

Director-General of Education Liew Wei Li's Congratulatory Speech
for the Inspiring Teacher of English Awards Ceremony 2023
National Museum, 5 October 2023

A very good evening,

Mr Jason Leow, Chairman of the Speak Good English Movement

Mr Jamie Ho, Editor of The Straits Times

All our educators,

Ladies and gentlemen.

INTRODUCTION

1. I am delighted to be here with you today at the Inspiring Teacher of English Awards ceremony.

2. The ITEA is a significant award that recognises the work and contributions of our English language teachers. Since its inception 16 years ago,
 - a. 127 teachers have received this award.

 - b. 8 more teachers will be recognised tonight.

3. I would like to thank the Speak Good English Movement, and the Straits Times for partnering MOE all these years in affirming and honouring the efforts of our English language teachers who have inspired their students' learning of the English language.

THE POWER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

4. Spoken by more than 1 billion people globally, the English language allows us to plug into the world. It is the lingua franca for science, business and trade. And the dominant language of the internet. Locally, English is an important common tongue for us interact and bond with one another in multi-cultural Singapore.

5. Given its pivotal role, the importance and responsibility of our English language teachers cannot be understated.

6. I would like to share 2 imperatives for our English language teachers.

7. First, **you must continue to open up the world, and a world of opportunities for our students.**

8. You do that by building a strong language foundation in them. Our students learn how to read, so that they can read to learn and learn for life.

a. Being able to read unlocks other doors to learning.

b. By doing so, you are equipping our students with a “superpower” which they can wield on their own.

c. As Dr Seuss says, *“the more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go”*.

9. Our students have done well in the learning of the English Language by international benchmarks.

- a. In the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), our Primary 4 students continued to perform very well in reading literacy despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. More importantly, Singapore is also the only education system where students have made steady progress over the past 20 years.
- c. This is testament to our strong curriculum and the efforts of our English language teacher fraternity, and support by parents.

10. English language teachers also have a profound influence over how well our students navigate the future. Through teaching the language, you cultivate 21st century competencies in our students.

- a. Take critical thinking and information literacy skills for instance
 - i. the ability to discern the credibility and accuracy of information,
 - ii. understanding the purpose and agenda of the source.
 - iii. These have become essential in the age of digital and social media onslaught, not all of which is well-intended or true.
- b. Consider another set of 21st century competencies – communication and collaboration skills.

- i. the ability and confidence to communicate and collaborate with others.
- ii. Pitching one's ideas
- iii. Persuading others to come on-board
- iv. These will help them forge their way in a more complex world

11. Second, **you must guide our students to use words for good**, even as they learn about the beauty and power of the English language.

a. Let me illustrate the effect words can have on us with a poem written by one of our award recipients today, Ms Heng Siok Tian from Hwa Chong Institution.

b. It is a poem titled, 'Skating', from her first collection of poems, *Crossing the Chopsticks and other poems*, published in 1993.

'Skating'

Words are ice skaters
Performing on a rink.
They can be trained
To ease slowly in gentle gestures,
delicate movements.

Or whipped
to spin feelings,
twist decisive ankles
at sharp angles
to chip
strategic eyes.

Versatile footwork
is
perseverant drill,
well-coached impulses,
thoughtful loneliness.

Like skating,
words have a rink
of quiet aesthetics.

12. A Literature teacher and an accomplished poet, Siok Tian has demonstrated the power of words to evoke a desired response in her readers.

- a. Words can be ‘trained’ to communicate shades of meaning.
- b. Words can evoke and convey emotions like how they can be ‘whipped/ to spin feelings’.
- c. As we teach our students to communicate confidently and persuasively, we must also help them to wield the power of words responsibly.

RECOGNITION OF AWARDEES

13. This evening, we celebrate 8 teachers who embody passion and innovation in making English interesting and relevant to their students.

- a. They are role models of effective use of English.
- b. They also bring inspiring pedagogies into their classrooms and help students to love the subject.

14. Let me share 3 examples.

15. Ms Leena Priya d/o Segaran is a teacher at Xishan Primary School.

- a. Leena observes that many of her students prefer watching videos or playing with computer games to reading a book.
- b. Determined to seed a love for reading in them, Leena set up a reading corner in her classroom.

- c. She also shares snippets of her favourite stories to inspire her students to explore new titles.
- d. As they read more, Leena saw that her students' imaginations were fired and they wrote more engaging stories.
- e. I am pleased to hear that Leena's class would always top the charts in terms of book borrowing!

16. Second, Ms Yvonne Koh Feng Ying. A Senior Teacher who teaches General Paper at Jurong Pioneer Junior College,

- a. Yvonne is determined to debunk the idea amongst her students that GP can be daunting.
 - i. To do so, she uses current and relatable examples to introduce new issues for class discussions
 - ii. She also incorporates gaming elements in her lessons to help them sharpen their critical thinking skills.
- b. A strong proponent of technology, Yvonne
 - i. Gets her students to track their own progress and learning points through a digital journal.
 - ii. She also uses video recordings to provide customised feedback to her students' writing

17. The third teacher of mention is a recipient of the Leadership Award. Ms Crescendra Tan Xiu Mei is Head of Department of English Language and Literature at Naval Base Secondary School.

18. As an instructional leader, Crescendra works to build a community of practitioners who is continually honing their craft.

a. She walks the talk by being the first to open her classroom to her department teachers.

b. This is to encourage feedback from them and to facilitate exchange of ideas.

c. Over time, her teachers also began to open up their classrooms for other teachers to observe and learn.

d. Crescendra also started a department Instagram account for teachers to exchange ideas and share their reflections outside of formal meetings.

e. All these create a safe and vibrant culture of collaboration, sharing and collective growth.

CONCLUSION

19. Leena, Yvonne and Crescendra are just some examples amongst our ITEA recipients and nominees.

20. This evening, there are many inspiring English educators sitting amongst us who are making a difference each day and I extend my appreciation to all of you too.

a. Your daily effort and dedication will bear good fruit, not always immediately and sometimes many years later.

b. Continue to hone your craft to teach our students to communicate with empathy, read with discernment and inquire critically.

c. Inspire others with your love for the English language, and contribute to the growth of the fraternity.

21. Together, we can nurture generations of students who will journey into the future with confidence, optimism, and purpose.

22. Once again, my congratulations to all of you, and to your schools!

23. Thank you.

THE END