspired defining trends in educational research, policy and practice.**

### Engaged in Learning

Professor Dennis McInerney shares some tips on how to motivate both students and teachers.

Click [here](#) to read more.



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 10 ▶ Inspire ▶ Engaged in Learning

## Archives

### INSPIRE

[Issue 1](#)

[Issue 2](#)

[Issue 3](#)

[Issue 4](#)

[Issue 5](#)

[Issue 6](#)

[Issue 7](#)

[Issue 8](#)

[Issue 9](#)

[Issue 10](#)

[Inspire](#)

[Ideas](#)

[Voices](#)

[Share](#)

[Relax](#)

[Issue 11](#)

[Issue 12](#)

[Issue 13](#)

[Issue 14](#)

### Engaged in Learning

| [Print](#) |

**Professor Dennis McInerney shares some tips on how to motivate both students and teachers.**



For most teachers, the new school year usually begins with two main goals: get students interested in class and get them to show it by performing well. However, like most New Year resolutions, this is often easier said than done.

How can we translate the concept of motivation into concrete actions in the classroom? *SingTeach* speaks to Professor Dennis McInerney about how we can motivate our students and engage them in learning.

**Q: It's common practice for some parents to dangle rewards, like cell phones or iPods, to motivate their children to work harder for their examinations. Is this something teachers should discourage?**

**A:** There's no simple answer to that. Research-based evidence says that students who are achieving well in schools are not rewards dependent. What that implies is even if rewards aren't given to them, they would still do well.

On the other hand, research also shows that students who are low achievers and those for whom particular material is very difficult to learn, or students who are ambitious and try to do well in something hard, a reward might be appropriate to keep them at their tasks. It's not a black-and-white issue.

**Q: What about extrinsic rewards in the classroom context?**

**A:** Research has shown that if you have students who are already intrinsically motivated and working well, when their teachers introduce rewards, there's typically a fall-off in achievement and motivation.

So you don't apply extrinsic rewards in this situation because it may distract the motivated student from the task of learning. Students may develop the desire to compete and outperform other students for the rewards, rather than learn for the sake of learning. This is okay for the winners, those who get the rewards. But there will potentially be a lot of losers, so those who don't get the rewards may lose motivation.

In some cases, students get rewards that aren't effectively tied to real productivity or what they have done, and they say, "Why did I get that reward? I didn't deserve it. Oh well, I don't really have to work much now because I did lousy work and I got a reward." So within that sort of classroom context, extrinsic rewards could be dangerous.

**Q: For students who are already intrinsically motivated, grades may seem to be the only thing that matters. What can we do to help them look beyond that?**

**A:** One of the things teachers can do is get students to *value the pleasure of understanding* what they are learning rather than depending on extrinsic rewards.

Second, help students *set long-term goals* for what they are doing. This connection between immediate goals for learning and future orientation is very important because if students see the utility of what they are doing in school to achieving these future goals,

then doing the work is no longer extrinsically dependant on just the grades.

Third, a simple way is to *provide stimulating and relevant lessons* and set them within real-life contexts. For instance, if they are learning something about medicine, set up a mock medical setting or go visit a hospital.

Fourth, *help students experience success* that is not measured by grades. For example, teachers can attribute success to the students' efforts and abilities, so they think they did well because they worked hard or because they are bright. Then the relevance of extrinsic rewards becomes minimal because the students feel good about themselves.

Fifth, provide students with *motivational feedback* that is not based on a grading system. The feedback could be about the quality, interest, or creativity shown in their work. So give motivational feedback and, if necessary, the grade. Or teachers could design their assessment and evaluation so there are opportunities for alternative assessments that don't have grades attached to them.

There's a whole battery of things a teacher can do but, of course, these have to be used appropriately according to the age of the child. What we typically find is that children from primary schools don't work so much for extrinsic rewards, they work for the fun of learning—they go to school to meet their teachers and friends and to become involved in interesting activities. But when the child gets to secondary school, when there's more grind and grunt, then intrinsic motivation becomes a very important way of keeping them highly task-oriented and focused.

Grades will, of course, always have a role to play in providing both a benchmark against which students can evaluate their performance as well as a motivator for them. And seeking good grades is associated with a whole host of positive reasons, such as pleasing one's parents and family, maximising one's potential to get into good university courses, as well as a tangible reflection of having understood some work. So we can't say that working for grades is all bad.

At the same time, grades should be put into perspective, and some of the other reasons for students trying hard and achieving at school—such as solving interesting problems, working with friends on collaborative projects, helping other kids do well by sharing one's knowledge, being respected as a hard worker—should be given more prominence if we want to have truly well-rounded, motivated students.

**Q: Many factors can influence a child's motivation level, and many of these are beyond a teacher's control. So who should play the role of motivator in a child's life?**

**A:** Well, there's no answer to that. What teachers can work with are the attitudes, values and approaches to learning that students bring to the classroom.

Research shows that there's significant variance in student performance that can be explained by variants in schools and classrooms—such as quality of teaching, appropriate and relevant curriculum, variability in teaching methods, valid and reliable assessment, effective feedback and so on—which teachers have control over.

So there are things teachers can address to enhance student motivation and student engagement in learning but ultimately everyone is responsible.

**Q: Any tips on how teachers can keep themselves motivated throughout the whole academic year?**

**A:** Teachers should question themselves periodically about how motivated they are about teaching. If they want their students to be energetic and motivated, then they have to be inspiring, motivational and energetic themselves.

Effective teaching involves some acting. I remember going into my 15th Introductory Psychology lecture at the university after teaching there for 15 years. I looked at the students and said to myself, "I've got to do this lecture again. I change the content a little each year but I've done this for so long. If I am bored, the students will also be bored."

But then I remember that when I walk in there, all those faces weren't there for 15 years. They are new faces and they are excited, and they are there to learn something new. And so I had to reinvent myself and make the lecture sound as if it was the first time I had ever given it, and become just as excited about the lecture as the students.

I think if teachers structure their teaching well and have good teaching skills, they will see progress in their students. It may be small in some classes but once they see progress, it will enthuse and motivate them throughout the year. Also, teachers should use a variety of methods in their teaching and assessment so that they can enjoy teaching and their students can remain engaged.

Personal engagement with the students will help them to stay enthusiastic in their long teaching careers. Get to know students personally; for instance, get to know something about their background or interests. Once the teachers are personally engaged with them, they will stay motivated through the year because they have become friends.



*Dennis McInerney is a Professor at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.*

*He has a strong interest in cross-cultural research and has published extensively in refereed international journals and written numerous book chapters and conference papers, particularly in the area of motivation and learning.*

#### **Selected References**

McInerney, D. M. (2006). *Developmental psychology for teachers: An applied approach*. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

McInerney, D. M., & McInerney, V. (2006). *Educational psychology: Constructing learning* (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia: Pearson.

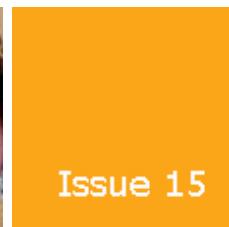
McInerney, D. M. (2005). *Helping kids achieve their best: Understanding and using motivation in the classroom* (Revised ed.). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

> [Click here](#) to read the *SingTeach* feature on this project

> Read about [CRPP's research project](#) on student motivation and future goals

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*



[Home](#) ▶ [Current Issue](#) ▶ [Ideas](#) ▶ [What Students Want to Achieve](#)

[Current Issue](#)

## IDEAS

[Inspire](#)

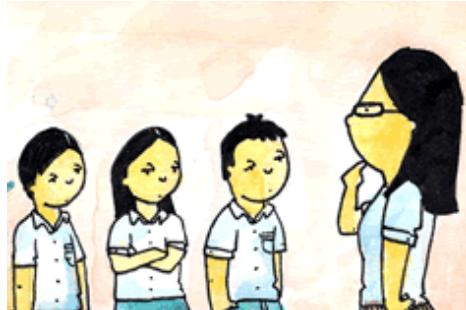
### What Students Want to Achieve

| [Print](#) |

[Ideas](#)

**Competitive. Grade-conscious. Materialistic.** The stereotype of the students in Singapore is one that seems to be mainly driven by economics and success. However, a recent CRPP research study tells us that our students' goals are not as simple as they seem.

