



The second point is that for Secondary Two to Four, it would be good if the number of subjects and the scope of the examination are reduced so that the burden on these pupils will not be so heavy.

For quite some time lots of people, including Members of Parliament, have complained that the burden on the pupils is very heavy. On top of that, if we want them to go for Immersion Classes without reducing the scope of the examination, the level of the papers, it is asking too much of the pupils.

Prime Minister :

If we have to reduce the workload for the eight per cent, then how much more we must reduce it for those below the eight per cent. A student can absorb no more than his total capacity. If you push him beyond this capacity, he'll give up. So we've got to monitor his progress. Teachers got to watch how their pupils fair. After two to three months, the Ministry of Education should review the situation and make adjustments to give each pupil his optimum absorption

rate. All new programmes are unpleasant because it means breaking old habits. We are all creatures of habit. But, not to attempt this change means that a whole group of students, for whom we have the capacity in the English schools, will lose their chance of a facility for spoken English. Therefore, however unpleasant for everyone, I say let's do it.

Many countries in the world have traffic jams. In Singapore we decided to do something new to solve it. We knew it was unpleasant for the motorists to change their habits. They would be unable to get into town unless they shared their cars, or park to take a bus, or take a bus from home. We had six months of problems. We solved it. In the same way, I am determined to solve this.

National Archives of Singapore

I owe a responsibility to parents who registered their children in the Chinese schools 7-9 years ago. We promised them that we would teach their children English. Otherwise, they would not have gone to Chinese schools. Now I have discovered we can teach them to read and write English at three grades below the English school, but they are unable to speak English because the language atmosphere is missing. I want to give this atmosphere to the largest number of students who want to learn.

The workload is not all that heavy. The time is burdensome. For a bright student, he will not be learning new subject matter. He is learning the same subject matter in a different language. We have said that those who are unable to cope at the same grade can go one grade below. But you know your students and their parents. Nobody wants to lose one grade.

National Archives of Singapore

The answer for the Chinese student is to make the four-year secondary course into a five-year one. Then we don't have to push them so hard. But all will be unhappy - parents and students. Why? Because their friends in the English schools are taking their 'O' levels in four years.

The easier way is to make it five years for 'O' levels for Chinese Schools. I asked the Education Ministry to consider this. The answer was, no. It would make the Chinese school unattractive. So, we face this difficulty. There is no other way.

But I agree with the principal - let's cut down the workload both in the Chinese schools CL1 and in the immersion schools. Let's balance it so that it is within the capacity of the student. But that is better than to leave the student in the Chinese school - unable to speak English easily.

Madam Liu : The fact that the workload for pupils going for the Immersion Programme is pretty heavy. Whether or not we can reduce the Immersion Classes from five days a week to something like two to three days. And also, if possible, to reduce the scope of the GCE 'O' level examination. It is hoped that if that is reduced then the pupils need not study so much and, therefore, they would have the time. The pupils in my school together with the parents are very keen to take part in the Immersion Programme even at the Secondary Three and Secondary Four levels, but they did not do so because they feel that the workload is too heavy. They came to ask me whether I could guarantee that their children would pass the 'O' level examination. If so they would go for the Immersion Class.

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : The problem has got to be solved in a practical way. I don't think you follow an immersion course by attending three out of five days in a week. If you miss two lessons, you won't be able to follow the rest of the course for the week. It's better to reduce the total

number of subjects being done from seven to five, or from five to three. If they want to repeat the other two subjects next year.

We come back to solve the same problem. If you want to master another language and you haven't got the capacity to do it in four years, then take five. But the Singaporean doesn't want to repeat it. That is the crux of the problem.

Mrs Huang Poh See  
of St Nicholas

Girls' School :

Mr Prime Minister, our girls are attending immersion classes in various schools now. At present, we have received many letters from the parents seeking permission from the children to withdraw from the immersion classes.

