

TEACHERS' DAY MESSAGE 2008
"Transforming Lives"

As we celebrate Teachers' Day this year, let us remind ourselves of the powerful role that teachers play in transforming the lives of their students.

How do teachers transform lives?

Firstly, teachers transform lives by inculcating values in their students. Did you know that the letters that spell the word "HEART" are found within "TEACHER"? This is not a coincidence. The best teachers not only develop our minds but they also sensitise our hearts to be responsible, caring and committed. Many of us will fondly remember teachers in our past who patiently guided us and helped us develop our own moral compass and sense of purpose in life. In my visits to schools and chats with teachers, I am always encouraged by the progress that schools are making in character development and how teachers seize teachable moments to nurture values in their students.

Secondly, teachers transform lives by recognizing their students' worth and believing in them. Teachers do this despite the challenges and setbacks along the way. Take the example of Mdm Carean Oh of Kranji Primary School. She was concerned about her student's frequent absenteeism and made many attempts to contact her and her family, but to no avail. However, Carean persisted and convinced the student to attend school. Touched by her teacher who did not want to give up on her, the student had a change in attitude. She came back to school, made steady progress and did well in her PSLE. Recently, she sent Carean an SMS that said, "Thank you for all the wonderful things that you have done for me." Our sincere efforts and belief in our students will always have an impact on them though we may not see the outcomes straightaway.

Thirdly, teachers transform lives by being passionate in their work. Mr Jonathan Wong was recently awarded the 2008 MOE Teaching Scholarship. When asked why he wanted to become a teacher, Jonathan cited Mr Edwin Chew, his Geography teacher as his source of inspiration. "I enjoyed the way Mr Chew taught Geography and the passion with which he brought the world into the classroom. Mr Chew gave us a lot of opportunities for development, and always had a lot of patience with us." In teaching, lives touch lives positively or negatively in daily encounters. The passion we bring to our work will lift the daily ordinary tasks to the level of the extraordinary. When this happens, our students will take away more than an understanding of the subject that we teach.

I have cited two examples of teachers who have transformed the lives of their students. Some would not consider them extraordinary but they are the kind of examples that we want to see proliferate in our schools because simple though they may be, they have the power to transform lives.

Thank you, dear teachers for always doing your best to make a difference in our students' lives. I wish you a Happy Teachers' Day!

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