

CONGRATULATORY SPEECH BY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING
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AT THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD CEREMONY
ON 6 OCTOBER 2022 AT THE POD, NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD

INTRODUCTION

1. A very good evening to all. It gives me great pleasure to join you at the Inspiring Teacher of English Award Ceremony.

2. This year marks the fifteenth year of the award. I am pleased to note the number of outstanding members of the English Language teaching fraternity who have been recognised over the years.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SINGAPORE

3. Fluency in the English language is crucial in helping us remain relevant in the world.
 - a. It plays an important role as the *lingua franca* of the world in economics and trade, as well as science and technology.
 - b. Our early adoption of English as our business and working language gave us impetus. This is a practical choice given its widespread use internationally and the role it plays in our history.

- c. Our proficiency gives us the capacity to connect with the world and enables us to gain a competitive edge in the global market for talent and capital.
 - d. It also helps us play a key role in bridge-building across cultures, playing a complementary role to the Mother Tongue Languages.
4. In multi-racial Singapore, the English language continues to serve as a common language to facilitate effective communication and understanding.
- a. The English language provides a common civic space for different communities to foster bonds and share experiences that build mutual understanding.

TRIBUTE TO THE ITEA RECIPIENTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE FRATERNITY

5. Given the importance of the English language for our students both locally and globally, our teachers play a critical role. They help our students build a strong foundation, appreciate the beauty of the language, and develop competencies which will help them to be future-ready.
6. This is seen in the recipients of the ITEA. Our nine recipients are passionate about English Language and in helping their students to enjoy their learning. They:
- a. meaningfully pique students' interest in learning about the world through developing their confidence in using the English language;
 - b. skilfully employ innovative pedagogies; and
 - c. proactively develop themselves professionally so that they can enrich students' learning and be future-ready.

7. Let me share with you three examples from our ITEA recipients.
 - a. One of our recipients today, Ms Lim Kai Li Clare, Head of Department for English from Fuchun Primary School:
 - i. leads her department to use stories and current affairs to help students acquire language skills, and understand the relevance of what they are learning in their daily lives.
 - b. Another recipient, Mdm Norashikin Binte Hassan, Senior Teacher for English Language from Qihua Primary School:
 - i. incorporates the affordances of technological tools with EL pedagogical practices such as “talk moves” in her students’ study of narrative texts. In this way, she builds their confidence to think through, and share their views.
 - c. Lee De Yi, an English Language and English Literature teacher from Swiss Cottage School:
 - i. applied insights from a Teacher Work Attachment Plus (TWA+) Programme opportunity with National Gallery Singapore, as well as courses on Art and Literature to design engaging classroom experiences for his students.
8. These examples from Clare, Norashikin and De Yi provide just a snapshot of the good and innovative work our ITEA recipients and nominees are doing to enable our students to learn well, and to make language learning come alive for them. There will be many more such good stories from the fraternity.
9. Congratulations to all our award recipients and nominees!

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

10. As our world of teaching and learning has changed and will continue to change rapidly, the way we teach English Language will also change.

- a. Certainly, in language learning, there will be core knowledge and skills that remain fundamental.
- b. But English itself is a living and dynamic language which continues to evolve.
- c. The prevalence of technology and new media also influences the use of the language.
- d. The future workplace requires our students to develop new, or higher level of competencies.
- e. Adding to the equation is how we can better nurture the potential of our students who come from diverse profiles.

11. What then, do we envision for our English Language teaching fraternity in the journey ahead? Let me share three aspirations with you.

12. First, even as our English Language teachers continue to build a strong foundation in literacy in our students, we will need to **harness language learning to develop other literacies**.

- a. I begin with information and digital literacies.
 - i. In a world inundated with information especially in the digital space, we will need to help our students acquire the skill of sensemaking and the instinct for discernment.