National Archives of Singapore

Their reasons are as follows:-

Firstly, they are not happy about the receiving schools they have been allocated. Secondly, the parents feel that the girls have insufficient time for their homework or self-study. Thirdly, the girls used to reach home very late in the evening, usually after half-

past six or even after seven o'clock. Fourthly, the children are over-exhausted after attending the classes. The parents feel that the programme adversely affect the health of the children physically and mentally. And fifthly, they come across transport problem. Sixthly, the parents don't like mixed school, they prefer girls' school for girls. And seventh, both the students and their parents feel that they don't benefit much from the programme. The reason is some sending school children, instead of speaking English they speak dialect and Mandarin among themselves. And they don't have this English-speaking atmosphere at all in the receiving school. And the students also feel that the speed or pace of teaching in the receiving school is rather slow.

Our girls, they feel that they already understand certain topics and the receiving school students still keep on asking questions and our girls feel that it's a waste of time. But if they can benefit much from the programme, I think they will try their best to attend classes like some girls sending to SCGS, Singapore Chinese Girls' School and RGS. They feel that they



benefit much although they feel rather exhausted but they still try their best to stay on.

Prime Minister : I haven't got the figures for St. Nicholas, Secondary Two, Three and Four.

Your Secondary One are happy in Raffles Girls' School, Singapore Chinese Girls' School and in Fairfield MGS. They are only unhappy when they are sent to Outram.

Mrs Huang : Our Secondary Two girls, 25 of them, they are attending course in Cedar, 39 in Rangoon Secondary School and 31 in Outram, Four in Fairfield.

## National Archives of Singapore

About 35 of them want to withdraw from Serangoon Secondary School; 26 from Outram; 11 from Cedar. But I still .....

Prime Minister : Why? I don't understand.

Mrs Huang : I still encourage them to continue. The reason is that they feel that they don't benefit much from the programme.

Prime Minister : They are a lateral immersion - same grade or one grade below?

Mrs Huang : Same grade.

Prime Minister : Same grade? So your grade of English is as good as Rangoon Secondary School. I think that's fair. If the student feels that he is not getting any benefit, then let him withdraw. If you have already succeeded at St Nicholas, in creating a bilingual atmosphere where students speak spontaneously either Mandarin or English, then you can decide to give up your immersion places to other schools. It all depends on the principal who sets the tone, the teachers who follow the policy of the principal create the atmosphere, the speech habits of the students. If you have established the bilingual habit all is well.

I am not a specialist in teaching. But I am a specialist in learning, because I had to learn languages. I made it a practice when I was learning my Mandarin to speak to my children in Mandarin so that I would improve. It became a habit. When they speak to me they will speak in Mandarin and I am forced to answer them in Mandarin. I create in my own home a bilingual atmosphere. I believe it can be done in the schools, provided the principal sets the tone in the same way as I decided I will set the tone in my home. If the principal does not want to set the tone because she does not believe in it, and the teacher knows that, then, of course, it is very difficult for the Prime Minister. He would have to make himself the principal. Or he will have to have a group of inspectors to make sure the teachers are following his policy, whilst they look for the principals who will set the tone.

National Archives of Singapore



number fell off and as of yesterday it was 11 out of 28. So we kept asking ourselves why. I think there is one factor - that is, when we send students to integrated secondary schools we have to make sure at least not the top 8 per cent but perhaps between 8 per cent and 20 per cent because they may have a better chance of not feeling that they are losing out on the programme. That's one. And the girls told me, "Sir, the boys are naughty." Well, 23 per cent of our population are boys. They are not naughty by standards of any other boy schools. But I think it's a problem of adjustment. And third, they said it is quite a strain. By the time they got back it was about 6, 6.30. Well, I thought that's not quite a fair comment because when we compared figures, RGS and Singapore Chinese - 100 per cent attendance. So, in spite of the strain, they are prepared to put up there.

Now about Secondary twos. We received 28 on the 17<sup>th</sup>. As of yesterday there were 15. We thought we will go out of our way - provide free text books so that they don't have to buy, use our school funds and even provide library facilities to borrow books.

So I would like to conclude by saying since they are better students in fact we are happy to have them. I think they have in fact toned up. Since the numbers dwindle we thought we would put these girls in classes where there aren't boys. At least, that might make them more at home. We got to wait and see how things work.

## National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister :

Thank you, Mr Subramaniam.

First, I am delighted that here is a principal with a common sense approach and a willingness and courage to face the facts. If we are prepared to face facts, then there are no problems which are solvable

which we cannot solve. It is when we make believe that problems are not solved.

