

**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE NIE TEACHERS'
INVESTITURE CEREMONY, 13 JULY 2009, 2:30 PM AT THE
NANYANG AUDITORIUM, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**

Your Excellencies

Mrs Tan Ching Yee, Chairperson, NIE Council

Professor Lee Sing Kong, Director, NIE

Colleagues

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon

1. It is my pleasure to be here today to share in your joy as you embark on a new and exciting phase in your life. Having completed the PGDE or Bachelor of Arts or Science (Education) programmes, you begin your life as a teacher, to nurture the next generation and to shape and mould the students under your care. I wish to extend my heartiest congratulations to all 604 graduands from the Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Bachelor degree programmes.

2. Teaching is a satisfying and fulfilling vocation, but as with most beginnings, there will be a learning curve. Some of you may be more prepared and find it smooth sailing, while others may question if they have been adequately prepared for their new responsibilities over the next few months. I urge you to draw support and learn from more experienced teachers and the Principal that would help you engage and inspire your students. It is their role and responsibility to guide and mentor you as a novice teacher. Believe in your abilities and the training that you have received and persevere.

Enhancing Singapore's Education System

3. As graduands and inductees to the teaching profession, you can take great pride that Singapore teachers are well regarded internationally. Singapore just hosted the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals. This was held in conjunction with Education Ministers of high-performing systems at the inaugural International Education Roundtable.

4. With the increased attention paid to results of international tests like the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), there is now recognition that some school systems consistently out-perform others.

5. Several studies have been done, to find out why. McKinsey & Company released a report in September 2007 entitled "How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top". Indeed, this report was the inspiration to gather the Education Ministers at the International Education Roundtable.

6. Foreign delegations have been visiting Singapore to find out what makes our education system tick. One such delegation from North Carolina, USA, who visited last January, concluded that three key factors have led to Singapore's success in education. The first factor is the integrated planning of our education system with our nation-building and economic aspirations. The second is our heavy investments in teachers and schools. The third factor is our willingness to learn from best practices around the world.

7. However, we must not rest on our laurels. As the world around us becomes increasingly complex, competitive and inter-connected, our education system must also continue to evolve in response to these transformations. It is in this spirit that the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) committee has recommended a number of changes to the primary education system. These changes seek to build on the strong foundations of the system by preparing our young to excel in the future.

8. The PERI recommendations will have a profound impact if implemented well. We seek to develop the whole child and make learning in primary school more enriching and engaging. Sports and outdoor education, performing and visual arts will be scheduled as part of the curriculum for all children. We will use feedback that provides richer information and utility to guide further development of each child. New primary schools will be built and existing ones expanded with better facilities to support teaching and learning. More teachers will be recruited to enhance primary education, and in particular, the Ministry of Education (MOE) will be moving towards all-graduate recruitment of teachers by 2015.

9. PERI's recommendations herald our overall directions for the entire education system where we will pay more attention to nurture the moral, physical, social and aesthetic spheres of students in addition to their cognitive development. The key to making all these happen will be our teachers. Our education system will need quality educators to lead and effect changes in an evolving environment.

10. We had earlier set ourselves a target of recruiting 3,000 teachers this year. I am pleased to announce that we have surpassed our teacher recruitment target as of end June this year.

11. We had also introduced the Allied Educators Scheme last year to recruit para-educators to partner our teachers in the areas of counselling, learning and behavioural support, and teaching and learning. I am happy to note that we have also exceeded our recruitment target of 680 allied educators this year.

12. While we have stepped up on hiring this year, we have continued to be rigorous in our selection of teachers and allied educators, ensuring that only those with the passion, aptitude and commitment are selected. Going forward, we will continue to recruit good candidates for the teaching service.

13. Besides recruiting more quality teachers, we must also continually develop our existing pool of teachers to keep them abreast of the latest innovations in education practices and concepts, and to help them to strive towards professional excellence.

Striving for Excellence

14. If no education service can rise above the standards of its teachers, then how do we further strengthen our capabilities and institutions for training and professional development? This is a central issue for the Education Service and one that we will do well to think carefully about. Three critical institutions play vital and complementary roles to train and develop our teachers.