[Voices](#)



Preliminary data from a CRPP research study shows that while high grades and rewards are still important reasons why students want to do well in school, they're not necessarily at the top of their lists.

[Share](#)

[Relax](#)

[PDF Version](#)

[Contact Us](#)

On the contrary, survey results indicate that students are likely to study hard because they want to improve their performance, are interested in what they're learning or want to help friends who may be having a hard time in class.

Described by Principal Investigator [Dennis McInerney](#) as a "quick hit of information", this one-year study aims to give teachers a general idea of what drives their students to learn and achieve in school.

"As far as we are aware, no one has done an extensive study on how Singaporean students conceptualise their future and where schools fit into their futures," says Prof McInerney. "We want to know if students see a connection between their future goals and what they do day-to-day in their classrooms."

And to find out exactly what motivates a student, the research team surveyed a total of 5,773 students, talked to 50 parents and teachers and conducted 80 student interviews in 13 neighbourhood schools across Singapore.

While the team has focused on areas that have been known to influence student motivation, understanding student goals is a key part of their research.

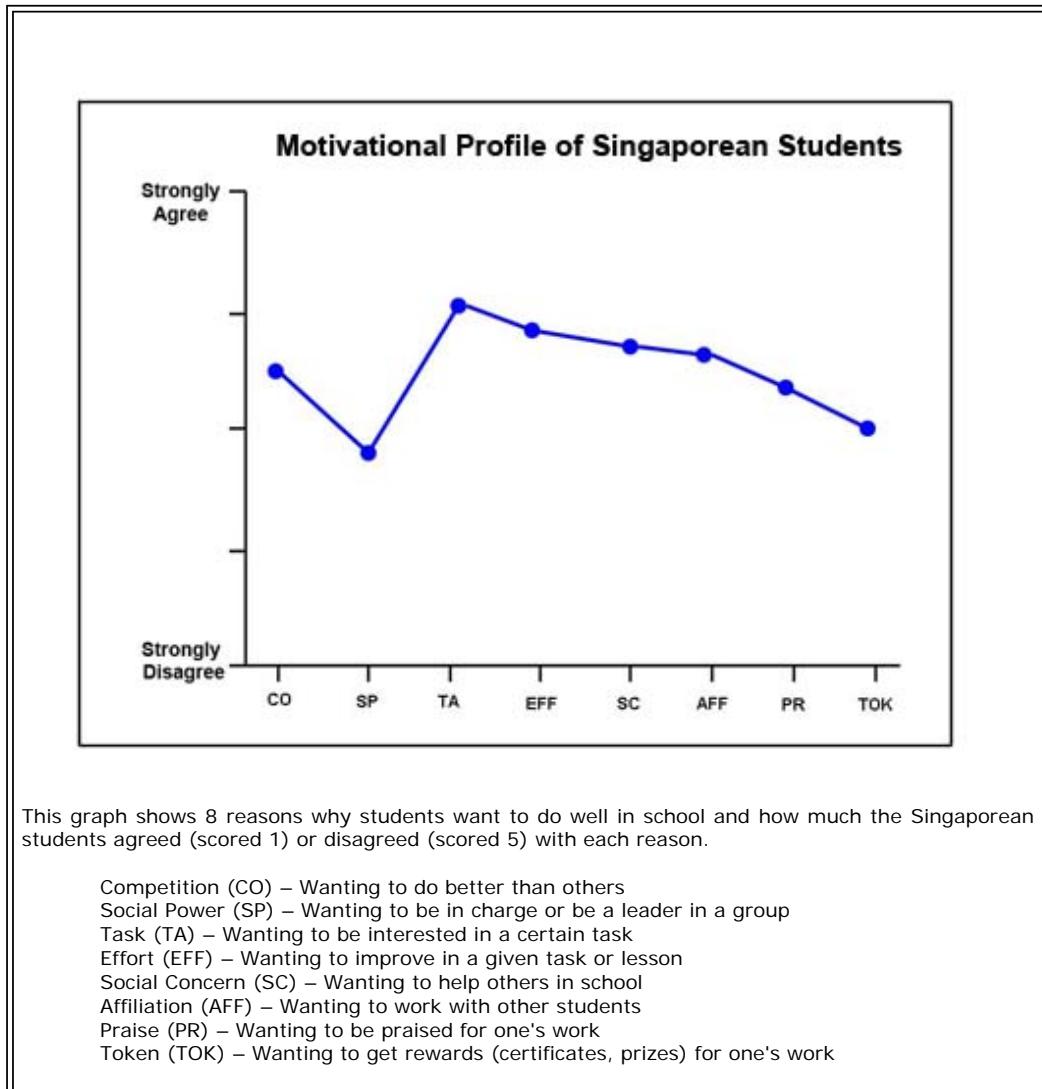
#### What students want now

Although the team is still at the preliminary stage of their analysis, what they have found out is already challenging common beliefs about how students in Singapore are motivated in school.

For one, "doing better than my classmates" was not strongly endorsed as a reason why students want to study harder. The usual suspects such as rewards and praise also did not rank as high and "leading or being in charge of a group" received the lowest score among the students.

While many students in Singapore may seem obsessed about their grades, they're not necessarily driven to be the best in the class. In fact, the act of comparing grades with their peers is not always a matter of competition but an affective way of monitoring one's own progress.

According to students interviewed, scoring higher than their peers made them feel happy—not because they beat the competition but because they felt like they had improved their performance.



"I think we need to look beyond what we can see from the obvious," says [Arief Liem](#), the project's Research Fellow. "Yes, students' immediate goal may be good grades but perhaps they want good grades because they want to achieve certain future goals. Grades may be the only tangible thing we observe motivating them but beyond that, there are other psychological factors."

"I remember interviewing a student who said she really wanted to win an award at school because it came with money," recalls [Yasmin Ortiga](#), a member of the research team. "At first I thought it was all about the prize but it turned out that she wanted to win the money because it made her feel proud to give it to her parents and contribute something to the household."

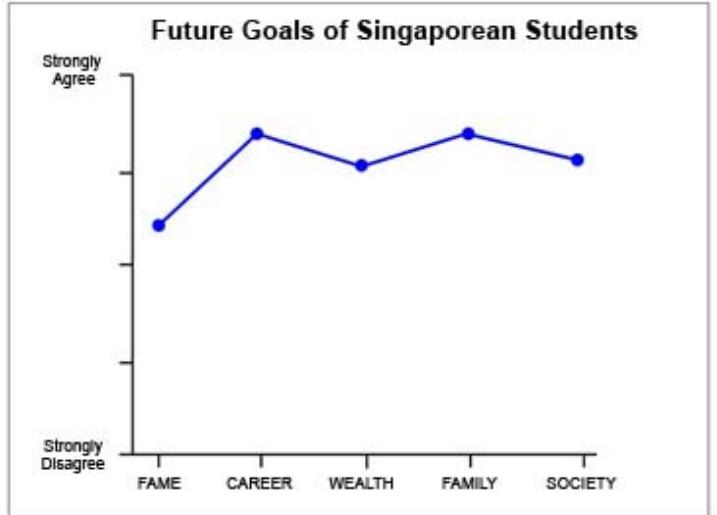
#### **What they want later on**

Aside from the current reasons why students want to achieve academically, the research team also explored more distant goals—or aspirations that students set themselves for the future. Both are important things to consider when encouraging students to plan their lives.

"It's a little dance between valuing what you are doing now and also seeing how it works to secure one's future," explains Prof McInerney. "If students value a particular future but are not seeing what they're doing now at school as preparing them for that future, then school becomes purposeless and perhaps meaningless for them."

