

Geraldine Maskelony's 2025 Fulbright Experience in Singapore

How similar/different have you found Singapore students to be when compared to yours back home?

As members of a learning community, Singapore students are not so different from mine back home in the U.S.—they are curious, capable, and respond well to good teaching. However, the structures around them shape very different classroom behaviors. Many Singaporean students displayed a quiet, purposeful demeanor in class, even during more traditional teacher-centered lessons. This contrasts with what I often observe in my U.S. classroom, where students participate readily with interactive or visually dynamic instruction, but may be less engaged during lessons that are more lecture-driven. Singapore students left me with the impression that school is recognized as serious work, and their more structured and high-stakes academic system seemed to generally cultivate a sense of discipline and accountability. Many students I observed were familiar with routines that supported focused classroom behavior (starting and ending routines, having materials prepared, staying on-task). That said, when Singapore teachers introduced opportunities for peer discussion, hands-on exploration, or technology-supported feedback, the students responded with energy and evident enthusiasm—not unlike students in my U.S. classroom when they're invited into active learning.



Students at Peicai Secondary working
on a sorting activity in biology class



Students at Swiss Cottage Secondary
explaining their learning goals in
Design and Technology

With respect to participation in their learning during class time, I found in my focus group discussions and observations that Singaporean students were less likely to willingly ask or answer questions in class. Many students in focus group discussions let me know that they were concerned about “being judged” or “looking stupid,” and several teachers commented that students did not want to “appear incompetent” in front of their peers. By contrast, I find that students in the US are more willing to jump in during class time to ask clarifying questions, propose an alternative scenario (“But what if we...”), or even disagree with something that has been said.

Both in Singapore and at home, students seemed to know, regardless of teaching method, when teachers truly had their best interest at heart, and they responded warmly to being seen and cared for in this way.

What was the most unexpected thing about Singapore schools/teachers/students for you?

Before entering classrooms, I expected the teaching in Singapore to be relatively homogenous and tightly standardized. This assumption was shaped in part by learning about the Ministry of Education's current focus on developing e-pedagogy and differentiated instruction. While I was impressed by the clarity of the Ministry's goals, I also wondered whether these centralized frameworks might result in a uniform pedagogical approach in practice—potentially limiting the variation I was hoping to observe in my research. Instead, I discovered a remarkable range of teaching styles across the many classrooms I visited. Teachers drew on their individual strengths and subject expertise to design lessons that responded thoughtfully to the specific needs of their students.

The most unexpected thing was, in a few cases, the level of intentionality with which “soft skills” were integrated into lessons. Teachers would plan not only for content outcomes but also for competencies like collaboration, resilience, and critical thinking. I saw lessons where every activity had a dual purpose: to teach the subject and to cultivate a disposition, embedded in group roles, open-ended questions, and student reflection. I was also surprised, particularly in a high-stakes testing setting, by the way in which these competencies were assessed, often through performance-based tasks. The precision and care with which teachers designed these moments stood out to me as a meaningful, culturally responsive approach that didn't sacrifice academic rigor.



Meeting with students for focus group discussions was a highlight and a source of rich professional learning and insight.



Presenting to teachers at Swiss Cottage Secondary about amplifying the benefits of inquiry-based learning with edtech

What are ideas you got from your attachment to Singapore schools/the Singapore Fulbright experience that you wish to take back home to seed and/or implement?

One of the most powerful takeaways from my time in Singapore was how seamlessly some teachers blended structure with responsiveness, using both technology and pedagogy to support differentiated, student-centered learning within a common national framework. I'd like to bring back several of these ideas as starting points for adaptation in my own teaching context.

In particular, I was especially inspired by the specific uses of educational technology to support active learning. In multiple classrooms, I observed teachers using online tools to capture and display student responses in real time, allowing for impromptu error analysis or discussion around misconceptions. For example, students would submit short written explanations or problem solutions digitally, which the teacher would then display anonymously for class critique or guided analysis. This quick, targeted check-in process created rich moments of feedback and peer learning without requiring extensive grading time.



Answering student questions about the US education system at Peicai Secondary

Singaporean teachers also excelled at interspersing teacher-led and student-directed segments within the same lesson. This intentional pacing allowed students to engage actively while having the benefit of direct instruction. Technology often played a key role in these transitions—for instance, by using Padlet to curate resources, distribute differentiated tasks, or gather student thinking in response to a prompt. These digital tools helped extend the walls of the classroom by collecting, preserving, and looping back to student work across lessons.

One concept that stood out was the frequent and effective use of technology to “assessment for learning”—Singapore’s equivalent to what we in the U.S. call formative assessment. I saw teachers using low-stakes quizzes, gamified check-ins, and even embedded SLS (Student Learning Space) activities to check for understanding mid-lesson, adapt instruction in the moment, and encourage students to reflect on their own thinking. These tools weren’t elaborate, but they were purposeful and clearly aligned with instructional goals.



