

# Getting To Know Our Students

Flora Ong, Master of Education (Curriculum and Teaching) and Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) graduate



## Flora Ong

is currently the Principal at Jurongville Secondary School and is a Master of Education (Curriculum and Teaching) and Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) graduate.

## Please describe some of the programmes that you have taken in NIE, and what led you to take up a higher degree programme?

In 2003, I did my Diploma in Departmental Management (DDM). Through the programme, I met Dr Moo Swee Ngoh, who was then an associate professor with NIE. Dr Moo taught us, as teachers of Nan Hua High School, to learn as a school community through peer coaching; this also started us in opening our classrooms. As the school's learning culture grew, more teachers started pursuing the Master of Education (MEd) programme part-time. I was greatly inspired by my senior colleagues, who travelled to NIE after teaching to continue studying at night classes. They often served as critical friends and helped one another to explore teaching and learning in classrooms through conversations. The drive and passion in these teachers motivated me to take up the MEd (Curriculum and Teaching) programme in 2010. After which, I returned again to NIE in 2015 to pursue the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP).

## What were some of the key takeaways from the MEd and LEP programmes?

When I was posted to Hillgrove Secondary School after graduating from the MEd programme, I felt a renewed sense of purpose. I was elated to work closely with Principal Mr Kenneth Lee (principal from 2009 to 2015) and former Head of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL) Academic Group, Associate Professor Christine Lee, in putting some of the educational theories into practice. The LEP that I took in 2015, took on a different focus. The LEP enabled me to learn the role of education through the dialogues with senior education ministry officials and my fellow classmates. My learning was further enhanced with what I learnt during an overseas study trip and my work with a school on a Creative Action Project (CAP). I was also both excited and challenged in the course on 'Futuring', which required us to think and plan 20 years ahead. This course allowed us to serve the fraternity with moral and professional responsibilities in mind. It reminded us that as school leaders, 'teaching is the human enterprise of paying it forward'.

## What were some of the challenges that you faced when pursuing the MEd programme and how did you overcome those challenges?

One of them was in reviewing the literature and finding the research focus for my Critical Inquiry project. I overcame a steep learning curve then as I had very supportive coursemates and NIE professors, which allowed me to embark on the project with greater clarity and conviction. Another experience was when I took on the role of the team leader for the overseas modules in Melbourne. It sharpened my skills of networking and communicating with fellow educators and officials in the university. I was blessed to have the help and warm hospitality extended by fellow Singaporeans who were lecturing and on their doctorate studies at the Melbourne University then.

## Having taken a few programmes in NIE, what has been your fondest memory in NIE?

One course that I enjoyed during my MEd programme was called 'thinking schools and thinking curriculum' by Clinton Golding. He challenged us to question 'why' and 'what' we value in good thinkers. The time that we had to read and reflect deeply on 'thinking hard about thinking' with my course-mates as well as on my own, is a luxury that I miss now that I am back in school. The discourse we had at each thought-provoking session showed us the dissonance in our thinking and inspired us to reflect further on what we read and question. Most importantly, the need to recharge after reflecting!

## Do you think that the LEP has been beneficial to you in your capacity as a Principal in Jurongville Secondary School?

The exposure in LEP enabled me to broaden my perspectives on leadership roles and values in education. It has also better prepared me to help my current school in envisioning and culture building.