"The stronger the connection between students' current goals for achieving at school and their perceptions of school's importance for achieving a future, the more motivated they become. And teachers are very important to help establish that connection," he adds.

Based on survey results, students indicated that getting a good job and supporting one's future family were definitely top priorities. Interestingly, future goals concerning wealth received a slightly lower score, and goals which had to do with becoming an important or famous person received the lowest score.



This graph shows how much importance the students have assigned to 5 future goals. A higher score indicates a higher level of importance.

FAME – To become an important person

CAREER – To get a good job

WEALTH – To be wealthy

FAMILY – To support your family

SOCIETY – To contribute to the society

While having such goals may seem like something that comes naturally, the research team believes that teachers should be more conscious of encouraging their students to plan for the future.

Adelaine Manzano, a member of the research team, agrees that not having any future goals can affect how students regard the value of school. "There are kids we talked to who do not express that they understand the value of schooling," she says. "They think that they need to wake up every day because they have to go to school and that's practically it."

And while some may doubt teenagers' ability to come up with concrete plans for the future, Prof McInerney believes that it's not a matter of forcing them to make a final decision. "I don't believe that kids of about 15 or 16 are not able to articulate a future," he emphasises. "It may not be clearly a specific career but it can be a future that says, 'I am going to progress, learn and become the best I can.'"

"I think what's important for kids at this age is to set them thinking about their futures and school's connection to that future," adds [Lee Jie Qi](#), another member of the team.

### **What's next**

As the research team continues to analyse their data, they hope to draw more connections between goals, other psychological factors such as values, self-concept, learning strategies, and how students see the value of school.

Hopefully, this will eventually lead to answering the important question of how all this fits into helping students learn better.

"Having goals is one thing but how do students actually go through the steps to achieve those goals?" says Prof McInerney. "We are not just looking at students' future goals and the relationship with motivation and engagement. We are examining whether or not there is a connection between this and how children organise their learning."

> [Click here](#) to read Prof McInerney's INSPIRE article

> [Click here](#) to learn more about this project

#### About the research team



*This project is led by Dennis McInerney (centre), a Professor at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education. His research team includes (from L-R) Research Fellow Arief Liem and Research Assistants Adelaine Manzano, Lee Jie Qi and Yasmin Ortiga.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore  
[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)

## Building the Future for Singaporean Students

### The relationship of values, future visions, motivational profiles and learning to school success

Whereas Singapore has an internationally reputable educational system producing high quality academic outcomes, a substantial number of students can do better at secondary education.

Underpinned by a spirit of valuing each and every student's potential contribution to the community and Singapore's future, this study will examine the pivotal role played by students' basic values, personally valued future goals, and other salient motivational and cognitive variables in predicting their learning process and achievement outcomes.

To this end, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be employed, using various psychological instruments with students and interviews with parents, teachers and students. A broadly representative national sample of Singaporean secondary students will participate in the study ( $N=3,600$ ). The rigorous design of the research, along with appropriate and sophisticated statistical analyses, will enhance the external validity of the findings in predicting student success in Singaporean secondary schools and allow extrapolation to Singaporean schools in general.

### Project Brief

**Project Number:**

CRP 3/07 DM

**Research Focus:**

Others

**Keywords:**

Educational psychology

**Start Date:** Jul 2007**Status:** Completed Mar 2009

### Project Team

**Principal Investigator(s):**

- Dennis McInerney

**Collaborator(s):**

- Arief Liem

**Contact Person:**[Arief Liem](#)

### Related Links

 [Project Publications](#)



# ARCHIVES



Home ► Archives ► Issue 10 ► Ideas

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## IDEAS

**Discover innovative ideas on teaching through thought-provoking articles on the latest research findings by NIE academics and researchers.**

### What Makes Teachers Tick?

Research shows that teachers' job-related beliefs influence their commitment to teaching, their morale, and even student achievement. Do teachers from different cultures have different beliefs about their work? And how do these differences influence student outcomes?

Click [here](#) to read more.

### What Students Want to Achieve

Competitive. Grade-conscious. Materialistic. The stereotype of the students in Singapore is one that seems to be mainly driven by economics and success. However, a recent CRPP research study tells us that our students' goals are not as simple as they seem.

Click [here](#) to read more.

Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 10 ▶ Ideas ▶ What Makes Teachers Tick?

## Archives

## IDEAS

[Issue 1](#)

[Issue 2](#)

[Issue 3](#)

[Issue 4](#)

[Issue 5](#)

[Issue 6](#)

[Issue 7](#)

[Issue 8](#)

[Issue 9](#)

[Issue 10](#)

[Inspire](#)

[Ideas](#)

[Voices](#)

[Share](#)

[Relax](#)

[Issue 11](#)

[Issue 12](#)

[Issue 13](#)

[Issue 14](#)

## What Makes Teachers Tick?

| Print |

**Research shows that teachers' job-related beliefs influence their commitment to teaching, their morale, and even student achievement. Do teachers from different cultures have different beliefs about their work? And how do these differences influence student outcomes?**

NIE professors joined Canadian psychologist Robert Klassen in a cross-cultural study to understand the differences in teachers' motivation beliefs in Canada and Singapore.

In this project, the researchers were interested in exploring "teacher efficacy", that is, teachers' beliefs in their ability to influence student outcomes.



### What they did

To learn more about teachers' motivation beliefs in both countries, a mixed method study was carried out from 2005–2006. It comprised two parts.

The first was a *quantitative* study exploring the motivation beliefs of secondary school teachers and how these beliefs influence their perception of school academic climate. The sample, 255 teachers from Canada and 247 from Singapore, completed a 50-item survey on teacher motivation beliefs.

The second was a *qualitative* study to extend and add depth to the quantitative findings, and to provide examples of the lived experiences of teachers in these two settings.

The second part of the study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews (individual and focus groups) with 10 secondary school teachers in Canada and 14 from Singapore.

### What do we know about teacher efficacy?

Efficacy beliefs are not about whether one has the skills or competence to do a job but the *confidence* to perform it. There is an extensive body of educational research on the role that self-efficacy beliefs play in influencing student achievement and motivation. Recent research has also suggested that academic performance is not influenced by student efficacy alone, but by the *teachers'* perceived efficacy as well.

This study looked at two aspects of teacher efficacy:

1. **Teacher self-efficacy** refers to the individual teacher's perception of one's capability to influence student outcomes (e.g., grades, behaviour in class) through their teaching.
2. **Teacher collective efficacy** refers to teachers' shared belief in their collective ability to solve problems and enact change in the school (e.g., solving disciplinary problems) through working together.

There is evidence to suggest that relationships between self-efficacy and collective efficacy may operate differently in different cultural contexts. However, very little research has been done in Asia about psychological and motivational influences on

teaching proficiency.

This study also examined *academic climate*, or the extent to which a school is driven to achieve academic excellence. Research suggests that when teachers feel that their school climate is supportive, they are more likely to believe they can work together to influence changes in the school. However, how teacher self-efficacy relates to academic climate has not received much research interest.

This study sought to bridge the gaps in the research, to help educators begin to understand the importance of such teacher variables in student achievement outcomes.

### **What did they find out?**

In collectivistic societies like that of many East Asian societies, where academic achievement, interdependence and co-operation are greatly emphasised, we would expect teacher self-efficacy to be insufficient in bringing about the desired changes in student outcomes, even with a positive academic climate. Instead, teachers may feel better empowered working together as a group to find ways to improve student performance.

Interestingly, the results from this study suggest that teachers from both countries believe they can influence student outcomes, even in challenging situations. However, social and cultural differences were noted in the extent to which they believe they can influence student outcomes. In the Asian context, teachers' *perceptions* play an important part in determining school success, not just their ability to teach.

The quantitative study revealed that in both countries, teachers' self and collective efficacies are significantly related to perceptions of academic climate. In Singapore, teachers' perceptions of their school climate are most strongly influenced by their belief in their ability to work together collectively to reach all students. This contrasts with Canada, where the social demographical background of the students plays a stronger role in influencing teachers' beliefs about the academic climate.