Learning about the history of education in Singapore at the MOE Heritage Center

I also gained a new appreciation for Singapore's national SLS platform. While it serves the basic function of providing consistent curriculum-aligned resources across schools, I saw how innovative teachers used it not just as a static library of resources but as a springboard for in-class learning. That said, few students spoke with enthusiasm about SLS resources during our focus group discussion, saying instead that the platform promoted a 'get-it-done' mentality and finding the fastest way to completion.

Beyond classroom practice, I was struck by Singapore's approach to teacher leadership rotation. The system allows experienced educators to move temporarily into middle or senior leadership roles—and then back into the classroom. This structure helps cultivate school leaders who remain closely connected to teaching realities while also seeding fresh instructional ideas within the teaching faculty. I would love to explore how a more fluid, cyclical approach to teacher leadership might work in my own context.



With the outstanding team from Academy of Singapore Teachers who coordinated my visit

Share with us an experience that resonated strongly with you in the course of your professional development journey in Singapore.

Something that resonated strongly with me during my professional development journey in Singapore wasn't a single moment, but rather a pattern that emerged across many conversations, classrooms, and settings.

It became increasingly clear that stakeholders at every level of the Singapore system—from senior policy leaders to classroom teachers to students themselves—are actively grappling with the tension between a results-oriented testing framework and the desire to cultivate a more holistic, creative, and student-centered learning environment. This tension was not hidden or denied; it was openly discussed and deeply felt. I encountered it in teacher interviews, student focus groups, conversations with school and national leadership, and in the very structure of some lessons.



Presenting professional development on project-based learning to teachers at Yusof Ishak Secondary School

What struck me most was how parallel this tension is to what we face in the U.S., but from the opposite direction. In my home context, we often pursue more open-ended, portfolio-based, or project-centered learning goals—sometimes at the expense of structured skill development or depth of foundational knowledge. The concern in the U.S. tends to be whether students are gaining enough of the concrete, testable skills needed for long-term academic and career success. In Singapore, the concern expressed by many was the inverse: that while students are generally well-prepared for exams, there is a growing push to “crack open” the testing culture to make space for more varied ways of learning and demonstrating understanding.

What resonated was not just the existence of this tension, but the thoughtful and systematic ways Singapore educators are beginning to respond to it. I heard examples of schools implementing alternative project-based assessments, even in core subjects; teachers designing choice-based lesson structures that invite students to take ownership within examinable topics; and others carefully incorporating inquiry-based learning—not just as an idealistic gesture, but as a strategic part of helping students connect meaningfully with content while still preparing for high-stakes exams.

The honesty with which educators acknowledged these trade-offs, and the care with which they’re experimenting within a high-accountability system, left a lasting impression. It reminded me that the struggle to balance rigor with relevance, and structure with creativity, is not unique to any one system—and that the conversation needs to continue at all levels, from national policy to classroom practice.



Working directly with Singapore teachers allowed us to share elements of our teaching practice with each other.

What was it that you were exposed to in Singapore that culminated in the content presented in TCEF2025?

In Singapore, I was exposed to a wide range of classroom practices that revealed how educational technology is being integrated—not as a standalone innovation, but as part of a broader, pedagogy-driven approach to teaching and learning. My TCEF2025 content will thus be a summary of the findings of my inquiry project: a synthesis of quantitative study results, classroom observations, student focus groups, and teacher interviews, all aimed at understanding how educational technology intersects with student engagement. I had originally expected to focus on digital tools, but what I found was that engagement was most strongly influenced by pedagogy—specifically, by active learning strategies, clear scaffolds, and teacher-student relationships.

The data, both quantitative and qualitative, showed quite clearly that technology functioned more as an amplifier than as an independent cause. My presentation will highlight this distinction using survey data and excerpts from teacher and student interviews to show how the design of the lesson—not the presence of devices—drove engagement. The idea that edtech’s value lies in how it supports interaction,

feedback, and collaboration was something I saw firsthand while observing how Singaporean educators blend digital tools into student-centered instructional design.



I'm official: receiving the compass customarily given to newly inducted teachers.



Working with my project advisor, Prof Chua Bee Leng of the National Institute of Education



In-person sharing with teachers was the deepest kind of professional learning



Getting ready to cheer the Swiss Cottage girls' basketball team to victory at regionals



Sharing US teaching practices on edtech and inquiry-based learning



A warm welcome at the Center for Teaching and Learning innovation lab at Yusof Ishak Secondary



Students were eager to discuss global issues as well as differences between Singapore and US schools.



Listening to student speeches for student leadership elections at Peicai Secondary School