If in fact the girls from St Nicholas are better in English than your students, of course, the Ministry of Education is at fault, seriously at fault, in sending the students there. The places could be used by other students who would benefit from Outram. This is a messy exercise, because we have got 123 schools involved - 24 Chinese, 99 English. If we had a computer and all the relevant data, - distance for sending to receiving school, standards of sending and receiving schools - then we could have done better.

The trouble is we don't know enough of each school measured on the same yardstick. So we will have this trial and error. The first few weeks will be troublesome. That is the reason for this meeting. We need your co-operation. When you find out errors, you should report them back to the Ministry. They will make adjustments.

National Archives of Singapore

Mdm Chua Liang of Nanyang Girls' High School : There are three main reasons for the students in my school not responding favourably to the Scheme. First, they are not happy about the receiving schools. As we all know, the expectation of the parents whose children are in the top eight per cent is very high. When they come to know that their children are being sent to schools which are not that well known, they are unhappy. We are in no position to force the parents to send their children for immersion classes.

Secondly, as my school is in Bukit Timah, my students are from Woodlands, Chua Chu Kang, Lim Chu Kang .....

Prime Minister : So far away!

Madam Chua : Yes, they have to travel quite a distance to go to school. These students may have to leave home soon after 5.00 a.m. and return home as late as 7.00 p.m. or 8.00 p.m. Most of them have to travel by two buses



and walk a distance in the remote areas. Their parents naturally show concern.

Third, it is because the parents are not in favour of sending their children to mixed schools that they send their children to my school, a girls' school. When the parents find that their children are being sent to immersion classes in a mixed school, they are unhappy.

I would like to make some suggestions. For the top eight per cent, we should send them to schools which are more acceptable to their parents. Secondly, as far as possible, female students should be sent to girls' schools. Thirdly, it has generally been felt that the children are too heavily burdened with their school work. While English literature and English will definitely help improve the English standard of the Chinese-school students, mathematics and Science may not help that much. As such, can they be allowed not to do the home work on these subjects? They may be

National Archives of Singapore

required to do class assignments but they should be exempted from doing home work because they are in any way doing these subjects in their own school.

Prime Minister :                      Your suggestions are practical.

I cannot understand why the Ministry sent 109 students in the eight per cent bracket from Nanyang to New Town, and allowed Nan Hwa which does not have the eight per cent bracket to send the girls to Methodist Girls'.

She has explained that her students came from Woodlands, Chua Chu Kang. Singapore parents and students place such great importance on quality that they are prepared to travel a long distance to get it.

We better do a rethink, rearrange places for the eight per cent if we want the eight per cent in the nine schools to succeed.

The government can take a passive attitude and do nothing. The Chinese secondary schools will fade out in 5-6 years. Less and less children are enrolling in these schools. It is tragic to let it happen. I therefore proposed the plan to preserve the best 12 Chinese secondary schools. The Education Ministry does not think that there are enough good students for 12 schools. They believe nine schools can be preserved. Whether or not these nine schools will be preserved will depend on the performance of the children in four years' time. If they perform well, the nine schools will succeed. Parents will not blindly accept what I say. Many will wait for the results. So, the results of their students' performance in 1982 and 83 are vital.

National Archives of Singapore

**TRANSCRIPT OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS DURING**

**“SEMINAR ON EDUCATION” ON 24 JANUARY 1979**

**(SECOND PART)**

Prime Minister :

I want to ask the fifteen to twenty popular English school principals this. Most are mission schools. They have given their reason for not taking more immersion pupils as their responsibility to their feeder schools. The Ministry suspects there is also unhappiness in not getting capitation dues from “immersion” students. We will give you the capitation dues. Why not make more places for these students? These are bright students. They can benefit more from your schools than the students you are taking from your feeder schools. Are you really so crammed up that there is no space in your classrooms? Can you not expand, make the space?

Let's start off with the girls' schools. RGS, MGS, Singapore Chinese Girls' School and CHIJ.

The principal of Nanyang Girls' School made her point. By the time parents choose non-mixed schools for their daughters, they prefer to be immersed in non-mixed schools. How many popular non-mixed schools are there?