Also, teachers' perceived collective efficacy mediates the perception of their personal efficacy and the school academic climate. Schools that recognise this collective strength of teachers and provide structured opportunities for them to work together on collectively identified school- and student-related issues can encourage a positive academic climate and empower teachers personally.

### **What do schools need to do?**

In practical terms, what this means is that schools need to begin paying attention to teachers' perceptions of competence, not just their actual competence.

"They may not perceive themselves as having the capability to initiate or embrace the uncertainty often accompanying change. Such teachers usually attribute any difficulties to external factors rather than their belief that they can exercise control over the process," explains Assistant Professor Chong Wan Har, one of the collaborators.

"Understanding that their problem is due to a lack of efficacy rather than resistance would help administrators isolate the source of the behaviour problem and begin to identify ways to overcome this misperception."

Thus, it may be more effective to enhance teachers' beliefs in their abilities to deal with new and challenging situations than to assess them on the merits of their current performance. This can only have positive effects on our students' academic performance.

### **Motivation Tips**

Here are some ways to enhance teacher motivation in your school:

1. Attending one-off workshops or seminars may be limited in helping teachers develop a greater sense of efficacy in dealing with specific student problems. Instead, help teachers obtain more **mastery experiences** in specific teaching tasks (e.g., effective instructional strategies or classroom management strategies).
2. Encourage regular guided practice and **modelling** from master or senior teachers to develop the skills and know-how (and not just knowledge alone) to enact change.

3. Encourage teachers to try new methods with old problems through ***verbal persuasion*** (e.g., corrective feedback, encouragement, looking at successful models).
4. Provide structured, well-guarded ***time*** away from teaching or teaching-related duties for teachers to come together to work interdependently, to exchange ideas on effective teaching approaches, to look for ways to enhance student learning and performance, and propose school-level changes that would facilitate their work.
5. Pay attention to teachers' ***physiological and affective states*** (e.g., fear of trying new ideas, anxiety) and provide them with avenues to embrace change and cope with uncertainty. Enhancing teachers' self-perception will in turn influence their future motivation as effective teachers.
6. Get teachers to engage collectively, rather than individually, in ***action research*** so they can try out new pedagogies in the classroom. Although this will require substantial time away from the class, with the support of school administrators, this could encourage teachers to persist and persevere in the midst of difficulties, and be able to articulate issues as they work in a group.

#### About the research team

*This study was led by Dr Robert Klassen, a former school psychologist and teacher and currently Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta. It was carried out in collaboration with staff from NIE's Psychological Studies Academic Group—Assistant Professors Chong Wan Har, Vivien Huan and Isabella Wong.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 10 ▶ Ideas ▶ What Students Want to Achieve

## Archives

### IDEAS

[Issue 1](#)

[Issue 2](#)

[Issue 3](#)

[Issue 4](#)

[Issue 5](#)

[Issue 6](#)

[Issue 7](#)

[Issue 8](#)

[Issue 9](#)

[Issue 10](#)

[Inspire](#)

[Ideas](#)

[Voices](#)

[Share](#)

[Relax](#)

[Issue 11](#)

[Issue 12](#)

[Issue 13](#)

[Issue 14](#)

### What Students Want to Achieve

| Print |

**Competitive. Grade-conscious. Materialistic. The stereotype of the students in Singapore is one that seems to be mainly driven by economics and success. However, a recent CRPP research study tells us that our students' goals are not as simple as they seem.**



Preliminary data from a CRPP research study shows that while high grades and rewards are still important reasons why students want to do well in school, they're not necessarily at the top of their lists.

On the contrary, survey results indicate that students are likely to study hard because they want to improve their performance, are interested in what they're learning or want to help friends who may be having a hard time in class.

Described by Principal Investigator [Dennis McInerney](#) as a "quick hit of information", this one-year study aims to give teachers a general idea of what drives their students to learn and achieve in school.

"As far as we are aware, no one has done an extensive study on how Singaporean students conceptualise their future and where schools fit into their futures," says Prof McInerney. "We want to know if students see a connection between their future goals and what they do day-to-day in their classrooms."

And to find out exactly what motivates a student, the research team surveyed a total of 5,773 students, talked to 50 parents and teachers and conducted 80 student interviews in 13 neighbourhood schools across Singapore.

While the team has focused on areas that have been known to influence student motivation, understanding student goals is a key part of their research.

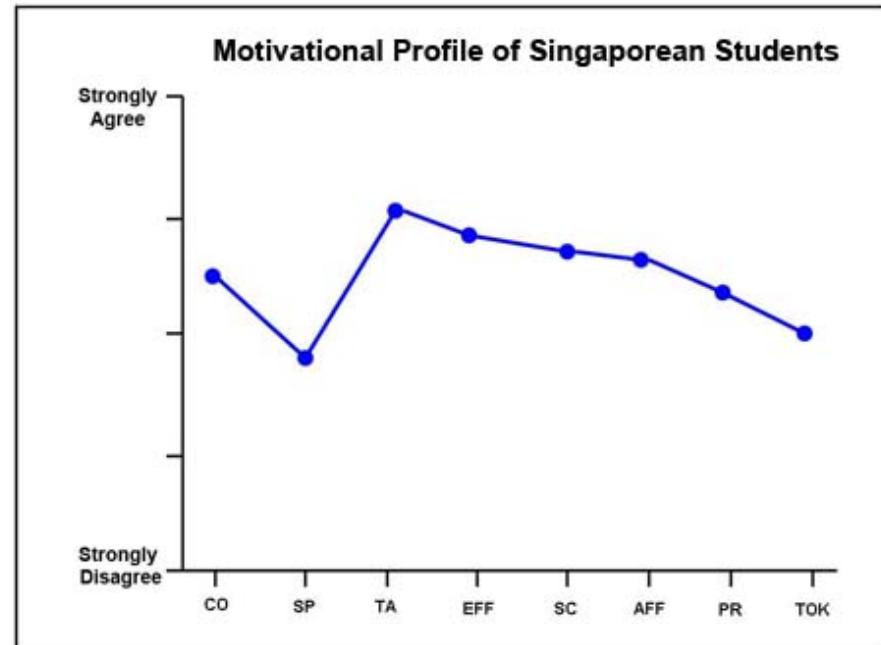
#### What students want now

Although the team is still at the preliminary stage of their analysis, what they have found out is already challenging common beliefs about how students in Singapore are motivated in school.

For one, "doing better than my classmates" was not strongly endorsed as a reason why students want to study harder. The usual suspects such as rewards and praise also did not rank as high and "leading or being in charge of a group" received the lowest score among the students.

While many students in Singapore may seem obsessed about their grades, they're not necessarily driven to be the best in the class. In fact, the act of comparing grades with their peers is not always a matter of competition but an affective way of monitoring one's own progress.

According to students interviewed, scoring higher than their peers made them feel happy—not because they beat the competition but because they felt like they had improved their performance.



This graph shows 8 reasons why students want to do well in school and how much the Singaporean students agreed (scored 1) or disagreed (scored 5) with each reason.

- Competition (CO) – Wanting to do better than others
- Social Power (SP) – Wanting to be in charge or be a leader in a group
- Task (TA) – Wanting to be interested in a certain task
- Effort (EFF) – Wanting to improve in a given task or lesson
- Social Concern (SC) – Wanting to help others in school
- Affiliation (AFF) – Wanting to work with other students
- Praise (PR) – Wanting to be praised for one's work
- Token (TOK) – Wanting to get rewards (certificates, prizes) for one's work

"I think we need to look beyond what we can see from the obvious," says **Arief Liem**, the project's Research Fellow. "Yes, students' immediate goal may be good grades but perhaps they want good grades because they want to achieve certain future goals. Grades may be the only tangible thing we observe motivating them but beyond that, there are other psychological factors."

