

# Getting To Know Our Professors

A/P Tan Seng Chee



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is the Associate Dean for Learning and Instruction at the Office of Graduate Studies & Professional Learning, and an Associate Professor with the Learning Sciences & Technologies (LST) Academic Group at NIE. He is also the Deputy Director of Centre for Research & Development in Learning (CRADLE) at NTU.

## Why do you enjoy teaching and mentoring higher degree students?

It is a fulfilling experience to teach and mentor higher degree students as these are concrete actions I can take in nurturing the next generation of researchers in Singapore.

## What research area(s) are you working on now? How does it impact your work at NIE?

I have been working on research related to computer-supported collaborative learning, particularly on the knowledge-creation approach to education. It is an approach that aims at developing students' knowledge creating capacity and agency, even among K-12 students. Even though K-12 students may not be able to create knowledge new to the world, they can certainly develop the agency, disposition, and approach towards creating new knowledge, at least to their immediate learning community.

## Why is NIE a good place for you to do your work?

Having worked in NIE for more than 15 years, I have many friends in NIE, including both academic and non-academic staff. It is reassuring to know that there will be people there to support me and there are friends going through this meaningful journey with me.

## What does NIE offer to higher degree students that is unique?

Even though educational theories and principles are generalisable and transferable, their applications in classrooms have to be contextualised. In

NIE, we have the privilege of linking to the experts in the world and yet having a group of researchers and instructors with local knowledge working in the theory-practice nexus. Many people do not realise that NIE is endowed with a unique interdisciplinary team of staff. Beyond education, we are able to offer higher degree programmes in academic subjects (e.g., life sciences) and professional practices (e.g., instructional design).

## How would you describe NIE higher degree students?

NIE's higher degree students are mostly part-time students. It's admirable that they are motivated to pursue a higher degree despite their heavy workload in schools or their companies; a journey that many instructors in NIE have also gone through. Many of our students have a wealth of work experience and are able to exercise "practice mode" of thinking that focuses on what's practical and what's not. Quite a handful of students, who are able to rise above to "design mode" of thinking, are working at the edge of innovation and pushing the boundaries in their fields of study. I have seen many students with impressive work and they continue to contribute to education or their respective fields in meaningful ways.

## What have you learnt from your students?

Teaching and learning are reciprocal activities: we learn as we teach. It can be a simple question that a student asks that prompts me to think more deeply about an issue. For example, some students did not think that a knowledge-creation approach is suitable for language education and mathematics education; that piqued my curiosity about this approach of learning for different disciplines. I also learn a lot from reading students' theses, which often offer new perspectives about an issue and new research ideas.