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26/06/98 12:02 PM

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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Dr Aline Wong, 27 June 98, 11.00 am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
NTUC CHILDCARE COOPERATIVE LTD, AND SENIOR MINISTER
OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND EDUCATION FOR THE
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY FOR THE DIPLOMA IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION BY RTRC ASIA AND
WHEELOCK COLLEGE, 27 JUNE 1998, SATURDAY 11.00 AM,
GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL, TUDOR BALLROOM**

Graduating Class of 1998, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to be here this morning to officiate at the 3rd

Commencement Ceremony of the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education.

2 The 25 graduands here today have worked very hard over the last two years at juggling work, family and studies to pursue a programme that will equip them professionally in their work with young children.

3 Each and everyone of you have shown a commendable commitment to your belief in the importance of the early years by choosing to work with young children and by upgrading your knowledge and skills in this area. This, itself, is an important attribute that a good teacher needs to possess - the spirit of lifelong learning.

4 Having completed two years of rigorous training, you now have a better grasp of the theories of child development and are more able to design and plan developmentally appropriate curriculum. With new knowledge and skills, and a determination to put what you have learned into practice, you can make a difference in shaping the learning environments for the children in your care. I am certain that as more early childhood teachers and their employers realize the importance of continual training

and skills upgrading, more teachers will take up continuous education and many more children will benefit from a greater number of professionally trained teachers.

5 In any childcare centre or kindergarten, the key elements of a quality programme are not the equipment and facilities of the school, but the quality of the educators. The teachers and principal are the ‘heart and soul’ of the education process. For young children, their social and emotional needs are best met through caring and nurturing staff. What’s more, a professional early childhood teacher acts as a catalyst to help children enjoy learning and become creative thinkers. In the face of a rapidly changing world of technology and social values, we must equip our children with the ability to think not only critically, knowing the difference between right and wrong, but also creatively, persisting to find solutions to the challenges they will face in their time. This requires us to equip the young with the appropriate skills and mindsets to cope with change more quickly. As early childhood educators, you help to lay the foundation for future learning in a young child.

6 As more studies unfold the significance behind emotional

intelligence, we now understand it is a basic prerequisite to one's success in life. We therefore need to imbue life skills in our young to help them tackle the vicissitudes later in life. These life skills include motivation, perseverance and the ability to get along with other people.

7 As a small island state, we must be prepared to invest in developing our human resource through a sound and purposeful education. What we hope to reap tomorrow, we must begin to sow the seeds today. Hence, as early childhood educators, you can play your part in inculcating and developing desirable attributes such as social skills, resilience and enthusiasm for learning in the young. These will help to prepare them for new challenges, to experiment, to make mistakes and learn from them, and to innovate, yet upholding core values of social responsibility to their families and country.

8 RTRC Asia's mission is to promote greater early childhood professionalism through training, consultancy and dissemination of information by providing different pathways for further professional development of early childhood educators. For the financial year 1997/98, RTRC Asia trained a total of 449 or 62.3% of the total number of teachers

trained nation-wide at the Basic level. It also trained 158 teachers or 50% of the total number of teachers trained at the Intermediate level. Another 602 early childhood teachers have enrolled in the various programmes offered by RTRC which include the Diploma programme, continuing education and professional support workshops, talks, study missions and in-house workshops.

9 Recently, RTRC Asia was appointed as the training agency for early childhood courses by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under its Singapore Co-operation Plan. This Plan aims to train early childhood leaders in developing countries like Laos, Mongolia and Vietnam. RTRC also collaborated with Unicef to organize an Early Childhood Institute for early childhood leaders from 14 countries in the region. Closer to home, RTRC launched a new programme – the Early Childhood Teacher Bridging Programme - to provide an alternative route for upgrading childcare staff who do not have the required pre-requisites to advance themselves through the Intermediate Course.

10 All of these developments would not have been possible without a highly competent professional staff at RTRC Asia, who have also the

courage and vision to venture beyond Singapore to help their colleagues in other countries develop professionally. Under the capable leadership of Dr Khoo Kim Choo, the RTRC Asia has become what it is today, a leading early childhood education resource and research centre, and a regional training centre. Its decade-old collaboration with Wheelock College has borne remarkable fruits, benefitting families and young children in Singapore. I am delighted to hear this great news that Wheelock College has decided to set up scholarships in the name of Dr Khoo as a means of recognition for her contribution to early childhood education in Singapore. Thank you, indeed, Dr Bakken, President of Wheelock College, and congratulations to Dr Khoo.

11 In the context of this bigger picture, each of you can play a key role in contributing to the early childhood field. You can do so by constantly upgrading yourself, networking, and sharing information and skills with others in the field.

12 Let me once again congratulate you all and wish you success as you join the ranks of others that have trained before you.
