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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Mr Lim Boon Heng, 17 Apr 99, 7.30 pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LIM BOON HENG, MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
AT THE 22ND ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF HENRY PARK PRI SCHOOL
AT 7.30 P.M. ON 17 APRIL 1999 AT HENRY PARK PRI SCHOOL

Education in a Knowledge Economy - Raising the Future of Singapore Together

Good evening,

Dr Cheng Wei Nien, Chairman of the School Advisory Committee,

Mr Richard Lim Chew Hi ong, Principal of Henry Park,
Members of the staff,
Ladies and gentlemen, students and friends,

Education used to be known as the 3 R's – Reading, writing, and arithmetic. These 3 skills were especially important in an industrial economy.

As Singapore makes its transition to a knowledge economy, there needs to be a different perspective to education. I would like to call it the 3 E's – Explore, Experiment and Experience.

The First E – Explore

Exploration is the seed of new discoveries. If Christopher Columbus had not sailed round the world and proven that the Earth was round, we would still be worried about falling over the edge of the Earth now. If Steve Jobs had not explored the idea of putting computing power into the hands of ordinary people, Apple Computers would not have been born and much of what we take for granted these days of the PC would not have been made possible.

Without new discoveries and innovations, we would not be able to make quantum leaps. Although incremental improvements would still be important in achieving greater efficiency, quantum leaps are what Singapore needs to sustain its competitiveness, as we compete amongst more developed nations.

National Archives of Singapore

The Second E – Experiment

If Exploration is the seed of new discoveries, then, Experimentation provides the conditions for new discoveries to grow to fruition.

We must be bold enough to experiment with new ideas. When interviewed, many creative people often attribute the source of their creative success to applying old knowledge to new areas. They adapt and try out what is practised in one field on another and new results come out of such experimentation.

Thomas Edison, the famous American inventor of the light bulb, said that his success came from "99% perspiration and 1% inspiration".

Without experimentation, we would have to be contented with the routine. There would be little progress.

The Third E – Experience

Education is about enriching our lives with experiences. We become better with experience, never mind if some of these are failures. We learn and improve from our mistakes. Indeed, we learn from the experiences of others, too.

The English physicist and mathematician, Isaac Newton, said he was able to accomplish what he did because he had “stood on the shoulders of giants before him”. Without the benefit of experience, we would forever be starting from scratch.

We need to orientate, enthuse, and inculcate into children the 3 Es for life – not just for school, but also when they are in the workplace. There is no better place to start than in primary school – the beginning and foundation for lifelong learning.

Values as Guiding Beacon

As we venture out to explore and experiment, we have to be mindful of our values system. We live in a multi-racial, multi-religious society. We work within a team. We must respect and appreciate every one in the team. As we make progress, we must also show respect for our elders and concern for the less privileged.

I am heartened to see Henry Park's efforts in raising a generation of young and caring Singaporeans. Your “Character First” Programme aims to inculcate core values and positive character traits among its students. Your Community Involvement Programme aims to give students the opportunity to build close relationships with the elderly and the less privileged. You are right in motivating students. Awards are given out for progress and good conduct. Classes are also given recognition for keeping their classrooms clean. You have also been organising activities, eg during Racial Harmony Day, for students to better appreciate the various races and cultures of Singapore.

I also notice the school's efforts in encouraging students to take responsibility for their tasks and assignments. A high level of internal motivation has been identified as the factor behind many successful people today. Some experts say that this is part of Emotional Quotient, or EQ, which if complemented well with IQ, guarantees success.

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Raising a child is not just a job, it is a vocation. It demands the deepest convictions and the highest standards from everyone concerned. Parents and teachers both play complementary roles in raising our next generation. Parents know their children best and hence are in the best position to motivate them towards a desired outcome. Without parental support, the various programmes initiated by the school would have limited success. Teachers, on the other hand, have access to the range of tools to develop the child's potential. Both need to work closely together, in partnership with each other, if we want to achieve excellent results.

I am happy to note the progress the Henry Park Primary School Parents' Association had made since it started 10 years ago as the Parent Support Group. The school had been very successful in reaching out to its students' parents. Beginning with about 25 interested parents 10 years ago, the Association now has more than 400 dedicated parents.

I encourage parents and teachers to continue to get together, either formally or informally. They can discuss and share notes with one another - whether it is about monitoring the child's time on the Internet or preparations for the Assessment the following week. Or they could simply get together during social events like birthdays or festive occasions. This invaluable network of friends will provide you with the resources from which you can draw strength and support.

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To make a successful transition to a knowledge economy, Singapore needs to have a thinking workforce. Education lays the foundation for shaping this thinking workforce by giving us the tools to learn. I have been told that this dinner would not have been put together so successfully if not for the efforts and contributions of the parents. I am glad that Henry Park, together with parents, has created an excellent environment for students to learn. This would help produce the thinking workforce that Singapore needs when they graduate in 10 - 15 years' time.

Happy Anniversary! I am happy to be able to join you in this celebration of your efforts in raising the future of Singapore.

Thank you.