Mr Chan Kai Yau : Of the four that I have just mentioned among the English schools - RGS, CHIJ, Methodist Girls', and there are few Methodist girls' schools - Fairfield Methodist Girls' School in Mount Sophia, Paya Lebar Methodist Girls' School ...

Prime Minister : What other schools?

Mr Chan Kai Yau : The Singapore Chinese Girls' School.

Prime Minister : Can I ask the four principals to tell me whether they are absolutely full to capacity? CHIJ, are you full to capacity? Suppose we pay the capitation tax and pay for new chairs and tables?

Sister Elizabeth  
of Convent of  
the Holy Infant  
Jesus :

Mr Lee, it's got nothing to do with the  
capitation tax. In our particular school, we have a  
problem because we operate completely in the  
morning. We have no objection at all to having  
Chinese school pupils. As a matter of fact, we'd be  
very happy to have them. For next year, we hope to  
have an immersion programme. But for this year, it  
was absolutely impossible - it came too late. Our  
school has always operated only in the morning and to  
suddenly switch to ...

Prime Minister :

If we get Chinese school classes to switch into  
the afternoon session and attend immersion in your  
school in the morning, you are prepared to have them?

## National Archives of Singapore

Sister Elizabeth :

Do you mean this year or next year?

Prime Minister :

I am talking about this year. That's why this  
meeting. For next year, we have a lot of time. We can  
sort it out.



back and think of a way to absorb some. Every passing day, these students are losing the facility of speaking in another language with another rhythm in another sound system. It's facility they have in their youth and they are losing a bit of it every day. I want them to pick it up - oral English whilst they can pick it up, best of all in the company of those who use that language. These students don't need tuition in the different subjects. They just need the exposure to the language. Even if you simply let them sit in the passage way, they will pick it up. Think the problem over and let the Ministry have your views. I'll ask them to report to me in a fortnight.

Sister Elizabeth : I'll do that.

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : Let's hear from RGS. Where is the principal?

Miss Tan Leng We have twenty immersion girls in Secondary

Neo of Raffles Girls' 1, 42 from Nanyang Girls' School in Secondary 2 and

Secondary School : 20 from ...



Prime Minister : Nanyang Girls' School?

Miss Tan Leng Forty-two, Secondary 2, just came in last

Neo : Thursday. Thirteen from St. Nicholas in Secondary 3  
and seven from River Valley Government High.

Prime Minister : Are you absolutely full to capacity?

Miss Tan Leng We were given two additional classes for

Neo : immersion. But if there is pressure we can annex our  
other special rooms and make it into a classroom.

Prime Minister : Why not let's do that. This is a very serious

National Archives of Singapore  
human problem. The principal of Nanyang has got  
students who are in the top 8%. They travel all the  
way to Woodlands and Chua Chu Kang.

I am sure whether they start off at 5.00 a.m., or  
4.30 a.m., if you tell them that they can go to RGS they  
will go. I have no doubts that within a year they will



send them to your brighter classes, don't send them to your slow classes. You have a good school. How many Secondary 1 classes have you got?

Prime Minister :                    You have ten?

Miss Tan Leng                    They are all very bright students. They are all

Neo                    :                    8% ...

Prime Minister :                    Alright. But there are some brighter than the others. MGS? Within the 8%?

Mrs Anna Tham                    Mr Lee, I have sixteen Nan Hwa students with of Methodist                    me in Secondary 1. I have offered twenty-one places

Girls' School :                    but they were not taken up to capacity.

Prime Minister :                    For Secondary 1?

Mrs Anna Tham:                    Secondary 1.

Prime Minister :                    Was that your limit?

Mrs Anna Tham: Yes.

Prime Minister : How many students do you have in Secondary  
1?

Mrs Anna Tham: At present, I have 181.

Prime Minister : You have 181 and your limit is 21?

Mrs Anna Tham: The number of immersion places that I have  
offered is 21.

Prime Minister : You've got 'A' levels?

## National Archives of Singapore

Mrs Anna Tham: No.

Prime Minister : They have moved to ACJC?

Mrs Anna Tham: Yes. In various junior colleges and pre-  
university schools.

Prime Minister :                    If we make the space, can you cope with your teachers?

