

OPENING ADDRESS BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 1st PLACE-BASED EDUCATION SEMINAR HELD AT RAFFLES INSTITUTION (JUNIOR COLLEGE) AT 9:05 AM ON WEDNESDAY, 17 MARCH 2010

Mrs Lim Lai Cheng, Principal, Raffles Institution

Distinguished speakers and guests

Principals and teachers

Ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

1. Good morning and a very warm welcome to all of you. It gives me great pleasure to be with you at this inaugural Place-based Education (PBE) Seminar 2010.

2. John Dewey, the renowned education philosopher and one of the most influential proponents of experiential education, once commented that:

“From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in school comes from his inability to utilise the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the

school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school.”

3. In order to bridge this dichotomy between school and life, Dewey advocated that unless the initial connection was made between school activities and the life experiences of the child, genuine learning and growth would not be possible. Education must begin with the everyday experience of the child.

DEFINITION OF PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

4. Place-based Education, or PBE, is an experiential pedagogy that emphasises hands-on, real world learning experiences, creating deep and meaningful connections between students, the school and the community. With its aim to establish the connections between youth, the school and the community, the pedagogy not only enables the delivery of the academic curriculum, it also facilitates holistic student development. It inculcates in our students, a sense of belonging to the community and nation. Most importantly, it can make learning fun and relevant.

GROWING CONNECTIONS

5. Today, Raffles Institution (RI) has taken the initiative to facilitate the sharing of PBE to enhance teaching and learning in Singapore schools. The theme of this seminar, “Growing Connections” encapsulates the essence of PBE and aims to provide insights into developing caring, motivated and rooted Singaporeans.

6. I would like to take this opportunity to commend some of our teachers for using innovative place-based methods to engage students and enhance teaching. Mr Kuak Nam Jin from RI introduced the Ecological Literacy elective in the school and used MacRitchie Reservoir, the school's backyard, as a platform to promote students' connection with nature. I understand that RI has collaborated with PUB extensively and will be adopting MacRitchie Reservoir as part of its school-wide PBE efforts.

7. Mr Daniel Lim from Pei Hwa Secondary School capitalised on his school's immediate community and started the Jalan Kayu Heritage Trail which now serves as an avenue for the younger generation to be connected with their community. Ms Jacintha Leong from St. Andrew's Secondary School actively engaged her students in the St. Andrew's River Project. As part of the Science curriculum, they studied the resultant impact on the eco-system and water quality of Kallang River, with the building of the Marina Barrage and the enclosure of the Marina Basin. Because of the rich experiences and interactivity these projects offer, students have developed a greater interest in their environment and community, in addition to becoming more enthusiastic in their studies. We should encourage such excellent initiatives in our schools.

8. As educators, it is imperative that we continuously explore new pedagogies to enhance teaching and learning and constantly

challenge ourselves to conceptualise authentic and meaningful learning experiences for our students.

9. This seminar is a wonderful platform for educators to network and showcase best practices to help students build and deepen connections with their communities. There are many more good stories to share on how we can engage the heads, hearts and hands of the students using place-based approaches, and I am sure that we will gain valuable insights and inspirations from the distinguished keynote speakers and the many local and overseas presenters who are with us today.

10. I wish you all an enriching and stimulating time at the 1st Place-Based Education Seminar.

Thank you.

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