



# Outstanding Youth in Education Award

## BOOKS, BRICKS AND BYTES

By Sivakami D/O Ratha

It is often said that language is a living thing. One can certainly believe that, watching Ms Sivakami's Tamil lessons come alive through every technique imaginable—from QR codes to eBooks and even Lego bricks.

When I was young, my parents taught me that having a good command of languages would help me connect better with people in the community and feel more confident. I developed a love for the Tamil Language. When it was time to choose a career, it was easy to decide. I wanted to be a teacher—a Tamil Language teacher.

When I completed my training at the National Institute of Education, I was pleasantly surprised to be posted back to my alma mater, Yishun Primary School—the school where I had developed my passion for the Tamil Language and the arts.

### Passion Back in Alma Mater

I'll never forget the first time I stepped into the school as an educator. I was going to work with some of my former teachers, who constantly amazed me with their selfless dedication. They always went the extra mile to make their lessons interesting and engaging to support students' learning. They also formed strong rapport with their students, instilling in them virtues of diligence, discipline and determination. Working alongside them prepared me for the greater challenges I would face as an educator.

Their perseverance in wanting to acquire technology skills motivated me and their positive attitude in role-modelling lifelong learning was also one of the reasons why I went on to pursue my Master of Education in Curriculum Planning and Teaching. I strive to become a preserver of the language for the community and an innovative practitioner in my classroom.

### Observations Along Learning

It's not always a bed of roses when it comes to teaching and learning. The students who are learning the Tamil Language now come from predominantly

English-speaking home environments with different Indian Language backgrounds. Some students may not have gained early exposure to the Tamil Language. They struggle to learn and converse in their Mother Tongue. However, it is important for our students to know their Mother Tongue as the language not only embodies their culture but allows them to stay rooted to their values and beliefs.

Every year, during the first week of school, I will go to every primary one classroom to gather the students for their Tamil Language class. Most of the time, at least one student will be fearful of learning the language. This was one of the main reasons why I began to experiment with various teaching strategies to make my lessons more interactive and student-centred, effectively engaging students and promoting the love for the language.



**Sivakami D/O Ratha**  
Yishun Primary School  
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## Teach to Excite

I devised new, exciting methods for teaching to improve the quality of learning. I got the students more engaged in their learning through the infusion of technology, dramatisation techniques and most recently, Lego bricks. These bricks were predominantly used at the lower primary levels to allow students to make connections to the new vocabulary words that they were learning. It paved the way for students to create real life models to link them with new learning experiences.

Lego was also incorporated at the upper primary levels to enhance my students' creativity skills. One such example was getting students to recreate the future Singapore in the golden jubilee year. The models exceeded my expectations as students envisioned a cleaner, greener and technologically advanced Singapore in the future. Incorporating the Lego bricks in my lessons has brought language learning to the next level. It creates a fun environment that develops and boosts students' communication skills, creativity and confidence.



**Ms Sivakami (middle) makes learning Tamil fun for her students by getting them to use Lego bricks to create real life models in order to link them with new learning experiences.**

## Reflective Moments

The eleven years I've spent at Yishun Primary School as an educator has been an enriching and exciting journey, full of experiences that fuelled my desire to enlighten the lives of the students I care for.

I began to incorporate drama strategies in my teaching and observed that the lower progress students had an aptitude to perform. Engaging them in drama also helped to address their emotional needs. Students understood that a deeper

understanding in the language sharpened their skills in drama.

Recently, a former student invited me to watch her stage production. She told me my presence was important to her as I had been her mentor in drama. As I sat there watching her production, I could not help but take pride in seeing my students blossoming into individuals who followed their dreams.

Over the years, I have become more of a facilitator of learning. I sought a variety of methods to engage my students to ensure clarity in receiving and processing the information for in-depth learning.

I started to introduce technological tools, which was a challenge since not all tools support the learning of the language. However, I experimented with the various devices in my lessons. I could see the sparkle in my students' eyes as they learnt Tamil Language through these innovative

strategies. I first started by teaching students to create e-books and then incorporated the use of QR codes to excite them. I vividly remember the time when a student with special learning needs was able to log in to the laptop without my assistance. I teared with joy as I conveyed the success story to his parents. It is definitely the little experiences that keep me going.

Investing time and energy to incorporate innovative strategies into classroom teaching and co-curricular activities enable students to make connections in the arts and languages. Tamil Language comes alive when I am able to enrich students' learning experiences through many platforms.

My work as an educator does not end after my students graduate. I believe in keeping Tamil Language alive beyond their primary school years. I ensure that I enrich the lives of my students by instilling values that they will stay rooted to even after they graduate from the school. I believe that my enthusiasm in ensuring that the future generations speak the Tamil Language will help preserve the language in Singapore.

**“Tamil Language comes alive when I am able to enrich students' learning experiences through many platforms.”**

**- Sivakami**

