

2026 ISSUE 1

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

# NEWSLETTER

## EVENTS + HAPPENINGS



EVENTS HIGHLIGHT:

### Love is in the Air: A Valentine's Day Poetry Celebration

11 February 2026

ELL faculty member, **Dr Angus Whitehead**, and NIE students from Club ArNex (Art + Connect) led by Chairperson Nicole Chou, organised an event celebrating love poetry and songs on 11 February 2026 entitled "Love is in the Air: A Valentine's Day Poetry Celebration". The event included a Poetry Open Mic competition which saw students reciting or reading aloud love poems, many of which were their own compositions. The competition was judged by ELL faculty members—Head ELL, **A/P Csilla Weninger** and **A/P Angella Poon**—as well as specially invited guest, Ms Jennifer Champion, a Singaporean poet and performer. After the competition, Ms Champion, Dr Whitehead and the NIE Jam Band entertained the audience with their musical performances. The fun and lively event was a thoroughly enjoyable celebration of poetry and song and an invaluable opportunity for students to express themselves creatively.



Jennifer Champion and Dr Whitehead

## AWARDS

**Dr Chia Ti Yong Alexius** and **Dr Mark Fifer Seilhamer**

from ELL were recently awarded the Nanyang Education Award at the University (Silver) and School levels, respectively. We spoke with them about what teaching is to them and what inspires them to teach.

## DR ALEXIUS CHIA

What shapes my teaching is the idea of lived experience, drawn from Wolff-Michael Roth's Being and Becoming in the Classroom. Teaching is not about applying theory in a neat, linear way, but about moving back and forth between theory and practice – what Roth describes as praxis. It is in this space that meaningful learning happens. In my classes, learning is designed to be authentic and immersive. Student teachers do not just talk about teaching; they experience it – sometimes as learners, sometimes as teachers. These shifts help them develop a more grounded and nuanced sense of what teaching really involves. Classroom work is also connected to the real world and shaped by multimodality. Meaning today is made across linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural and audio modes, so learning needs to reflect that complexity. When student teachers work with these modes, they begin to see how teaching can better connect with their students' realities. Learning is also deeply social. Working within professional communities allows ideas to be shared, tested and refined. With the right support structures, teachers grow together. At its heart, teaching is a process of becoming – shaped through experience, reflection and the communities we learn with.



Dr Mark with his students from different periods of his teaching career.



Storytelling is the foundation of my teaching. My original impetus for becoming a teacher was, in fact, an off-hand comment from my wife: "You'd make a good teacher because you're a good storyteller", she told me (back in 1999). I had never before given it much thought, but upon reflection, I realized that throughout my prior educational experience, the teachers whose classes I had truly enjoyed and retained information from were those who had made storytelling an integral aspect of their instruction. With my memories of these teachers' classes serving as my model, I began, from the very first class I taught, liberally sprinkling personal anecdotes into my lessons. But the stories we feature in our lessons need to be the right stories – well-chosen and relevant – so my lesson preparation always involves trying to recollect experiences that illustrate particular points that I'm making in class. This was quite difficult early on in my teaching career, but over time, I've built up a story arsenal that has served me well. For our teaching to be effective, we need to leave a trace in students' minds to ensure that our teaching content does not start to fade when our classes are finished. I firmly believe that stories, if chosen appropriately and told with some dexterity, can have a memorable impact, leaving such a trace.

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

### XIA MENGYU

ELL's valedictorian from the MEd (English) programme this year is **Xia Mengyu**. Mengyu obtained her undergraduate degree in Translation and Interpretation in China and taught English for about one and a half years before she embarked on her postgraduate studies in NIE. She says, "When I entered the MEd programme, I was already beginning to reflect more seriously on classroom practice—not only what seemed to work, but why it worked, and how learners could be supported more thoughtfully. My studies at NIE gave me a language and a framework for questions I had been carrying with me but could not yet properly articulate."

