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**ADDRESS BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE 6TH TEACHER'S CONFERENCE 2012, ON THURSDAY 31
MAY 2012, AT 0950 HOURS, SUNTEC CITY CONVENTION CENTRE,
BALLROOM 1**

Ms Ho Peng
Director General of Education

Distinguished guests

Principals, Teachers

Colleagues,

Good Morning.

It gives me great pleasure to be with you this morning at the 6th Teachers' Conference.

2. The theme for this year's Teachers' Conference: "Teaching in the 21st century – Enriching Minds, Engaging Hearts" encapsulates the aspirations of our teaching fraternity for the 21st century.

3. Your presence here today reflects your commitment to excellence, and to learning and reflection. Let me take this opportunity to share some thoughts on teacher development.

Quality Teaching – Singapore’s Recipe for Success

4. Every country in the world is seeking to improve her education system. Consistently, research has shown that the single most important determinant of student outcomes is the quality of teaching. The unstinting collective efforts of our educators, past and present, have enabled us to achieve high standards in our education system. Indeed, your good work, day-in, day-out, enables every child who passes through your hands to realise his hopes and dreams.

5. The Ministry is committed to our teachers’ professional development. From the well-regarded pre-service programmes at NIE to in-service professional development programmes and post-graduate studies awards, the range is broad. This commitment can also be seen in the GROW 2.0 package, and the “TEACH” framework. Many schools are now Professional Learning Communities. MOE has also set up the Academy of Singapore Teachers and the various subject academies and language institutes.

The Challenge of an Uncertain Future

6. The 21st century has been, and will continue to be, an age of rapid social, economic and technological changes. New knowledge is being created by the minute, while old knowledge is becoming obsolete at an equally fast pace. We live in a world where the most current knowledge is readily accessible with just a click of the mouse; a world which places great emphasis on being able to connect to, and work with others; a world which places great value in excelling in non-routine cognitive tasks which cannot be easily taken over by computers.

7. The educational paradigm of our parents' generation, which emphasised the transmission of knowledge, is quickly being overtaken by a very different paradigm. This new concept of educational success focuses on the nurturing of key skills and competencies such as the ability to seek, to curate and to synthesise information; to create and innovate; to work in diverse cross-cultural teams; as well as to appreciate global issues within the local context.

Principles for Teacher Professional Development Systems

8. We are redefining the desired outcomes of a 21st century education. As we do so, we must also articulate clearly the outcomes of the 21st century teacher, and how we develop our teachers to achieve that. Let me highlight a few principles that will guide our efforts.

Shift from Deficit Model to Growth Model

9. First, we need to shift from a deficit model to a growth model: that is, from addressing deficiencies to building on strengths. Certainly, there will be areas where teachers need to address shortcomings, but our main focus should be to develop our teachers' areas of interests and strengths, and to help them develop holistically. All teachers should grow over time, no matter how good they are in their craft already.

Greater Teacher Autonomy and Ownership

10. Second, we should encourage teachers to be self-directed learners, to take ownership for charting their own professional development. By making self-assessment and reflecting on their own learning needs, our teachers will become more reflective learners and be role better models of self-directed learning. They will be able to optimise their learning and to make thoughtful choices in developing certain competencies over others.

Application of Learning to Close the Gap between Theory and Practice

11. Third, learning should be cyclical and continual, rather than linear and one-off. While one-off professional development courses can be useful, we should place greater emphasis on sustained learning, application and reflection. It is easy to understand theory, but the craft of teaching is honed through a series of continuous small improvements, practised consistently, day-in, day-out.

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Mentoring and Teacher Collaboration

12. Fourth, mentoring and teacher collaboration are powerful platforms for teacher growth, as they support continuous learning, allow for co-construction of knowledge and build positive habits of learning. Good teaching demands complex skills and the effective application of tacit knowledge. School-wide mentoring and teacher collaboration are therefore important ways to develop skilful teachers.

Global Understanding grounded in Local Perspectives and Contexts

13. Fifth, to prepare our students for a globalised world while helping them stay anchored to their local community, teachers must be able to engage students in discussions on global issues and help them contextualise and understand the impact of these global issues locally. Thus, teachers will need to understand and synthesise the diverse worldviews, while remaining grounded in their local culture and context. Indeed, some countries have even made local and global literacies a compulsory module in their teacher development programme.

Evolving Teacher Professional Development in Singapore

14. Over the years, we have been evolving and improving our system for developing our professionals. We have gradually shifted from a largely centralised system to one which emphasises greater teacher ownership. We have 32,000 educators and a one-size-fits-all system will not work well. Moreover, we must make the store of our teachers' tacit knowledge accessible to the fraternity.

