

SJC AWARDS CEREMONY 2015

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, SINGAPORE

Miss Susie Ho, Principal St Joseph's Convent
Parents, Teachers
Distinguished guests
Students

Good morning to all.

It is my great honour and privilege to be home this morning here at SJC where my teenage spirit spent four golden years happy and free. It was here that I was inculcated with the values, "Simple in Virtue, Steadfast in Duty" and here where the seeds of becoming a woman of integrity were sown.

Tribute to Lee Kuan Yew, Education and the importance of Teachers

As we are all aware, today is the rescheduled date for the awards ceremony originally scheduled on the 28th of March because that was the week of national mourning for the passing of Singapore's founding father Mr Lee Kuan Yew. As we struggle to move on in the midst of our pain

and sorrow at the passing of a legend, let us not forget the vision that Mr Lee had for Singapore's education system. As a newly independent nation with no natural assets except our people, Mr Lee believed that only in investing in the education of our citizens can every individual achieve his and her full potential and that collectively, we can then build the future of our nation together and compete on a level playing field with the rest of the world. He deeply believed that schools must lay the strong foundational blocks for nation building by building students of strong moral fibre and character crucial for our survival as a young nation. His fundamental belief in education was to produce the Good Man and the Useful Citizen; and teachers were seen as instrumental to producing the Good Man and Useful Citizen. Long before international management consulting firms like McKinsey & Co declared that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers", Mr Lee recognized that the pivotal role that teachers play in the education system. In 1966, he addressed a meeting of school principals with the simple but powerful message that, "Teachers are the most important digit" in building the quality of the education system and asserted that, "If I have to choose one profession in which you give the most for the least it is probably teaching - if you take it seriously. You have to have the temperament for it to coax, to stimulate, to cajole, to discipline a young mind into good habits. You must have an aptitude." What he meant by this statement was simply that the multiplier effect of a teacher's influence is infinite: for better or for worse.

As we reflect on the life and legacy of a great leader with the gumption, vision and tenacity to build a nation we proudly call our own, let us pay tribute and honour to him by living out his unwavering belief in the power of education to transform lives and to build a future generation of Singaporeans able to continually sustain happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation and home, Singapore.

Reflections about teaching, good teachers and the power of education

In the last quarter of a course that I teach each Semester, I ask my student teachers to reflect about how the academic content of the course that I teach can be applied practically in their classrooms in the future on a flip card. After the student teachers have shared their thoughts, I will, in turn, share with them my philosophy about teaching. I tell them that you have often heard the saying that “You are what you eat.” In other words, your size and shape broadly reflects the type of dietary habits you practise. I go on to tell them that, “as a teacher, you must remember that “you are WHAT, WHY, HOW and WHO you teach.” In this short statement, I am trying to share the essence of what it means to be a teacher and what it means to embrace the personhood of a teacher. In a nutshell, being a teacher is a 24-7 role because both inside and outside the classroom, we need to be role models who live out the values that we try to impart to our students. As teachers, we are always “on air” as our students are also silently

observing our behaviour even after we have stepped out of the classroom.

I see my role as a teacher educator in the nation's sole teacher preparation institute to be of a very high calling, which is to continue to keep the passion for teaching alive in our students and to first role model what it means to be good teachers and to demonstrate what good pedagogy looks like. Above all, I see my mission to be one of inspiring the love of learning in our student teachers so that they can be lifelong learners themselves.

In April 2013, I was invited by Mayor Dan Sullivan of Anchorage, Alaska to deliver a keynote address entitled, "A Portrait of Great Teachers: The Singapore Story" at the "Great Teachers Colloquium" which the Department of Education organised. To kick-start the symposium, every participant, including myself, was asked to share who our favourite teacher was in high and to detail the qualities that they possess. I chose to honour my secondary school teacher Mrs Cecile Tan from St Joseph's Convent and flashed the following powerpoint photograph of us taken on Teachers Day in my graduating year at SJC.[Flash ppt slide 1] I reflected about the qualities that she possessed that made her a truly outstanding educator and they include the following: truly inspirational, deeply passionate about teaching, exhibited great care for her students, generous mentor, upheld a strong sense of justice and fairness and was knowledgeable about in her subject matter and about life in general. [Flash ppt slide 2] When I

received a university honour award from President Tony Tan last year, I said that if I am honoured as a teacher today, I would say that I owe it to my own teachers who were mentors and role models. Collectively, they instilled in me a deep sense of integrity along with the quest for academic excellence and are also the reasons why I have decided to make teaching my lifelong career.

Recently, I have also been deeply touched by the words of a fellow speaker at a conference who shared that “Education is for life, not for livelihood.” These are powerful words that remind us about the true meaning of education. To me, education is about helping each child to maximise his or her full potential in life. This potential, when fully realised, can then enable one to use his/ her talents to contribute to the betterment of both the local and global society where we live.

Honouring Extraordinary Achievement Beyond Academia

This brings me to my next point which is the launch of the SJC Alumnae Special Achievement (SJCA) award. The Special Achievement Award serves to recognise students for demonstrating the qualities of resilience and perseverance; having the ability to rise above their circumstances to face challenges or setbacks in their lives during the year(s) in the school to achieve excellence in both academic and

non-academic area; being a positive role model, exemplifying positive character development and a positive attitude towards learning and self-improvement AND to motivate students to continue to pursue excellence.

Today, as President of the SJC Alumnae, it gives me great pleasure and honour to announce that this award is made by the contributions of three lifelong friends who met at SJC and they are: Ms Lu-ann Ong, 1st Vice-President of SJCA, Ms Vena Chua Boon Hui and myself from the class of 1987. This is how we looked back then [flash powerpoint slide 3]. I asked Lu-ann and Boon Hui to pen me a few lines about what motivated them to contribute to the setting up of this special award and I will share their thoughts with all of you.

From Lu-ann, seated just there,

“If you spent your days trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing on your pens, don't think you have no hope of winning an award. I had spent my golden days in SJC watching how a ball is tossed into a netball net, listening to the sounds of birds in the trees outside our classroom, laughing away with friends, and walking around the courtyard. This award is aimed at your best instincts; astute identification of what is right and wrong, passion for what you do, interest and dedication, connection with others at a human level - beyond the borders of grades, different classrooms - and above all, the cultivation of self-worth. Each of us is a

single mind with one pair of eyes, one pair of ears and one beating heart. Each of us is special in our own way. Many people care about grades in our society because we allow them to care about it. But if you have a sense of purpose in your lives and are able to express that sense in whatever form - be in grades, sports and just being you, you have a space to craft your own story. So, I want to take this moment to share with you that I crafted my own life story with a good chapter of it written in SJC. SJC deserves a very special award in my heart - for the values it grounded in me, the opportunity to meet people who will become my lifelong friends, the interest in sports and a balanced environment to nurture confident and grounded individuals.

It is for this reason that we created this prize – simply for love of the school and dedicated to all SJCians who are special.”

And from Ms Chua Boon Hui who now lives in Hong Kong,

“It is about giving back to the society and giving back to our alma mater. SJC holds a special place in my heart as that was where I met my true friends in life. True friends don't have to meet often or talk often...true friends will always be there for you.....that special bond will never be broken.....”

Our heartiest congratulations to the winners of this year's SJCA Special Achievement Award. And to all other award winners, remember that today marks only the beginning of

what you can achieve for the rest of your life. Wear the badge of not just your award but of SJC firmly in your hearts and I wish you success in your lives, success that is defined as having impacted the lives of others positively.