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OPENING ADDRESS BY GUEST OF HONOUR, MR. LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE KINDERGARTEN CONFERENCE 2011 ON TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2011, AT THE REPUBLIC POLYTECHNIC.

Professor Marilyn Fleer,

Pre-school leaders and teachers,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am very happy to be here at the 2011 Kindergarten Conference. This year, we will have the chance to hear from Professor Marilyn Fleer, our MOE Distinguished Speaker, as well as academics, partners and your fellow pre-school leaders. I hope all of you will make the most of this opportunity to share best practices and learn from each other.

A Commitment to Quality Pre-School Education

2. All of us are here because we believe in providing a strong foundation for our nation's children. The research on pre-school education is clear. Evidence in many studies show that quality early learning programmes

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work – for our children and for our society. Participation in high-quality pre-school programmes results in both short- and long-term positive outcomes for children, including their willingness to persevere through adversity, their motivation in learning and their ability to acquire future skills.

3. MOE has taken active steps to raise the quality of pre-school education in Singapore. One major milestone is the development of the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) – a quality benchmark for all childcare centres and kindergartens to strive towards. In September this year, 52 pre-schools received their SPARK certificates of achievement at the inaugural SPARK Certificate Presentation Ceremony. Tomorrow, another 17 pre-schools will be receiving their SPARK certificates of achievement. Congratulations to all of these centres! I encourage more of you to strive towards the standards articulated in the

SPARK. National Archives of Singapore

4. Going forward, MOE will continue to do more to support pre-schools in their quality journey through two broad strategies: First, we will enhance teacher quality. Secondly, we will enhance the quality of pre-school programme offerings. Let me elaborate on these.

Enhancing Teacher Quality

5. Critical to quality pre-school education is the quality of teacher training. The quality of the courses which prepare candidates to be pre-school teachers is important and a regular review of the courses is necessary to ensure its relevance for beginning teachers.

6. This is why MOE has embarked on a review of the teaching and leadership Diplomas in Early Childhood Care and Education, i.e. the DECCE-T and DECCE-L. The objective is to raise the standards and rigour of the diploma courses, so that diploma graduates will be well-equipped to fulfill their responsibilities as pre-school educators. Earlier this year, the Pre-school Qualification Accreditation Committee or the PQAC, organised focus group discussions with pre-school teachers, principals and training agencies to gather feedback on this review. I thank you for your feedback and suggestions which will be taken into consideration as part of the review, to be completed next year, with the revisions to be implemented in 2013.

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Opportunities for professional upgrading

7. To prepare teachers and leaders for a career in early childhood education, continual professional upgrading and development is necessary. MOE provides a spread of opportunities for professional upgrading and development. Since 2008, MOE has provided scholarships and bursaries to encourage teachers to obtain the DECCE-T. As at June, 87% of kindergarten teachers and principals have attained or are undergoing diploma training, up from 52% five years ago.

8. In addition, MOE awards scholarships and bursaries to support teachers in higher learning at UniSIM: the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education with Management and the Bachelor of Early Childhood and Chinese Language Education. To date, 165 teachers have received scholarships, bursaries and teaching awards for the diploma and degree courses. This year, in keeping with our efforts to support teachers in professional upgrading, MOE started to provide scholarships for the Master of Education in Early Childhood Education conducted by the National Institute of Education (NIE). This morning, I am pleased to announce that five teachers will form the first batch of scholarship and teaching awardees

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for the Masters programme. I encourage all pre-school teachers and leaders to apply for these professional upgrading opportunities.

Continual professional development

9. Besides upgrading your professional qualifications, it is important for you to deepen your knowledge and skills in early childhood education through the course of your career. Continual professional development is necessary because it helps you to enhance the quality of adult-child interactions, school-family partnerships and contributes to the quality of children's learning in pre-school.

10. MOE will provide even more training opportunities to help you keep abreast of developments in the field. In addition to this conference, two symposiums were organised this year: the inaugural Music Symposium in May and the Innovation Symposium in September. The symposiums were well-received and we will continue to organise such professional development opportunities next year. MOE also organises workshops on curriculum and pedagogy as well as leadership and management, all of which have received positive feedback from the participants. The full list of workshops are compiled in the MOE Professional Development Prospectus,

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which you will be receiving today. I hope you will make use of this prospectus to plan your own professional development; for pre-school leaders, you can use this to come up with a training roadmap for the development of your teachers.