"I remember interviewing a student who said she really wanted to win an award at school because it came with money," recalls **Yasmin Ortiga**, a member of the research team. "At first I thought it was all about the prize but it turned out that she wanted to win the money because it made her feel proud to give it to her parents and contribute something to the household."

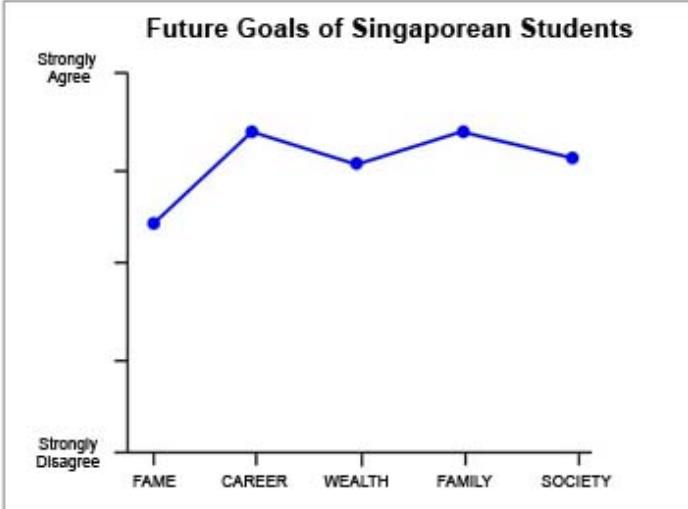
#### **What they want later on**

Aside from the current reasons why students want to achieve academically, the research team also explored more distant goals—or aspirations that students set themselves for the future. Both are important things to consider when encouraging students to plan their lives.

"It's a little dance between valuing what you are doing now and also seeing how it works to secure one's future," explains Prof McInerney. "If students value a particular future but are not seeing what they're doing now at school as preparing them for that future, then school becomes purposeless and perhaps meaningless for them."

"The stronger the connection between students' current goals for achieving at school and their perceptions of school's importance for achieving a future, the more motivated they become. And teachers are very important to help establish that connection," he adds.

Based on survey results, students indicated that getting a good job and supporting one's future family were definitely top priorities. Interestingly, future goals concerning wealth received a slightly lower score, and goals which had to do with becoming an important or famous person received the lowest score.



This graph shows how much importance the students have assigned to 5 future goals. A higher score indicates a higher level of importance.

- FAME – To become an important person
- CAREER – To get a good job
- WEALTH – To be wealthy
- FAMILY – To support your family
- SOCIETY – To contribute to the society

While having such goals may seem like something that comes naturally, the research team believes that teachers should be more conscious of encouraging their students to plan for the future.

Adelaine Manzano, a member of the research team, agrees that not having any future goals can affect how students regard the value of school. "There are kids we talked to who do not express that they understand the value of schooling," she says. "They think that they need to wake up every day because they have to go to school and that's practically it."

And while some may doubt teenagers' ability to come up with concrete plans for the future, Prof McInerney believes that it's not a matter of forcing them to make a final decision. "I don't believe that kids of about 15 or 16 are not able to articulate a future," he emphasises. "It may not be clearly a specific career but it can be a future that says, 'I am going to progress, learn and become the best I can.'"

"I think what's important for kids at this age is to set them thinking about their futures and school's connection to that future," adds **Lee Jie Qi**, another member of the team.

#### **What's next**

As the research team continues to analyse their data, they hope to draw more connections between goals, other psychological factors such as values, self-concept, learning strategies, and how students see the value of school.

Hopefully, this will eventually lead to answering the important question of how all this fits into helping students learn better.

"Having goals is one thing but how do students actually go through the steps to achieve those goals?" says Prof McInerney. "We are not just looking at students' future goals and the relationship with motivation and engagement. We are examining whether or not there is a connection between this and how children organise their learning."

> [Click here](#) to read Prof McInerney's INSPIRE article

> [Click here](#) to learn more about this project

#### **About the research team**



*This project is led by Dennis McInerney (centre), a Professor at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education. His research team includes (from L-R) Research Fellow Arief Liem and Research Assistants Adelaine Manzano, Lee Jie Qi and Yasmin Ortiga.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore  
[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)**

## Building the Future for Singaporean Students

### The relationship of values, future visions, motivational profiles and learning to school success

Whereas Singapore has an internationally reputable educational system producing high quality academic outcomes, a substantial number of students can do better at secondary education.

Underpinned by a spirit of valuing each and every student's potential contribution to the community and Singapore's future, this study will examine the pivotal role played by students' basic values, personally valued future goals, and other salient motivational and cognitive variables in predicting their learning process and achievement outcomes.

To this end, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be employed, using various psychological instruments with students and interviews with parents, teachers and students. A broadly representative national sample of Singaporean secondary students will participate in the study ( $N=3,600$ ). The rigorous design of the research, along with appropriate and sophisticated statistical analyses, will enhance the external validity of the findings in predicting student success in Singaporean secondary schools and allow extrapolation to Singaporean schools in general.

### Project Brief

**Project Number:**

CRP 3/07 DM

**Research Focus:**

Others

**Keywords:**

Educational psychology

**Start Date:** Jul 2007**Status:** Completed Mar 2009

### Project Team

**Principal Investigator(s):**

- Dennis McInerney

**Collaborator(s):**

- Arief Liem

**Contact Person:**[Arief Liem](#)

### Related Links

 [Project Publications](#)

## Building the Future for Singaporean Students

### The relationship of values, future visions, motivational profiles and learning to school success

Whereas Singapore has an internationally reputable educational system producing high quality academic outcomes, a substantial number of students can do better at secondary education.

Underpinned by a spirit of valuing each and every student's potential contribution to the community and Singapore's future, this study will examine the pivotal role played by students' basic values, personally valued future goals, and other salient motivational and cognitive variables in predicting their learning process and achievement outcomes.

To this end, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be employed, using various psychological instruments with students and interviews with parents, teachers and students. A broadly representative national sample of Singaporean secondary students will participate in the study ( $N=3,600$ ). The rigorous design of the research, along with appropriate and sophisticated statistical analyses, will enhance the external validity of the findings in predicting student success in Singaporean secondary schools and allow extrapolation to Singaporean schools in general.

### Project Brief

**Project Number:**

CRP 3/07 DM

**Research Focus:**

Others

**Keywords:**

Educational psychology

**Start Date:** Jul 2007**Status:** Completed Mar 2009

### Project Team

**Principal Investigator(s):**

- Dennis McInerney

**Collaborator(s):**

- Arief Liem

**Contact Person:**[Arief Liem](#)

### Related Links

 [Project Publications](#)



# ARCHIVES



Home ► Archives ► Issue 10 ► Voices

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## VOICES

**Learn from fellow teachers as they use research to reflect on, question, and voice out improvements for their own practice.**

### A for Assessment

Assessments are a fact of life for most, if not all, students and teachers in Singapore. When we think of assessments, we often think of externally administered tests and examinations. In this article, we see how self-assessment can help motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Click [here](#) to read more.

### Out of the Box

Feeling the lack of good ideas in the classroom? Maybe the problem's not how students think but where they do the thinking. That's what the teachers at Compassvale Secondary School found out through an action research project on improving their students' creativity.

Click [here](#) to read more.



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 10 ▶ Voices ▶ A for Assessment

## Archives

### VOICES

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

### A for Assessment

[| Print |](#)

**Assessments are a fact of life for most, if not all, students and teachers in Singapore. When we think of assessments, we often think of externally administered tests and examinations. In this article, we see how self-assessment can help motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning.**



As a former teacher and educational psychologist, Wong Hwei Ming is familiar with both classroom and psychological assessments. So when she embarked on a doctoral degree, she decided to focus her research on how students look at their own learning through self-assessment.

"The assessment system in Singapore is changing," explains Hwei Ming. "We are incorporating more forms of assessment, such as project work, portfolios and performance-based tasks. Self-assessment is one of these alternative assessments."