- ii. English Language is a natural vehicle for students to acquire the skills of critical reading and thinking, verifying sources of information, understanding purpose and audience, and appreciating diverse perspectives before coming to a well-reasoned conclusion and deeper understanding of issues.
 - b. In addition, English Language learning must help our students to have the ability to connect and collaborate with others. In this way, they can create new ideas and perspectives which bring value to the world.
 - i. To be able to do so is not just about enunciating well.
 - ii. But it is having the confidence to use the language effectively and responsibly for expression, persuasion and inspiration.
 - iii. Or what the English teachers will be familiar with – for “*effect, affect and impact*”.
 - c. By developing these literacies in our students, we are building their social and cultural capital.
 - i. Through the language, our English Language teachers open up the world, and open up a world of opportunities to students from different backgrounds.
 - d. I am pleased to learn that the English Language Syllabus 2020 puts an even greater premium on nurturing these literacies and dispositions in our students.
 - i. Let’s keep at this. We will see the fruits of our labour one day.
13. Second, our English Language fraternity **must continue to adopt innovative pedagogies, including harnessing new technologies**, to enrich the learning experiences of our students and to nurture their potential.

- a. We must teach and learn in both the physical and virtual classrooms; and to teach and learn both in schools and outside the school.
- b. We will leverage the best of technology in educationally meaningful and age-appropriate ways.
- c. For example, we can tap immersive technology to make the beauty of the English Language come alive for our students and help them better connect with what they learn.
 - i. Imagine, our students transported with Jane Austen to the rural English countryside!
- d. We will also need to adopt adaptive technologies that allow our students to be self-directed in their learning, and to better cater to their needs and aptitudes.
 - i. For those who are more linguistically inclined, we can stretch them further.
 - ii. For those who need a bit more help, we can help them to establish the necessary language and literacy foundations.
 - iii. Coupled with the use of data, these will help the English Language teachers to make decisions on who and where to focus their attention at any one time.
- e. Customising learning like this requires more resources. But it is not possible to always have more, and even more teachers.
- f. Hence for better customisation and to facilitate out-of-the-classroom learning, we are developing adaptive learning tools powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) that can provide personalised guidance to students.
 - i. For example, we are developing a Learning Feedback Assistant (LFA) for English that provides students with immediate feedback on some

aspects of language in students' writing, so that our teachers can focus on more complex aspects of writing.

- ii. There are also possibilities to help students develop reading and speaking skills which we are looking at.

14. Even as we tap on the wonders of technology in teaching and learning, it can never replace the role of the teacher.

- a. The human touch of the teacher to nurture and guide is the heart of teaching.
- b. The teacher will then be able to focus on higher value work with the students.
- c. Therefore, our English Language teaching fraternity will also develop new skill sets in order to master technology and help our students deepen their development of new literacies.

15. So, third, while we celebrate the talents of the individual English Language teacher, we **must also focus on leveraging team strengths to evolve and progress as a fraternity.**

- a. This calls for more collaboration such as sharing of ideas and resources across the fraternity.
- b. We already started doing this with the Student Learning Space (SLS).
 - i. Our curriculum planners and Master Teachers develop learning resources and lessons for teachers to adopt and customise.
 - ii. Teachers can also share their own resources with other teachers in the Community Gallery.
- c. But we can do much more.

- i. I have shared this “80 - 20” rule where 80% of our basic teaching resources are to be readily available from a common pool, and 20% is customised by the teacher according to students’ needs.
- ii. This can also help to manage teachers’ workload.
- iii. So, continue to crowdsource for good lesson ideas and resources.
- iv. Help one another to figure out the best approaches. Every teacher, regardless of experience, can contribute to this marketplace of ideas for teaching and learning.
- v. This will also help to elevate our professional practice.

CONCLUSION

16. To all award recipients and our nominees, I am very heartened by your passion and dedication in nurturing students’ English Language proficiency and love for the language.

- a. I would like to commend you for contributing professionally to the fraternity and for being a source of inspiration to teachers of English.
- b. My warmest congratulations again to all of you and your schools!

17. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for their strong commitment and support to the ITEA for the last fifteen years, as well as to the wider community for supporting English Language learning in varied ways.

- a. Language learning does not just happen in the classroom. It is also dependent on the overall environment.

- b. The role of the community and the media in providing a rich language environment, developing sound content, and in role-modelling the use of the language in our everyday lives cannot be understated.

18. I wish all our teachers of English a meaningful journey of teaching and lifelong learning as you continue to inspire students to love and enjoy learning the language, and to use the power of the language in edifying and uplifting ways.

19. Thank you.