11. I am also pleased to announce that in January next year, MOE, in collaboration with Republic Polytechnic, will be launching a certificate course in music and movement for pre-school teachers. This part-time 75-hours course spans 2 months and equips teachers with knowledge of basic music theory, music making, dance concepts and movements. The course will enable teachers to design music, movement and dance activities for young learners. It would be good if every kindergarten has at least one teacher who is well-trained in music and movement. I encourage you to make full use of this opportunity to upgrade your skills in music and movement.

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Recognizing Outstanding Teachers

12. To recognize the dedicated and passionate pre-school teachers amongst us, MOE gives out the Outstanding Kindergarten Teacher Award (OKTA) every year. This morning, we are pleased to have two teachers

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receiving the Outstanding Kindergarten Teacher Distinction Award – Ms Nadiya Priyadishni from the Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Kindergarten, and Ms Estrelita Maria Gaspar from the Ascension Kindergarten. Both teachers are passionate about pre-school education. They have the ability to engage and connect with children, and to bring out the best in them. They are also actively involved in building strong school-community relations. Both Ms Nadiya and Ms Estrelita are mentors to new teachers, and held in high regard by their supervisors and peers. They are truly an inspiration to all of us.

Enhancing Programme Quality

13. Quality teachers must be complemented with quality programmes. In my visits to pre-schools, I am heartened to observe that there are many efforts by teachers to try new things and experiment with more effective ways of engaging the children. Many kindergartens have made good use of the MOE Innovation Grants to develop a culture of innovation, and to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. This year, a total of 21 projects will receive the Outstanding Kindergarten Innovation Award. “Learning Beyond Boundaries” by PCF Punggol East is one such award-winning project. In PCF Punggol East, children use the ‘Skype’ video-conferencing

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software to interact with people, including experts on a local Frog Farm, and even students in a pre-school in India! Learning extends beyond the four walls of a classroom and the children develop a greater awareness of the world around them. This is an innovation that does not cost much to implement but yet has great impact because it re-defines learning paradigms.

14. MOE will continue to invest in innovation at the pre-school level, so as to improve the quality of pre-school programmes and unlock the potential of every child. The application for the 2012 Innovation Grant opens today. So if you are seeking funding for your innovation projects, do send in your applications early.

Reviewing the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework

15. Besides nurturing a culture of innovation, teachers need a curriculum framework to guide their decisions on what and how to teach. A 2010 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report¹ noted that setting out a curriculum framework with broad teaching and learning guidelines can improve the quality of pre-school education.

¹ Report on Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy for Quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC).

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16. Last year, in response to feedback from many teachers, MOE developed a “Nurturing Learning Dispositions” curriculum resource to guide teachers in nurturing six learning dispositions in children: **P**erseverance, **R**eflectiveness, **A**ppreciation, **I**ntentiveness, **S**ense of wonder and curiosity, and **E**ngagement; or PRAISE in short.

17. Today, I am pleased to launch a set of six picture books to complement the existing curriculum resources. MOE collaborated with local authors and illustrators to feature local contexts which young children in Singapore can relate to. Teachers can use these picture books to help children develop an awareness of and recognise the learning dispositions depicted. All MOE-registered English Language teachers will receive a set of these six picture books.

18. Going forward, MOE will review its Kindergarten Curriculum Framework to refresh key teaching and learning principles so as to better prepare our children for living and working in the 21st century. The current Kindergarten Curriculum Framework was published in 2003. It highlights what we consider to be key principles of a quality preschool education in Singapore. Many of the broad principles in the existing framework are still

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relevant. But we want to update the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework with the latest research about how children develop and learn. We will also articulate the desired pre-school curriculum philosophy and approach, as well as outline strategies for teachers to plan and deliver engaging and holistic learning experiences for children.

19. Earlier this year, MOE had engaged pre-school teachers and principals to get preliminary feedback on updates to the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework. I would like thank those who were involved in sharing your views with us. Today, a draft of the updated framework will be distributed to all kindergarten teachers. We invite you to give us your feedback and suggestions to help make this framework an even better one for our children's development and learning.

Conclusion

20. In closing, I would like to thank all of you for the challenging and meaningful work that you do on behalf of this nation's children and families. All of you are on the frontline of change – to transform our pre-school education sector, and to ensure excellent early learning and support for all children. MOE is committed to support you in your efforts to improve the

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quality of pre-school teaching and the quality of pre-school programmes. I wish you all the very best as we embark on this exciting journey towards high-quality and affordable pre-school education for the benefit of every child.

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