Because self-assessment is formative in nature, rather than summative, it allows students to be involved in the process of learning. Students take responsibility for their own learning and are involved in reflecting, analysing, synthesising and evaluating their own performances. This form of assessment also allows students' learning to be monitored and guided while the learning process is ongoing.

#### Assessing self-assessment

Hwei Ming's research focuses on self-assessment at the primary school level. She believes that students, even the young ones, have much to say about what and how they are learning. Self-assessment is one means of allowing them to articulate their learning process.

"Although there has been extensive research done at the higher education levels, there isn't any done in the primary schools yet," she says. "I wanted to see how much self-assessment are being carried out in the primary school level, and hope to see some of the benefits of self-assessment appearing in our local context," she adds.

As part of her research, Hwei Ming taught students three strategies of self-assessment: using checklists, learning logs and rubrics. In each of these strategies, learning was assessed using the criteria of understanding, reasoning, clarity, communication and effort.

#### What happens when students assess themselves?

While Hwei Ming's research is still ongoing, what she has observed thus far provides sufficient reason to show the viability of using self-assessment among primary school pupils.

She found that as students became more involved in their learning, they started to ask questions like, "Am I doing the right thing?" and "Do I need to do more?" "When students start doing self-assessment, they will take some responsibility for their own learning," she notes, "and by triggering this, they actually do become motivated as well."

Hwei Ming also found that many students had a better understanding of their work as they could gauge themselves against given standards and try to better themselves, and some even began to do better in their studies. This, in turn, boosted their self-esteem and confidence.

### All in favour of self-assessment

Overall, students seemed more eager to persevere with their tasks when they discovered that self-assessment was not difficult to do. Feedback from teachers involved in her research has also validated these observations.

"The students don't feel so threatened and scared when they make mistakes, and they ask questions when they don't understand," says Hwei Ming.

In addition, teachers noticed that for some of the better classes, the students were able to recognise what the next step in their learning was, which she felt was a significant achievement for primary school students.

Attesting to the value of using self-assessments in classrooms, Hwei Ming says, "The good thing about self-assessment is that it doesn't discriminate against any ability group. All the students learned something regardless of their ability."

### Making it work in your classroom

With so many benefits, it may be surprising to note that self-assessment is not difficult to use. "Teachers can actually start using self-assessment as soon as they start teaching," explains Hwei Ming. "You don't need to accumulate experience before you can conduct it."

Self-assessment can take place any time during the lesson, and it can be in written or verbal forms. It can be as simple as asking, at the end of each lesson, "How many of you understood what was being taught? Put a thumbs-up for those who understood the lesson and a thumbs-down for those who didn't."

Hwei Ming has these tips to share with teachers keen on using this assessment mode in their classrooms:

#### 1. Believe in it

"Firstly, teachers should know what they want to use self-assessment for. They should not be doing it just for the sake of using it," cautions Hwei Ming. "Teachers need to believe in what they want to carry out because once they believe in something, half the battle is won."

#### 2. Be prepared

As self-assessment shifts the responsibility of learning from teacher to pupil, teachers should be prepared to be more open-minded and not limit themselves to the few assessment tools they have been using. It also helps to keep abreast of the latest developments in assessment practices. "Teachers need to get out of their comfort zone, be patient, and find the most suitable method for themselves and their students," advises Hwei Ming.

#### 3. Basic principles

Hwei Ming tells us that the environment is critical. "Teachers need to create a positive environment in which making mistakes is seen as a way of learning and improvement," she says. "They also need to let their students know what the intended learning outcome for that lesson or topic is."

For example, teachers can facilitate this by involving their students in the process of creating the self-assessment criteria. This not only familiarises them with the criteria and but also helps them to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, it is important that teachers demonstrate how to use self-assessment and the types of questions students can ask during self-assessment.

So, if you're looking to give your students that added boost in their learning, why not try self-assessment? Hwei Ming certainly gives it a thumbs-up!

- > Check out these links for more information on self-assessment:
  - [http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/self\\_eval.php](http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/self_eval.php)

- <http://ozpk.tripod.com/000000selfassess>



*Wong Hwei Ming is a trained teacher and registered psychologist in Singapore. She is presently working as a Research Associate with the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education. She is concurrently working towards a PhD in Education.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**  
[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 10 ▶ Voices ▶ Out of the Box

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## VOICES

### Out of the Box

[| Print |](#)

**Feeling the lack of good ideas in the classroom? Maybe the problem's not how students think but where they do the thinking. That's what the teachers at Compassvale Secondary School found out through an action research project on improving their students' creativity.**

Faced with sagging scores in the "ideation" component of their students' O-level results, a group of teachers from **Compassvale Secondary School (CVSS)** launched an action research project to find out how to improve creative thinking in Design and Technology (D&T), Visual Arts and Home Economics. Their findings showed that the first step towards inspiring creativity was also the simplest: finding the right location.



"For the kids, the classroom was just not a source of inspiration to think out of the box," says D&T teacher Tan Tiah Hui (picture above, right). "It was after looking at the student interviews, discussions and observations of the teachers that we realised it could be the environment that was stifling their creativity."

While students were definitely not short on ideas, most of their proposals were based on existing works or things that they'd seen before. "Their ideas were too simple," explains Cheh Seok Buay, who also teaches D&T. "Let's say we ask our students to design a penholder. What they'd normally do is draw a rectangular box, or at most a cylindrical shape, then they'll say that you can put your pens inside!"

Both Tiah Hui and Seok Buay believed their students' ideas were so constrained partly because the regular rooms used for D&T classes were drab and uninspiring—students sat on hard stools amidst machinery and tools. Thus, their main aim in doing an action research study was to find out exactly what students thought would motivate them to be creative.

The teachers conducted interviews, held discussion groups, and even had students draw what their "ideal room" would look like. After which, they brought their findings to the school management and obtained sufficient funds to build a classroom especially designed for students to meet in, discuss and brainstorm ideas for their projects.

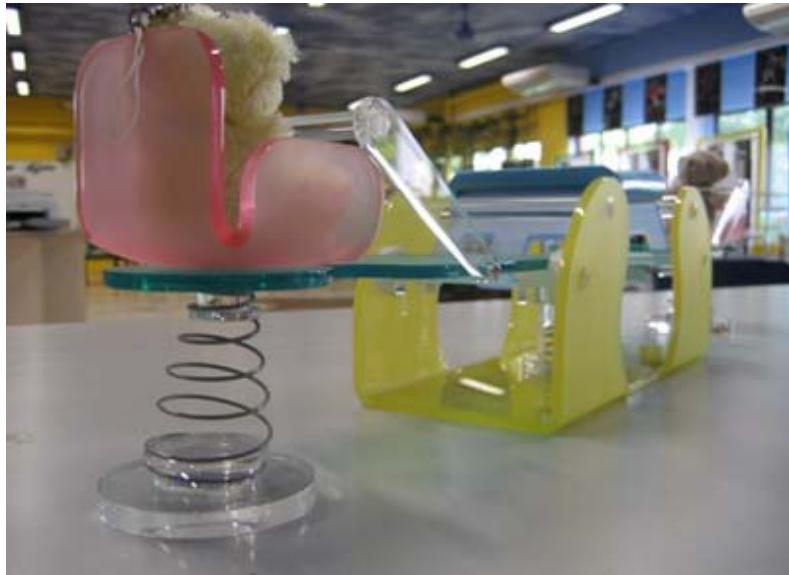
Today, the ideation room is in full use, with various areas and features conceptualised and created by the students and teachers themselves. The cherry on the cake is the various D&T awards clinched by their students this year (see box story below), bearing testimony to the success of the D&T teachers' efforts.

"Ideas cannot be just thoughts," says Seok Buay. "To a certain extent, it has to be about bringing the child to discover on their own. It is something that they must experience for themselves."

With the room approaching its second year since completion, the teachers are happy with the fruits of their labour. It is their hope that the room will continue to allow more students to find their "AHA!" moments in years to come.