The MEd programme also strengthened her interest in the relationship between education theory and research, and teaching. Asked about what she found most memorable about her learning, Mengyu noted, "What stayed with me most from my time at NIE was not only the programme itself, but also the people I met there. Over time, what struck me was how genuinely invested the lecturers and mentors were in their work. You could sense it in the way a question was framed in a seminar, or in the careful tone of an email reply. It was not a performance of academic enthusiasm, but something quieter and more convincing. It shifted something in how I think about my own future—not toward any fixed plan, but toward a clearer sense that I want to keep asking serious questions, and that I have now seen, close up, what it looks like to do that well." Mengyu continues to work in the field of English education and remains interested in how the theory-practice nexus can improve her teaching. She hopes to pursue graduate studies in the future.



Mengyu and her classmates at A/P Angella Poon's class

## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

### ASST/P GORDON BLAINE

I grew up in a small town of fewer than 2,000 people on the northern plains of South Dakota – about as far from Singapore, in almost every sense, as one could imagine. As an undergraduate, I wanted to explore something new and majored in global studies with a focus on urban planning. I was fascinated by cities, infrastructure, and how people move through space. After graduating, I moved to South Korea, intending to teach kindergarten for a year before returning to study urban planning. Instead, I found myself loving teaching. That wasn't the plan, but it changed the direction of my life. I went on to teach primary and eventually secondary school.



Teaching at a kindergarten

Those classroom experiences pulled me toward questions about language, learning, and children. I studied applied linguistics in Hawaii, then returned to Korea to work in teacher education. When I eventually found my way into language assessment research during my PhD, it was not out of enthusiasm for testing; it was out of concern. Having watched assessment shape teaching and learning across different contexts, I became interested in how it might be made more humane, more holistic, and more responsive to the many ways children actually communicate.

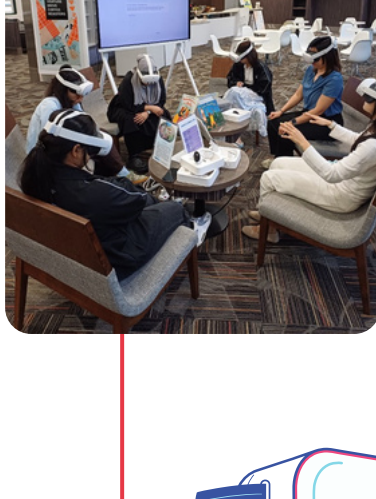
Now, my work focuses on what children show us when we pay close attention. That means tracking not only words, but gesture, affect, materials, interaction, and movement—and thinking carefully about how assessment can make room for all of it. Joining NIE feels, in many ways, like a continuation of questions that have followed me from South Dakota onward. How do people make meaning across languages, cultures, and classrooms. And how can assessment better honor the richness of that communication? Singapore is a remarkable place to keep asking them.

At the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) 2026 conference

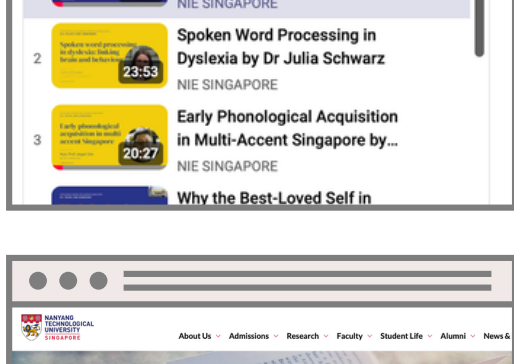


## TEACHING HIGHLIGHTS

In March this year, ELL colleagues **Dr Jo Ann Netto-Shek** and **Ms Shreenjit Kaur** collaborated with the Digital Library Services team in NIE Library to give 120 PGDE (Primary) students from QSE 50D (Children's Literature) the opportunity to explore Virtual Reality (VR) technology in children's literature for the teaching of English at the primary levels. The technology enabled student-teachers to interact with narrative environments and to consider how to use e-literature developed for children in their future English Language classrooms. Dr Shek notes, "It's one way to reach children who are reluctant readers. Once a child meets that character or has that experience in the beautiful worlds constructed in literature, that child might reconsider reading, no matter how difficult it is right now for them, as something they might wish to persevere doing". According to Ms Kaur, immersive technologies "have the potential to complement positive reader identities by offering children new ways to engage with stories." While the student-teachers thoroughly enjoyed the immersive experience and found the session highly engaging, they also pointed out the need to pay attention to possible learner challenges such as difficulty focusing while fully immersed, motion sickness, and issues to do with classroom safety.



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