Mrs Anna Tham:                    How are you going to make the space, Mr Lee?

Prime Minister :                    I could get the army to put up a hut for you.

Mrs Anna Tham:                    Mr Lee, I am embarking on a building programme and ...

Prime Minister :                    No, that's too slow. By next year I would have got to grip with this problem. I can give firm directives on which way we shall be going. I will require your cooperation less because I will be more in charge, like ALS. By the second year, we shall have a better command of the situation. We can allow taxis to go in at half price. We can make refinements. It's during the first year that I need your cooperation most. It seems to me selfish that with 181 students you allow 21 immersion places.



Singapore classrooms are built such that we cannot take in more  
 Chinese Girls' than 40. We have however two special rooms; one is  
 School : a ETV room and the other is a second language room  
 which is for Malay students. If you give me sufficient  
 staff I would be able to take in more.

Prime Minister : How many immersion pupils have you got for  
 Secondary 1?

Miss Heng Five, Sir.

Cheng Ling :

Prime Minister : Five? How many pupils have you got for  
 Secondary 1?

## National Archives of Singapore

Miss Heng Total 233.

Cheng Ling :

Prime Minister : You ought to do better. I don't want to hear you  
 now. I want to hear you in a fortnight.





Mr Chan Kai I think they are much more popular than the

Yau : rest.

Prime Minister : Let's start with RI.

Mr A K Sigamoney We have 50 students from River Valley in  
of Raffles Secondary 1 and 73 students in Secondary II, also  
Institution : from River Valley. We expanded the secondary school  
- number of classes in Secondary 1 by two from 8 to 10  
in order to take in seven students per class. Now we  
have 43 students in each of the classes, Secondary 1 as  
well as Secondary 2. We did the same thing in  
Secondary 2. We expanded the classes, from 8 classes  
to 10 classes in order to accommodate the immersion  
students. This is how we were able to take a total of  
123 students from River Valley Government School.

We also have 70 places available in Secondary 3. The  
students have not come in yet. Again we expanded our  
Secondary 3 Classes in order to make provision for this  
and all our classes eventually will be 43 per class. It  
will work out to about 7 to 8 immersion students per

class in everyone of the classes, from Secondary 1 to Secondary 3. We are not able to expand any more - all our Secondary 1s, 2s and 3s are in the afternoons - because we have a large number of pre-university students in the morning. We have 26 classes and they are all about 40 to 42 now. Quite a number of them had to stay back in the afternoons for extra lessons because the curriculum cannot be completed at one o'clock. It goes on beyond that. Our laboratory facilities and also classroom facilities and special rooms are used for tutorials, general paper sessions and so on for large number of pre-university students who have to stay back.

Prime Minister : I understand. You have no free space available for temporary expansion?

Mr Sigamoney : We have made full use of all our facilities including our lecture theatres . But if there is any way in which the school can help, RI is always willing.

Prime Minister : All the government schools have been willing and cooperative. That is the lesson from these figures. Can I ask ACS? What's the score?

Mr Ernest Lau of Anglo Chinese School: The score is that we have taken 30. We were asked to take 11. We can take more. We increased our Secondary 1 classes by one from 12 to 13. By closing down our special rooms, it is possible to increase.

Prime Minister : How much can you increase by?

Mr Ernest Lau : We can increase by another class.

Prime Minister : Well, that's positive. That's the kind of answer I want to hear.

Mr Ernest Lau: Thank you, Sir.

Prime Minister : Do you require more teachers?

Mr Ernest Lau : I would, of course, require more teachers.

Prime Minister : Alright. Then make sure that you get a  
capitation grant. We'll fill it up. SJI, St. Joseph's?

Brother Kevin Byrne of St. Joseph's Institution : Mr Prime Minister, our school is very old and  
the classrooms are rather small. We have raised the  
number to 40 in each class now in Secondary 1. We  
have taken in 44 immersion students in the Secondary  
1 and we have increased our number ...

Prime Minister : Forty-four out of? What's your total?

Brother Byrne : Four hundred students.

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : Four hundred Secondary 1?



Prime Minister :                    Suppose we found space for your Secondary 4 elsewhere, do you feel that your secondary 4 students would suffer a loss? I am thinking of next year.