### Great ideas

A picnic transporter that doubles as a table, a handphone holder that makes a pretty display piece, and a see-saw (see model below) that both toddlers and adults can enjoy together. These are among the award-winning CVSS student inventions in the 2008 D&T Awards.



Here are some of the things we can learn from CVSS about creating an environment that is conducive for creativity.

#### 1. Avoid square tables

But don't think circles are the only alternative! At the ideation room, students chose to have tables in the shape of *hexagons*. So everyone gets to join in the discussion while enjoying their tables' unique shape.

#### 2. Do away with uniformity

Who said walls all had to be the same colour? Each wall at the ideation room is painted bright shades of yellow, green and red. White clouds are drawn on a blue ceiling to remind students to aim high with their ideas.

#### 3. Bring in some nature

A lot of inspiration can be drawn from the outdoors, so don't be afraid to bring some nature into your classroom. At CVSS, teachers brought in a water fountain, a fish tank, and an assortment of garden stones to the classroom so that students wouldn't feel like they were being "trapped" indoors.

#### 4. Be proud of your work

You don't have to look far to find inspirational items to jolt creativity. Showcase exceptional student work so that others may be inspired by their example.

*Ms Cheh Seok Buay, Ms Ng U-lynn, Mr Tan Che Koon, Mr Lawrence Seow, Mrs Ang Bee Wee, Ms Simon Shereen Suping, and Ms Sithravelu Sathiyakala.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,**

**Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

**[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)**



# ARCHIVES



Home ► Archives ► Issue 10 ► Share

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## SHARE

**Get teaching tips and advice as we share our reviews of books, websites and teaching aids, written especially for the Singapore context.**

### Thank You, Ms Gruwell

In our [last issue](#), Professor Julianne Moss recommended the movie *Freedom Writers* as a way to reflect on one's practice. Our *SingTeach* reviewer gives a personal take on this movie.

Click [here](#) to read more.



# ARCHIVES



Home ▶ Archives ▶ Issue 9 ▶ Inspire ▶ Big Questions

## Archives

## INSPIRE

[Issue 1](#)

[Issue 2](#)

[Issue 3](#)

[Issue 4](#)

[Issue 5](#)

[Issue 6](#)

[Issue 7](#)

[Issue 8](#)

[Issue 9](#)

[Inspire](#)

[Ideas](#)

[Voices](#)

[Share](#)

[Relax](#)

[Issue 10](#)

[Issue 11](#)

[Issue 12](#)

[Issue 13](#)

[Issue 14](#)

## Big Questions

| [Print](#) |

**It's the school holidays once again and for many of us, that time of the year when we review our last 10 months in the classroom. Where do we begin to evaluate our teaching practice? What are some questions we should be asking ourselves? And how can we recharge for the new school year? SingTeach talks to Julianne Moss to find answers to some of these questions.**



**SingTeach: Tell us more about your work with teachers in schools.**

**Julianne:** A lot of that work has been in teacher professional learning, but particularly around the issues of curriculum and pedagogy. *I don't see curriculum as just a syllabus; curriculum is much more than that.* Curriculum can be thought about as either a noun or as a verb. I'm very interested in the *doing*—the "what do teachers do" in the context of their work, inside their schools, and also what are the kind of ways that they can inquire into their own pedagogy.

**SingTeach: What are some ways teachers can improve their pedagogy and practice?**

**Julianne:** When we look at schooling, there are many *big* and *essential* questions that we have to keep asking. And if we only think about curriculum in the narrow form—curriculum as the noun, that is the syllabus, rather than the verb—we find it very difficult to be able to get at some of the big issues that we face inside education.

Inside curriculum inquiry, we talk a lot about the practices of the teacher that get them asking questions about their own practice. Very often, people might know the word initially as *reflective practice*. But that term is very difficult and slippery for people to understand how it works. If we look at the field of curriculum inquiry, there are a number of approaches that people now adopt to help teachers work through issues about their own practice.

The common approaches are known as *action research*, but action research is only one of the many forms. The work of *narrative inquiry*—the work of Jean Clandinin has been particularly influential—helping teachers to story their lives; but not just to tell a story, but to be able to ask questions about their practice. The *self-study movement* also is another emerging field, where teachers have been invited to bring what they know to the table, but in the context of the community of learners or a community of practice.

**SingTeach: This end-of-year break is probably a good time for teachers to start asking questions. For teachers who are not familiar with these approaches, where do they begin?**

**Julianne:** I think one of the things, as you finish the school year, is that sense of relief that you've made the year. You've survived the year, and so you're looking for some ways of nourishing yourself so that you can be rejuvenated for the coming school year.

We often think about some reading, or something more formal, but I think that there are many great movies that people could use as a way to just ask themselves some essential, some big questions about their year. Two of my favourite movies are *Freedom Writers* and *Born into Brothels*.

Some might prefer to take a text, but to take a story about the life of a teacher, and then go back and ask yourself some fundamentals about your school year. Questions like: How did my students learn? Or what did they learn? What was my role in it? What knowledge did they gain from schooling? Is this the knowledge they need?

So take something that first of all you'll enjoy, but also will help you to start asking questions about what I call your *professional self*. And inside of that, to do what we call some *noticing* and some *seeing* about the way the year has played out for you.

### **SingTeach: How can teachers develop their professional self?**

**Julianne:** Increasingly, teachers are being asked as part of professional standards, or even their employment, to be able to develop a *professional portfolio*.

You may well have collected up many things over the year that you've put into your "tidying up" pile. But if we start to be able to think about them as *research artefacts*—documents, photos, formalised assessment practices, informal assessment practices that you may have used—and to really bring them together in a way that is a record of our work.

The idea of a portfolio is not just a scrapbook full of mementos. The portfolio is a demonstration of your professional knowledge, to help you ask those big questions for the following year. Where am I going to start with that group of students? What worked well last year? Did I really see what it is that my students learn?

So instead of seeing them as things that just keep piling up your desk, you can start ordering them into some way of understanding your own professional practice.

### **SingTeach: This requires the teacher to take a very different stance, doesn't it?**

**Julianne:** Yes. And in qualitative research, a lot of people quote Denzin and Lincoln, who talk about *making the familiar strange*. I think that's what we have to do to our own practice. And that's really hard. The day-to-day basis is such that there are so many demands that are put upon teachers, just because the way that the school day still works. So if we can help ourselves *become a bit of a traveller*, if you like, in our own classroom, to try and discover some things.

But that's hard on your own. One of the important messages in professional learning is to build a community; a community of teachers can achieve many things. I think as teachers, one thing we can do is that we can connect together—more the better if you have strong leadership in your school, where the principal really understands the need for creating time for teachers to work together. Because it's really difficult to think about your practice, to be able to do the reflection (or what we call the "noticing"), without that time.

Also, I want to encourage people to think about asking the *students* about how they might have seen their teacher, because I think that's also an important way of getting insight and feedback. Too often, people still have the conception of the teacher being the master and the student being less. But in today's world, we learn in multiple ways and in multiple places, and I think we underestimate what it is that our students bring into the learning conversation.

### **SingTeach: Do you have tips on how teachers can be recharged for the new school year?**

**Julianne:** I think it is important that your vacation is your vacation—do some things for yourself! And given all the pressures that are on teachers, I think that sometimes we have lost sight of what it really is to be a learner. So if there is one thing that I can suggest to do for the holidays to get recharged, it is to be able to go and experience something that you may not have experienced before. *Think about what it's like to be a learner again* because that can make you quite humble about the experience of learning and give you some good reminders about what somebody is going thorough when they are attempting to take that step inside the learning continuum.

> [Read the full interview.](#)

**Julianne Moss** has been a teacher and teacher educator for over 30 years. She is deeply interested in curriculum and pedagogy. Though currently lecturing at the University of Melbourne, Julianne says she still identifies very strongly with the field of practice, having spent half her career in schools.