15. Firstly, National Institute of Education (NIE) is primarily responsible for the basic training to turn students into teachers. The set up of NIE since 1991 which allowed the consolidation of resources and a stimulating academic environment has provided a major boost to elevate standards of teacher training. The continuing challenge for NIE is to strengthen the nexus between theory and practice. It must find more effective ways to provide practical learning experiences for student teachers. It should strengthen the role of mentorship provided during the practicum and induction periods. NIE will need to review and enhance the pedagogical methods and assessment that are aligned with our desired outcomes of education and to train new teachers to equip our students with the knowledge, skills and values for the 21st century classrooms.

16. NIE has been introducing novel ways to expose its teacher trainees to different perspectives. In June this year, in partnership with the University of Reading, three outstanding student teachers from the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science programmes were selected to participate in a pilot overseas practicum programme at Maiden Erlegh High School in the United Kingdom. For three weeks, Benjamin Lim, Nordiyana Omar and Foo Shiang Xin observed and delivered lessons, under the guidance of supervising teachers in the school. I understand that NIE is encouraged by the benefits of this pilot programme and will continue to send more student teachers for overseas practicum experiences.

17. MOE of course forms the second pillar whose efforts are critical to develop teachers. MOE has put in place various initiatives to support your professional development throughout your career. You can look forward to various training courses as well as professional development schemes that will allow you to pursue higher degrees in the future.

18. One such professional development scheme is the postgraduate scholarship which MOE offers to outstanding graduate Education Officers. This

year, I am pleased to announce that MOE has offered postgraduate scholarships to 51 Education Officers to pursue their Master's degree or PhD at local and overseas universities. I am confident that these officers will apply the knowledge and experience they have gained from their studies to make key contributions in various areas of our Education Service. Let me extend my congratulations to these postgraduate scholarship recipients.

19. Thirdly, the community of teachers must themselves drive and develop a culture of professional excellence. This makes sense, as practitioners themselves know best what is needed and effective on the ground. Teachers cannot leave their professional development to MOE and NIE, but must as a body address gaps and help steer the direction of the profession. Discussions are on-going on how teachers can be equipped to do this. I urge all practitioners to provide inputs and take a keen interest in this important area.

Outstanding Role Models

20. When teachers are self-motivated and adequately trained, they can accomplish significant outcomes even early in their careers. I would like to take this occasion to also commend three youth teachers who have distinguished themselves with their dedication and passion towards their students both in and beyond the classroom. Mr Eugene Ng Ming Teck of Jing Shan Primary, Miss Leow Hwee Fen of Anderson Secondary and Mr Muhammad Rezal Bin Ramli of Ping Yi Secondary will be honoured with the Outstanding Youth in Education Awards (OYEA) today. From guiding students in their classrooms to engaging children and youth in the community through local and overseas community development projects, these teachers are excellent role models who have inspired the younger generation with their hearts of service and compassion.

21. Amongst you are also students who have demonstrated admirable qualities and potential to be outstanding teachers. One such example is Siti Nur Aishah Binte Abdul Halim from the Bachelor of Science programme, who is receiving the EDB Book Prize and Singapore Institute of Biology Book Prize today for being the top student teacher for Biology. Aishah was also part of a 20-strong contingent which undertook an international service learning project to help a school in Sri Lanka. The team taught the students netball and helped them to organise district-level netball tournaments. During the two-week programme,

they also conducted IT workshops for its teachers and gave its students English lessons.

22. Benjamin Lim, whom I mentioned earlier, is another outstanding student teacher who has contributed actively to the community. Benjamin has a talent in the Chinese musical instrument *sheng* and has performed at various charity and community events, including the President's Challenge Youth Talent Concert, where he had helped to raise funds for the President's Challenge Fund. Today, together with some friends, he is actively organising workshops and performances for community groups such as the Singapore Children's Society.

23. Last year Benjamin also had to overcome a very low period in his life when his mother passed away. Despite the setback, he has managed to complete his teacher training with flying colours. Today, he will graduate as the valedictorian for the Bachelor of Arts degree programme. My congratulations to both Benjamin and Aishah.

Conclusion

24. As you begin your career as a teacher, recognise the extra-ordinary influence you wield over young and eager minds. Exercise this influence with care and diligence, to positively shape those you teach. In your daily lives, uphold the high standing of the teaching profession that has been achieved by your colleagues and predecessors. Give to this your chosen vocation, your passion and commitment to go that extra mile for your students and colleagues. If you can do this, you will be rewarded with gratitude and respect for many years to come. With that, I wish you a satisfying and fulfilling career ahead.

25. Thank you.