Brother Byrne :                    Our numbers will be smaller next year. In Secondary 3 we have 13 classes.

Prime Minister :                    No. My proposal is of a different nature. We get the four most popular male schools and lend them a building for all their Secondary 4 boys. So each of these four schools can expand by one-fourth.

Brother Byrne :                    Yes, I suppose that could be done.

Prime Minister :                    Do you feel a sense of loss - your pupils going to another building?

Brother Byrne :                    Well, it will be so.

Prime Minister :                    You would?

Brother Byrne : Yes.

Prime Minister : Even though they will come back for their sporting and ECA activities?

Brother Byrne : That would help if it could be arranged but it would be difficult to organise.

Prime Minister : On your present classroom space - you can't take anymore?

Brother Byrne : No.

Prime Minister : Not possible?

## National Archives of Singapore

Brother Byrne : No, because we have to split some classes for language. So, it's just not possible visibly.

Prime Minister : That's an honest answer?

Brother Byrne : Yes.

Prime Minister : Thank you. St. Andrew's?

Mr Harry Tan Our school building was built in 1938. As such  
Ho Swee of the floor area can only accommodate 38 comfortably.

St. Andrew's : We are prepared to expand until 40. But that is the  
limit. I have 363 students this year, excluding 53  
immersion students. I am capable of taking another 24  
from Maris Stella, if it would like to send.

Prime Minister : Is that a private arrangement with Maris Stella  
or through the Ministry?

Mr Harry Tan : No, I am referring to Maris Stella because we

National Archives of Singapore  
are referring to top 8 %. I am supposed to receive 77  
but somehow or other I have been given 53. All the 53  
are still with me. Since I only have 7 classes from  
junior school, I am prepared to open 11 Secondary 1  
classes. I would suggest that the Ministry do not send  
me any students from the other primary schools but to





give us due consideration - more generous with our quota.

Prime Minister :                      What schools next on the popularity rating ?

Mr Chan Kai Yau:                      For girls' schools, Tanjong Katong Girls', Crescent Girls', Cedar Girls' - these will be the next group.

Prime Minister :                      The first eight are top on the popular list?

Mr Chan Kai Yau:                      That's right.

Prime Minister :                      Suppose we got the Secondary 4 group in three

National Archives of Singapore

top schools into one building and make space for

Secondary 1, they would have got the space to absorb?

Mr Chan Kai Yau: It is possible. There are other problems when we mix the Secondary 4 into one particular school. They are normally the leaders in the school in terms of pupils' activities.

Prime Minister : Of the whole school, you mean?

Mr Chan Kai Yau: Of the whole School. If you take them out ...

Prime Minister : Take out some.

Mr Chan Kai Yau: We will look into that.

Prime Minister : I will leave you with these thoughts before I

National Archives of Singapore  
have a five-minute break. If the top English schools will co-operate then this scheme is more likely to succeed. My specialty is understanding people, Singaporeans. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to get unpleasant and unpopular things done. I understand what Singaporeans want, what makes them do what they want. They want their children to go into

top schools. I can explain to parents till I am blue in the face that education does not change their child's inside, the hardware of a computer. I can explain that education is the software. But parents don't believe me. They still believe that education can increase intelligence. You can't buy intelligence. You can buy knowledge. The question is whether you can absorb it.

Since they want top schools, let's find a way to give it to those who deserve them. By next year, we would be more sure of the problem. We had no time this year.

Let me pose this problem to the top English schools. If the nine top Chinese schools succeed as I am convinced they can, they pose a threat to the supremacy of the top eight English schools. Because if all the bright students are in the nine schools you will find whether you are ACS, RI, St. Joseph's, MGS, SCGS (Singapore Chinese Girls' School) or the

Convent, all your students will be grey carp, not golden carp, because they would have been creamed off.

So my bait to you: if you cooperate, you will develop as the counterparts of these nine schools. In the English stream you will run classes which offer CL 1, EL 1. Let me tell you the reasons for this need. For the top students who can cope, the scholarship qualifications will be examinations for CL1. CL2 is for ordinary students. So if your students want to take the scholarship examination with EL1 and CL1. If your schools cannot offer those courses, or you haven't got the pupils, who can make those standards, slowly you will be creamed off your golden carp.