#### **Selected References**

- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hay, T., & Moss, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Portfolio, performance and authenticity*. New South Wales, Australia: Pearson.
- Moss, J. (Ed.). (2007). *Researching education: Visually, digitally and spatially*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Moss, J., et al. (2004). *Invitations and inspirations: Pathways to successful teaching*. Carlton South, Victoria, Australia: Curriculum Corporation.

---

*Published by SingTeach, October 2007*

Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore  
[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)



# ARCHIVES



[Home](#) ▶ [Archives](#) ▶ [Issue 10](#) ▶ [Share](#) ▶ [Thank You, Ms Gruwell](#)

## Archives

### SHARE

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

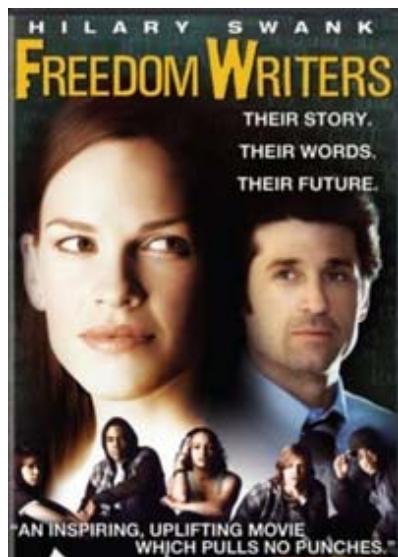
### Thank You, Ms Gruwell

[| Print |](#)

**In our last issue, Professor Julianne Moss recommended the movie *Freedom Writers* as a way to reflect on one's practice. Our SingTeach reviewer gives a personal take on this movie.**

Dear Ms G,

I hope you don't mind me calling you that. I rather like this term of affection your students at Woodrow Wilson High coined for you. I recently caught *Freedom Writers* and the story of Room 203 blew my mind.



I don't think anyone can remain unmoved by this movie. It was difficult to watch the daily struggles of your students. The kind of environment these teenagers lived in, where even the taken-for-granted act of turning up for classes became a matter of life and death, was just unimaginable.

But even that wasn't as alarming as knowing that some of your students carried guns to school for protection. It was as if there was nowhere safe for these teenagers because even the school, as if mirroring the city's troubles, was divided along racial lines and throbbed with racial tension.

As I watched the events unfold on screen, my hands kept reaching for the synopsis sheet, to confirm again and again that this movie was based on real-life events. It was as if these teenagers were "in a war".

I think you're very brave to have constantly tried to reach out to them, even after they declared that they hated you because you were white. You tried to reach out to them in their language—playing hip-hop music to discuss poetry, joking with them about Homer/Holmer—and yet they remained indifferent.

I was impressed by how you managed to turn your students' misdeeds into teaching opportunities. When the racist caricature was passed around your class, you could have dismissed it as a childish prank but you met them face on and jolted them back to reality by telling them about the Holocaust.

I was rooting for you! But I caught myself wondering if your department head was right when she said, "You can't make someone want an education." As I watched them snub your efforts time and again, because they could not foresee a better future than the lives they were leading, because they did not understand the importance of learning, I couldn't help but wonder if it was worth the effort.

I don't think I could ever be as courageous or persistent as you. It was hard but you never gave up, and I was really glad when you proved me—and your department head—wrong.

You gave them a voice by creating for them a safe space to tell their stories. You restored their self-esteem when you gave them new books, even when they were

deemed "unteachable" by the school administration.

These were simple acts, but they made these teenagers feel that each of them mattered. Your belief and faith gave them hope that the possibilities for their futures could be limitless.

So thank you, Ms G. Thank you for showing me that with passion, creativity and kindness, it is possible to make a difference in this world.

#### **About the reviewer**

*May Ng is a Research Assistant who was initially reluctant to watch and review Freedom Writers, but after 123mins, she was glad she gave the movie a chance.*

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

**[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)**



# ARCHIVES



Home ► Archives ► Issue 10 ► Relax

## Archives

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

## RELAX

**Sit back and relax with our silly cartoons on anything and everything about the fun side of teaching. Who says teachers can't laugh at themselves?**

**What if we could get ANYONE to teach our students?**

Click [here](#) to read more.



# ARCHIVES



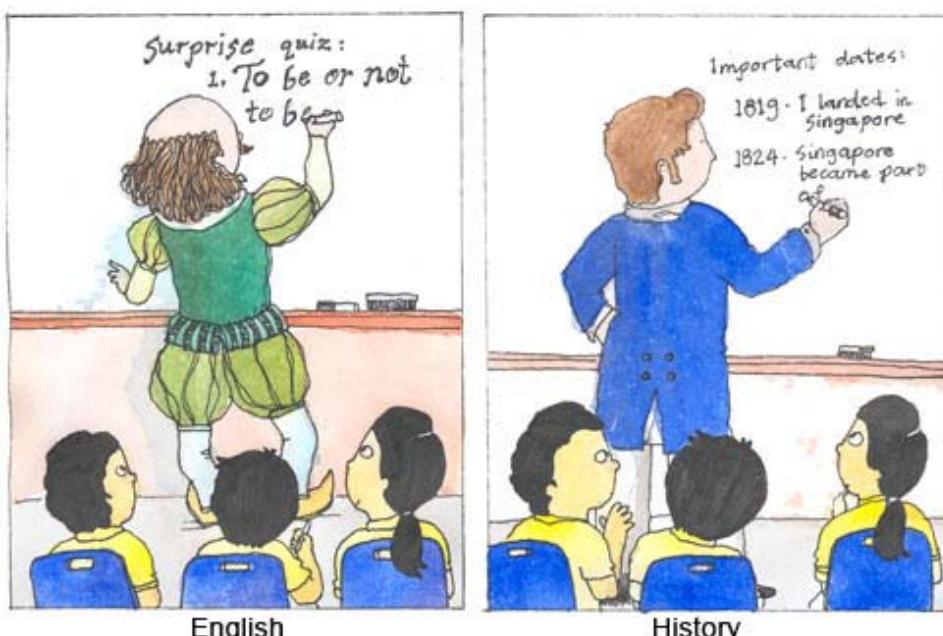
[Home](#) ▶ [Archives](#) ▶ [Issue 10](#) ▶ [Relax](#) ▶ What if we could get ANYONE to teach our students?

## Archives

### RELAX

[Issue 1](#)[Issue 2](#)[Issue 3](#)[Issue 4](#)[Issue 5](#)[Issue 6](#)[Issue 7](#)[Issue 8](#)[Issue 9](#)[Issue 10](#)[Inspire](#)[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[Issue 11](#)[Issue 12](#)[Issue 13](#)[Issue 14](#)

### What if we could get ANYONE to teach our students?

[Print](#)

#### Can you name them all?

Try to identify all four "teachers" in this cartoon. For the answer and a fresh RELAX cartoon, click [here](#).

> Want to see our [previous cartoon](#)? Click [here](#).

---

*Published in SingTeach, January 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore  
[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)**

[Home](#) ▶ [Current Issue](#) ▶ [Relax](#) ▶ [Fantasy Faculty Rooms](#)[Current Issue](#)

## RELAX

[Inspire](#)

## Fantasy Faculty Rooms

| [Print](#) |[Ideas](#)[Voices](#)[Share](#)[Relax](#)[PDF Version](#)[Contact Us](#)

Artwork by Yasmin Ortiga

**Let us know**

Any other ideas on what your fantasy faculty room looks like? Send us an email at [sgeteach@nie.edu.sg](mailto:sgeteach@nie.edu.sg) and the best suggestion wins a Popular voucher!

**Did you get this one?**

Congrats to those who sent us the answers to the [Issue 10 cartoon!](#) To those who haven't figured it out, the "teachers" are: William Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, Confucius and Albert Einstein.

---

*Published in SingTeach, March 2008*

**Copyright © 2008 National Institute of Education,**

**Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

[Privacy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Information for Contributors](#)