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**Speech by Mr David T E Lim, Minister of State for Defence and Information
& the Arts at the Launch of Discovery Zone at the
Singapore Science Centre on Thursday, 19 October 2000 at 6.30 pm.**

Ladies and gentlemen:

1. I am delighted to be here this afternoon to launch the Discovery Zone. But I am sure my delight is nothing compared to the many hours of fun and enjoyment that children will experience in this new facility.
2. Many childhood educators believe that children learn through play and discovery. I support this theory. Even as adults, we learn more by doing something than by just reading or hearing about it. None of us learned to drive a car by listening to our older brothers sisters talk about their driving lessons. We learnt by knocking down poles, and crunching the gears. We should not therefore be surprised that children learn the same way – by trial and error, by doing and experiencing.
3. There are many theories why play and discovery are so effective as learning strategies.

4. One reason suggested is that play involves not just the brain, but the whole body as well. Because the whole mind is stimulated, there are more sensory memories that help a child to figure out how things work. A child may not fully understand concepts like force and friction, but he knows that the harder he pushes, the further the truck runs.
5. Another reason could be that play allows a child the freedom to exercise his imagination, unbounded by rules and set pieces. She is free to let her mind wander, to experiment, to discover for herself what limits nature sets, and what possibilities, how impractical, nature offers.
6. But whatever the reasons, children have fun when they play. And this in itself is an invaluable lesson, that learning can be pleasurable, and that by observation and experience alone, we can learn a lot.
7. The value of play and discovery, however, can be further enhanced if adults – teachers or parents – are also present to guide the child. Guidance is not the same as instruction. Leading a child to find a solution is a vastly different strategy to providing a child the solution. But guidance, and inputs from adults at judicious moments of play, can help the child discover patterns and principles he might otherwise miss.
8. I am glad that the Discovery Zone, which we open this evening, will offer opportunities to both children and their parents to play and learn together. In a few minutes, we will all get to see this for ourselves. I would like to congratulate and commend the Science Centre for embarking on this project. I would also like to thank the Discovery Channel and Singapore Cable Vision for their sponsorship and support.
9. Facilities such as the Discovery Zone are important elements in the new knowledge infrastructure that we are building. They contribute to on-going and broad-based education in our community.
10. As an Asian society, we have always placed importance on education. In the new economy, this is even more essential. But learning paradigms have shifted. The world is not organised and bundled as neatly as it was twenty or thirty years ago. Our children will not grow up to be doctors, lawyers or engineers. They will grow up to be knowledge workers in medicine, in commercial and business relationships, or in the construction of new living

and working habitats. Job categories will be more broadly defined, even as individuals may become more specialised in their tasks and knowledge domain.

11. Graduating with a certificate or diploma or degree is not the end of education, but the end of a beginning in education. Learning will be a lifelong process, and a lifelong priority. It will take place in classrooms, but just as importantly outside of classrooms. Museums, science galleries, discovery centres – all these will be important sources of learning – for children as well as for adults.
12. The government will continue to invest in these facilities, to upgrade, expand and build new facilities that more people can enjoy. I hope that Singaporeans will look to these places not merely as outing venues, but as places where they can be enthralled, energised and engaged in finding out more about the remarkable world we live in.
13. If we can be like children, always curious and eager to understand, never afraid to try out new things and to experiment, and be filled with passion to experience and learn as much as we can – then I think we will be winners in the new economy. And not only that, but we will create for ourselves a way of life that makes learning a wonderful and delightful journey of discovery and joy.
14. Ladies and gentlemen: It is my privilege to invite you to join me on that journey as I now declare the Discovery Zone open.

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