## National Archives of Singapore

So your answer must be to offer in your schools a specified number of classes in EL1 and CL1 or EL1 and ML1 or EL1 and TL1. Only then can your students compete for scholarships. It will be more difficult for you to achieve this than the nine selected Chinese schools. Once the nine have established a

bilingual atmosphere, they won't need immersion classes. The top English-stream schools may never establish the same effectively bilingual atmosphere. You have large numbers of students below the top 8%. The parents who donate the money for swimming pools and other facilities will be upset. So you take in more grey carp with golden carp.

Within a few years, you will have prepared your best students in scholarship classes - students who have to make scholarship level, EL1 and CL1. You will require the help of the Chinese school teachers and principals to staff these classes. In these classes you must achieve a higher standard of bilingualism than the rest of the school.

National Archives of Singapore

I suggest if you are cooperative now, later the best Chinese schools will reciprocate and help you.

After the break, I want to hear from the English-stream teachers. I already know the problems of the

Chinese stream. How can the English schools better solve these problems. We have to take into account existing value judgements and prejudices. How can you make success less painful during the transition of two to three years. Then the top English schools must offer the same bilingual competence for their aspiring scholarship students. Otherwise all your best students will gravitate to these nine Chinese schools.

I am convinced, having heard the principals of RI and RGS, that the top government schools have absorbed as many immersion pupils as they can. But I am not convinced that the mission schools have done as much as they can.

## National Archives of Singapore

The other schools like Outram are still valuable as good immersion environment for students from schools not as good in English as those from St. Nicholas. We have to make full use of the teaching and learning capacity which exist in the English Schools to bridge this transition.





having both streams in the same school - the schemes of work are the same. The coordination between the teachers are very good. What is being taught in the morning is consolidated in the afternoon. So far, the students have coped with it very well.

Prime Minister : Any other views?

Sister Maria Ng of Hai Sing Girls' High School : We have students from outside the 8%. We have difficulties in getting students to go for immersion classes due to many factors. Many of the reasons were reported by other principals. One of the reasons is that our students are from poor families. They have to walk for a long period of time to get home. I am thinking if they are given places for immersion classes in the nearby girls' schools, it is very likely they will attend.

Prime Minister : Where is your school?

Sister Maria Ng: It is in Upper Serangoon, 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> m.s.

Prime Minister : Upper Serangoon, isn't it 7<sup>th</sup> mile?

Sister Maria Ng: Fourteenth kilometre. It looks very odd with this zero per cent in our school. I think the Ministry will be very upset. I am very upset with it, too.

From the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, already quite a number wanted to withdraw. I forced them to go. I brought many girls to help them to go, encouraged them, made them feel at home. I think Willow Secondary School can support my case. After the first day many did not want to go. Forty-two students who went to Willow came back. They share among themselves the

experiences they have. I don't say that the school did not treat them well, but mainly the long hours. Many of them have to help at home to rear the chickens and pigs. So the 50 odd who were supposed to go to Parry refused to go anymore.

I face with all such problems. I encourage them every day, even wanted to bring them there myself.

But they respond in such a way. Some of the parents say they would prefer to have the supplementary class in our school.

I agree with the system - if you have the English-speaking environment, surely the student would study better. My students found that during recess time, the students speak dialects or Mandarin. They say after all they don't get much out of it, why should they have to continue such mental and physical strain and long hours, and that would hinder their GCE 'O' level examinations.

Prime Minister :

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore



Prime Minister : I don't know where I got the practice. If a child is keen and highly motivated, he will create the opportunity. He will speak to his friends. He will pick up words from his friends. It does not have to be formal instruction between teacher and pupil. Interaction between pupils without the teacher is most beneficial.

Mrs Jillian Scully : Sir, you got your Mandarin practice in your home. These children cannot because of the dialects spoken in their homes. It is true during recess the children revert to dialect. This is something that can be changed. It will be changed, but it takes time. A child who has been exposed to dialect all his life cannot suddenly speak good Mandarin comfortably with his poor group.

Prime Minister : Thank you. Are there other views?