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15. Our Master Teachers are exemplars of educators engaging in life-long learning. Competent practitioners of their craft, Master Teachers continually pursue professional development opportunities to further hone their craft. They seek to expand their professional knowledge beyond their subject disciplines, to acquire a deeper understanding of learners and learning, in order to provide for the holistic development of students. They seek new ways to develop themselves, including designing and developing new workshops and undertaking action research.

16. At present, 305 of our schools are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Successful PLCs engender a culture of collaborative professionalism, and encourage a shift from the traditional mentality of “me-in-my-classroom” to a more open, collaborative and learning-centred model. Indeed, PLCs are natural platforms for the generation of new ideas and practitioner-oriented professional growth.

The Teacher Growth Model

17. Last year, the Academy of Singapore Teachers spearheaded an extensive effort to bring together educators to envision the 21st century teacher. The ideas and aspirations have been crystallised in the Teacher Growth Model.

18. The Teacher Growth Model is a professional development model, designed by teachers, for teachers. It rests on the philosophy that teachers are student-centric professionals who take ownership of their growth; and articulates the desired outcomes of the 21st century Singapore teacher. To achieve these outcomes, the Model provides a framework for professional development.

21st Century Desired Outcomes for the Singapore Teacher

19. Let me elaborate on the five teacher outcomes. First, and fundamentally, we believe that the 21st century teacher is an ethical educator who demonstrates high professional standards of integrity and moral courage, and is a role model to his students and colleagues. The ethical educator develops awareness of his own strengths and limitations, and collaborates with others to build an ethical climate.

20. Second, the 21st century teacher is a competent professional who continues to develop new knowledge, skills and dispositions to lead, care, and inspire. He demonstrates strong pedagogical skills to facilitate learning, develops the character of and nurtures students holistically.

21. Third, the 21st century teacher is a collaborative learner who actively engages in professional conversations to learn from his peers and from experts. He collaborates with other teachers to address professional concerns and challenges. By working in teams and acting as a mentor, he contributes to enhancing the capacity of the teaching fraternity to teach well.

22. Fourth, the 21st century teacher is a transformational leader. He is driven by a sense of mission to enable students to learn and develop, and leads and inspires his colleagues to reflect and innovate. By building trusting relationships among practitioners, the transformational leader leads and manages changes.

23. Finally, the 21st century teacher is a community builder who understands Singapore's unique context and appreciates local and global issues. He develops a strong sense of social responsibility in our students, and collaborates with stakeholders so as to develop his students into concerned citizens and active contributors.

The Teacher Growth Model Learning Continuum

24. To support our teachers in achieving these outcomes, the Teacher Growth Model sets out a comprehensive Learning Continuum. The Continuum provides, for each learning area, the relevant learning modes and development opportunities. These opportunities are spread over the course of the teacher's career, from the stage of a Beginning Teacher to the pinnacle level of a Principal Master Teacher.

25. The Learning Continuum recognises diverse modes of learning – from the traditional face-to-face courses and workshops, to experiential learning, blended learning with ICT, networked learning, mentoring, reflective practice and collaborative action research. You can participate in Professional Learning Communities, Subject Chapters, and Professional Focus Groups, and make use of a variety of real-time and ICT-based platforms.

26. The Teacher Outcomes and Learning Continuum of the Teacher Growth Model will aid you in planning your professional growth in discussion with your reporting officers. It will enable you to engage in continual learning as reflective practitioners. By encouraging teachers to learn together, the Teacher Growth Model will also promote greater synergy and coherence across different professional departments and schools.

Conclusion

27. It has been a joy for me to meet many dedicated and passionate teachers in the past year, and I commend you for your good work. I am convinced that your passion and professionalism will enable you to excel. We at the Ministry are committed to providing opportunities for your professional development, to enable you to do what you love most, to bring out the best in our children. The tagline “Every Teacher, A Gem” in today’s launch of the Teacher Growth Model affirms the critical role that you play in our education system.

28. Our teachers are the key to the success of our next phase of “values-driven, student-centric” education. I see our teachers grounded in values and steeped in skilful practices, and actively collaborating to build communities and transform learning. I see our teachers as models of excellence and self-directed lifelong learning. This teacher-led culture of professional excellence will ensure that our system remains well placed to face the challenges of the 21st century.

29. Thank you for making a difference to our young. I wish you an enjoyable and productive Teachers' Conference.

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