

SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE HWA CHONG EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2010, ON MONDAY, 1 MARCH 2010, AT 8.30AM AT THE CLOCK TOWER AUDITORIUM

Mr. Jonathan Lee Hee Long, Chairman, Board of Directors, Hwa Chong Institution;

Mr. Desmond Ong Eng Chang, Chairman, Board of Governors, HCI;

Dr. Hon Chiew Weng, Principal, HCI

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. I am pleased to be here at the 2010 Hwa Chong Education Conference. It is encouraging to see over 500 educators and researchers convening to explore new directions in education and to create new possibilities for the 21st Century classroom.

LEARNING WITHOUT BORDERS

2. The theme of this conference, 'Learning without Borders', opens up an important dialogue on the fast-changing education landscape in our increasingly borderless world. This borderless world is the product of two key forces-

globalization and the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Where in the past, education might have been regarded as a domestic or even a local issue, today, it has undoubtedly been caught up by the forces of globalization. Take for instance the Higher Education sector. The flow of international students to American and European universities is increasing every year. At premier universities such as Harvard and Cambridge, international students comprise some 16 to 20% of the student population. At the same time, we are also seeing more students from the West being attracted to Asia- some 11,000 American students studied in China from 2006 to 2007, a 25% increase from the previous academic year¹.

3. As the world becomes increasingly globalised, our need to interact with and understand other cultures has intensified. We have more opportunities now to improve cross-cultural understanding and to encourage cross-national cooperation. Meanwhile, technological developments have also opened up exciting new possibilities for the customizing of teaching practices, in order to better engage and excite students. ICT can be used to expand our students' learning horizons; it can be a powerful aid to learning, as well as a tool for assessment. As educators, experts and policy-makers, we must make use of ICT to share our best practices and models.

¹ Tamar Levin, Study Abroad Flourishes, With China a Hot Spot, 17 Nov, 08, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/17/exchange.html?_r=1

KEY CHALLENGES

4. Globalisation and new technologies require new teacher roles and new pedagogies. For one, technology has radically changed the way the younger generation thinks, assimilates and processes information. This creates several challenges for educators. Our students are constantly inundated by multiple streams of information from different sources. It has become increasingly difficult to capture their attention and interest as their expectations are shaped by the scintillating packaging and presentation styles in new media. Harnessing the power of ICT goes beyond simply investing in infrastructure, which is comparatively easy to do. Achieving meaningful integration into educational practices, bringing about deep changes in mindsets among teachers and students, and getting the most out of each dollar of investment is much tougher. Like many other countries, Singapore has been exploring how to achieve maximum benefits from integrating ICT with education. HCI was one of five schools selected as pioneer FutureSchools², to pilot innovative pedagogies leveraging on new technologies, as well as to find ways to address key issues concerning school culture, mindsets and training. Our sixth FutureSchool, the School of Science and Technology, was launched this year. Through these FutureSchools, we hope to distil useful learning points and successful practices which can then be rolled out to all other schools.

² There are currently six FutureSchools: Beacon Primary School, Canberra Primary School, Crescent Girls' School, Jurong Secondary School and Hwa Chong Institution. The sixth FutureSchool, the School of Science and Technology, began operations in 2010.

5. Globalisation and the impact of applied technology on modern societies around the world call for a radical rethinking of what education is. A key question that educators have faced throughout the years is how best to prepare our children for the future. That question has never been more relevant than at the present moment. We want to ensure that our children will be equipped to handle what the future will bring. In a world of constant and unpredictable change, our education system can no longer simply teach content and skills for specific jobs. Industries are rapidly changing and may even disappear by the time today's students join the workforce. It is imperative then that we, as educators, cast our eyes beyond the immediate. How can we prepare our children to confidently face an uncertain future?

6. For one, the basics of numeracy and literacy will remain critical. A strong foundation in reading and writing, and in Science and Mathematics, will provide the bedrock upon which students assimilate new knowledge. However, there is growing agreement about the importance of life skills and related competencies.

To compete globally, individuals will need to think critically and creatively to constantly re-invent their companies and themselves. They will need to work effectively in teams, and with people from different countries and cultures. And during periods of high uncertainty and unpredictability, they will also need to be adaptable and resilient. Most importantly, for the future success of the nation, we need individuals to be strongly rooted to the country with a strong sense of social obligation to the community. We are in the midst of implementing new

frameworks that will enhance the development of 21st century competencies in our students. This will form part of the holistic education that our schools will provide to better prepare our students to thrive in a fast-changing and highly-connected world.

TEACHERS- THE HEART OF QUALITY EDUCATION

7. In the midst of change, one factor remains constant. The 2007 McKinsey Report established that the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. A teacher, above all, must have the passion to teach. Parker J Palmer, author of the book “The Courage to Teach”, described teaching as the most difficult but also the most important of human endeavours. The teacher is a confidante to his or her students, a guide in dealing with the emotional upheavals of adolescence, a coach to inspire achievement. We need teachers who are committed to the cause of education.

8. Director-General of Education, Ms Ho Pang, launched the Vision for the Teaching Service: - Lead. Care. Inspire last year. . Our teachers must be able to lead their students and to make leaders out of them. They must be able to draw out the full potential of their students and provide them with opportunities through which they can discover new horizons for themselves. Senior and experienced teachers must also be leaders and mentors to young beginning teachers, and share with them their knowledge and their wisdom.

9. To care for your students is intrinsic to what you do every day as teachers. Of paramount importance is the physical and emotional well-being of our students, as well as the development of their character and moral values.. The third element is 'Inspire'. Great teachers inspire, through their love of the subject they teach, through the way they teach, and the way they care. As a community of teachers, I urge you to take some time to reflect on your teaching, to think about the professional values you hold dear and see if these are aligned to the Vision.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

9. Platforms for professional exchange, such as this conference, allow teachers to develop themselves as a fraternity. I am confident that this conference will provide you with valuable insights that will help you nurture students who are equipped physically, intellectually, and morally for citizenship in this new technological and globalised age. And while we get excited by the new opportunities that technology is providing us, let us not forget to strive to develop our students into good citizens. I would like to wish all participants fruitful and engaging conversations.

10. It now gives me great pleasure to declare the 2010 Hwa Chong Education Conference open. Thank you.