

**Faith Kaylie Ong Yi Cheng**  
**2023 Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Programme**

***A Professional Sojourn in the U.S.***

“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration, our growth is limited to our own perspectives”- Robert John Meehan

Teaching is a highly complex craft for which we know that a lifetime alone is insufficient for one to gain mastery over but with careful rigorous focus on their classroom practice, teachers can continue to improve throughout their career. It has been a blessing and a huge privilege to be a participant of the Fulbright programme. One of the main highlights of the programme would be the opportunity to meet a team of international educators. A total of seventeen educators from ten countries came together to commit ourselves to a time where we could nurture our curiosity about the world around us, enter a period of self-reflexivity of our own pedagogical approaches and our educational philosophy while enriching ourselves professionally in our cross-cultural understanding of different educational systems all over the world.



*17 Teachers, 10 Different Countries united by a passion  
for learning and growth*

Discussions with my fellow Fulbrighters on topics such as access, physical resources, and pedagogical approaches has broadened my worldview and perspectives of education. As a teacher, it is my greatest privilege to gain an insight of the lived experiences of teacher educators around the world to better enrich and sharpen the views I have about education today.

As we emerge from the shadows of Covid-19, some questions I had as I embarked on this journey were to find out through stories what teaching and learning looks like and what professional development opportunities teachers had. For example, how would a teacher from Uganda continue to reach out and work with students who had no access to technology? How would a teacher from Greece spur colleagues towards achieving a common goal and to stay passionate about professional development amid the uncertainties where teacher rotation occurs on a regular basis? Also, what structures and support are put in place in U.S. schools to support students with special educational needs? To find my answers, I had to keep an open mind, listen attentively, and ask questions to gain precious insights from their narratives.

In a time of constant change, educators have the herculean task of preparing our students to thrive in a future that we ourselves are uncertain about. Thus, I was determined to use this precious time to dive into metacognitive questions we could use in the classroom and



investigate how the affordances of generative artificial intelligences (AI) could be harnessed to provide self-regulated feedback. I greatly appreciated the space and

time that I had to work alongside university faculty that prompted me to dive deeper into my area of research. After presenting the findings of my research, I received offers from various faculty staff and from fellow Fulbrighters to collaborate on creating professional development workshops to uplift the teaching fraternity and by extension, create meaningful and purposeful spaces of learning in our classrooms.

### Nurturing a Curious Mind



*Attending my first Fulbright Seminar*

There were various opportunities for us to engage in professional exchanges and learning. These opportunities included the Fulbright seminar, technology workshop and attending audit courses at the university.

Auditing the course '*Diverse Family, Community and Society in Early Childhood Education*' enabled me to have

interesting open conversations with American educators and trainee teachers. Through various platforms, I had the opportunity to learn about the educational contexts from colleagues all around the world and to gain some precious insights from the U.S. contexts.



*Auditing Classes at the University*



*A wonderful time of discussion and sharing with Aaron Sams who wrote "Flipped Learning: Gateway to Student Engagement"*

Some of my most precious learning experiences also came from small group interactions. One of which involved Aaron Sams, one of the developers of the flipped learning model. The Singaporean Fulbrighters were also very fortunate to meet with staff from Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) who shared with us some of the latest innovations

that they were working on with NASA and the spirit of innovation that made CMU what it is today.



*Learning about the constant spirit to innovate and improve from CMU*

### Teaching Highlights in Western Pennsylvania

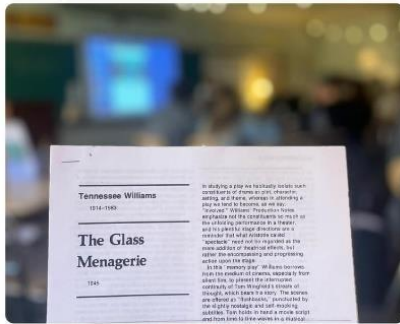
What made the Fulbright programme a unique experience was the ability to experience two six-week school visits and learning journeys to schools such as the Indiana County Technological Centre, a vocational school, and The Kiski School, a private boarding school that would turn from an all-boys to co-educational school. As a teacher, one of the key highlights of the entire experience would be the two long school stints at *Indiana High School* and *Pittsburgh Brashear High School*.