Mdm Liu Mon I am concerned over the schools which are not

Ling of Whampoa Secondary School : selected for the top 8% like mine. What we have been discussing will to a certain extent affect the morale and psychology of the students who are not in the top 8%. Since the announcement of the nine schools for the top 8% students, the teachers in my school have been somewhat demoralised. So are the students and the parents concerned. I hope that the authority could also look after those who are not within the top 8%. The future leadership may not necessarily come from the top 8%. This is my view. I may be wrong.

Prime Minister : Psychologically, I think Madam Liu is representative of our problem. There is no way to dodge it. She reverts back to the problem of the psychological hurt to those not included in the 8%. It could be 8%, it could, in my view, probably be only 5% who can really make EL1 and CL1.

National Archives of Singapore

The question is: what is our ideal education system knowing these limits, dialect-speaking homes and an economy which demands competence in English. Further, overall performance of the population depends on them not being culturally cut off from their past.

If let things be, there will be a complete drift into the English schools in about five years. Registration for the Chinese schools will be negligible.

Perhaps that was the easiest way - to do nothing. Nanyang University would close down because it would have no students. All students already wanted to go to University of Singapore. The Chinese middle schools will close down next. Slowly the Chinese primary schools will also close.

National Archives of Singapore

I don't think that would be in Singapore's interest. It's not excellence in English that drove Singapore on. It is the cultural drive, something deep and fundamental.

One simple way out of our dilemma is to teach English-dialect, English-Malay, English-Tamil, English-Punjabi or whatever. Then we keep bi-culturalism. It also means an increasing dominance of English even between Chinese of different dialects because they will increasingly prefer to use English instead of dialect.

Much depends on what parents want for their children. The Ministry and the schools must take the wishes of parents and students into their planning. The principal of Whampoa is unhappy that we have to mark off the top 8%. Well, let's mark off the top 14%, who will make it from Secondary 4 to Pre-U 1. Only 5% make it to university, less than the top 8%. The biggest group will make Secondary 4 and will not go on to Pre-



U or university. They will have to be competent in English at EL1. They will keep up what they have learned in Chinese in primary school, and take it on till secondary 4. But it is madness to try and make them achieve CL1 standard or even CL2 at a standard which has been pitched artificially by the Ministry at two grades below the EL1 grade. We know the average cannot do it. The students feel dragged down.

At the lower layer, of course, everybody hopes that his child or her child will at least be average. However, we know statistically that 30% cannot make PSLE. With better tuition we may reduce it to 20%. We cannot expect this 20% to be bilingual. Learning one language will be more than that child can cope with.

Every year, about 40,000 children are born. However well we educate them, I doubt if more than 8% will make it to university and take a degree. We can reduce the failure at PSLE from 30 to 20 percent.

We have to be practical. Let us have them literate in one language, not semi literate in two. If they speak dialect at home, 'literacy' may be easier in Chinese, Mandarin. If they speak Malay, we can get them to master English since it uses the same alphabets and English and Malay sentence structures are similar.

When we mention 8%, I am conscious that 92% of parents are unhappy. For every invitation by the Ministry to say, "Your child can go to these nine schools," I have eight happy parents and 92 not happy.

That is not the way we go about these problems.

Singapore succeeds because we have been prepared to

face the unpleasant.

National Archives of Singapore

Out of this meeting, I hope will come an appreciation that this is not a scatter-brained scheme. I have thought a long time over these problems. I knew if that I agreed to major changes in Nanyang University, I had to make rapid consequential changes

from Pre-U to Secondary, Primary levels. The less time we waste in making these changes, the less the waste in the lives of our young. There is always unhappiness for those adversely affected by change. I sympathise with them. But I cannot allow them to hold up the rescue operation.

One principle remains inviolate. This scheme is voluntary. People are emotional over languages. Therefore, whether it is immersion or choice of school, leave it to the parents.

I am offering a practical way out of our difficulties. It is necessary that people like Mrs Liu should express unhappiness. But it is necessary that she understands these plans be carefully implemented and adjusted from time to time and made successful.

We cannot change the genetic make-up of a child. We can help him develop to his fullest. We can

increase the ease with which he absorbs knowledge,  
the means to communicate and other knowledge.

National Archives of Singapore