*Learning about the future-ready programmes at Indiana County Technology Centre*

In both schools, just like in Singapore secondary and tertiary institutions, teachers work in one-to-one computing settings. This

opportunity to adopt an 'outsider-insider' lens allowed me to glean precious insights



*Appreciating the similarities and differences in our pedagogical approaches towards language teaching and learning*

on classroom practices and how teachers across different subjects and grade levels utilised technological resources to enhance student learning.

In one of the schools, I had a chance to understand how groups of students with specific needs were identified and how the appropriate intervention strategies were implemented. I thoroughly enjoyed the

moments where I could carry out teacher duties such as being the bus chaperone at the Senior

High School I was attached to. There were also various opportunities to teach students across Grade 9 to 11 (the equivalent of Secondary 3 to Junior College Year 1) while I was there.



*Teachers take turns to do bus duty to ensure that students take the chartered bus rides home.*



*Conducting a Demonstration Lesson using Harvard Project Zero's Visible Thinking Routine of "See-Think- Wonder" in the U.S. Classroom*

The mutual exchange of pedagogical strategies was also a key highlight. I also had the chance to demonstrate the use of routines like "See-Think-Wonder", "I used to think that... Now I think" and the evergreen "What Makes You Say That?" to provide opportunities to make students' thinking visible in the classroom. By



*Presenting Mr McElheny with souvenirs from Singapore on behalf of the Singapore Fulbright Team 2023*

using artefacts from Singapore, I was able to share about Singapore’s culture and invited the students to do a comparison with their home culture. The robust exchange of ideas and high level of student engagement was rewarding, and it was wonderful to witness the joy of learning in a classroom which brought back many pleasant teaching memories I had back home in Singapore. I also had the opportunity to interact with school administrators, in particular, the Principal of Indiana Senior High School, Mr McElheny, where we had

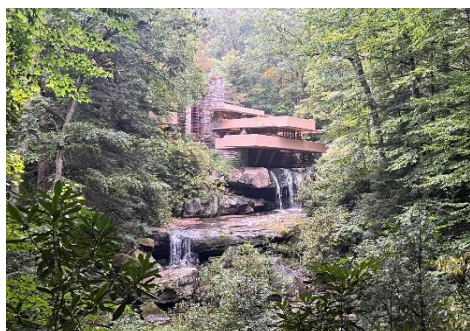
the most engaging conversations about education policy, the similarities and differences of U.S. and Singapore education systems and the challenges that our countries face as we think about education and its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Appreciating the Charms of an American Experience**

Alan Cohen said, “There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither”. To allow us to gain insights to the culture, the American way of life and to broaden our horizons, we had numerous opportunities to go on cultural excursions. One of the highlights for me was the visit to Niagara Falls. Mostly known for



*At Niagara Falls*



*Fallingwater in Mill Run, Pennsylvania*

her beauty, Niagara Falls is a source of hydroelectric power. I also felt incredibly blessed that due to the rain, I got to catch a glimpse of a rainbow at the Falls. We also had the chance to visit Fallingwater,



*Watching a Broadway Musical in New York*

a house designed by Frank Wright that was listed as a Heritage Site. Our cultural exchange trips also provided us with opportunities to travel to watch various sporting events, trips to Pittsburgh and to New York. As someone who enjoys musicals, I decided to splurge on watching a Broadway Sondheim musical thriller, *Sweeney Todd*, starring Josh Groban while I was in New York. This was

indeed a once in a lifetime event for me as it was one of those moments when you get to watch a world-class performance and appreciate a high-quality musical performance. I also had the chance to visit Central Park with fellow Fulbrighters and caught a glimpse of famous Statue of Liberty as well.

It was also my first-time celebrating Thanksgiving, and I could not be more thankful for my host family and faculty advisor who so graciously invited me to their homes to experience first-hand how Americans celebrate Thanksgiving. I found it to be a meaningful



*Visiting Jakes Rocks in the Allegheny National Forest with the university's Outdoor Club*

holiday that makes one take conscious steps to be grateful for the numerous



*Having Thanksgiving lunch with the Conjelkos, my host family*

blessings in life, both big and small. The hospitality of the locals could also be seen in how they specially took time out make us feel like family at home by sharing with us about the history of the area, opening our eyes to some unique experiences that were just a small slice of the huge myriad of experiences that America has to offer. Not

to mention, I also joined the university's Outdoor Club activities and this added another dimension to life as a university student again. Some of my Pennsylvanian highlights



*A memorable Halloween celebration dishing out candy with Francis, a fellow Fulbrighter from Uganda, and my students from Indiana High School*

included celebrating Halloween by dishing out candy to nearly 200 children in the neighbourhood! Thanks to my host family, they also organised a chance for me to try my hand at carving my very own pumpkin. I also had the



*Celebrating the fruits of our labour. Hand carved pumpkins with Elizabeth, a fellow Fulbrighter from Mexico*

chance to visit my first ever Christmas Tree farm and those scenes from Hallmark movies that I used to watch over the year end holidays certainly now came to life!



*Visiting Mytrysak Christmas Tree Farm in Indiana, Pennsylvania. Indiana, PA is also known for her reputation as the "Christmas Tree Capital of the World".*

## Paying It Forward

As I think about the many encounters I had on the Fulbright programme, I've become deeply appreciative of the strong support that teachers in Singapore receive and the immense trust that seems to come naturally for many of us in the system. My



interactions with other Fulbrighters gave me a renewed perspective on our approaches in Singapore and am contemplating ways to refine them further. The world is fast changing, and Singapore cannot afford to rest on our laurels nor take our Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores for granted. Instead, this experience has opened my eyes to what values we need to have as teachers in the face of fast changing technologies so that our curriculum continues to stay relevant, enabling us to pass on evergreen values to our students.



*At the Fulbright DAI Closing Ceremony held in Washington, D.C.*

During my time on the Fulbright programme, I've come to realise that Singapore's education system excels in acknowledging timeless constants while remaining flexible and open to make timely changes in our system to make teaching and

learning constantly relevant. The question today is perhaps how can we individualise our standards and teaching to help all our children meet their full potential? It may seem oxymoronic but perhaps that is the future of teaching and learning. How can we customise these pedagogies for the masses and yet use them to individually personalise the learning for our students with the aid of technology? An African proverb states "To go fast, go alone. To go far, go together". Be it in Uganda, Greece, Taiwan, or Singapore, it is about working together with parents, colleagues, community partners to create classrooms and school as a place of learning where children feel a sense of belonging.

This opportunity to embark on the Fulbright programme allowed me to nurture and develop my curiosity about the use of thinking as questioning and the role of AI in education today. I have plans to share my learning at the school, cluster and zonal level on how metacognitive questions can be used in the classroom to support self-directed learning. Furthermore, I will share how I harnessed the affordances of generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT) to provide questions as a form of feedback to students' drafts. This provides both teachers and students an opportunity to teach and apply the use of AI in safe environment which focuses on developing digitally empowered and future ready learners. With strong pedagogy and AI use, students are given opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills to evaluate the questions posed by the machine, self-assess their own understanding, and make independent decisions to revise their work. In so doing, students are given chances to develop the disposition of what it means to think and learn. The work that I started in the U.S. is far from finished and I hope that by sharing my learning, further refining it with a team of interested teachers, we will continue to inspire each other to create more engaged classroom experiences for our students.