

**FY 2011 COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATE: 2nd REPLY
BY MS GRACE FU, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION, ON DELIVERING A STUDENT-
CENTRIC EDUCATION**

1. Sir, allow me to address specific issues raised by members, and elaborate on two key areas: (i) First, our efforts to create a student-centric learning environment; and; (iii) Second, providing more support for students with special needs.

(I) SUBSTANTIVE AND INNOVATIVE INVESTMENTS TO DELIVER A STUDENT-CENTRIC EDUCATION

Enhanced School Infrastructure to Support Holistic Education

2. Mrs Josephine Teo and Mdm Halimah Yacob asked for an update on the Primary Education Review and Implementation Committee's (or PERI) recommendations. We are upgrading 40 more Primary schools in Phase 3. This will facilitate primary schools to transit to single session and allow strengthening of non-academic aspects of education like PE, Art and Music.

3. These upgraded schools will have newer and better facilities to support more innovative and engaging lessons. Allow me to cite a few examples.

4. The first slide shows a PE lesson at Hougang Primary School. To support a more holistic education, indoor sports halls such as this will allow PE lessons and CCAs to be conducted throughout the day, rain or shine. All schools that need it will be equipped with synthetic turf, which is cheaper to maintain and can be used immediately after it rains.

5. For the Performing and Visual Arts, schools will have band rooms, dance studios, and performing arts studios. Here we see a Performing Arts Studio at Lianhua Primary, which is integrated into the library to maximise the use of space. We see pupils performing a skit as part of the Programme for Active Learning or PAL, which helps Primary 1 and 2 students develop character and life-skills as well as discover their talents. At last year's COS, I mentioned that MOE was prototyping PAL in 12 schools. I am pleased to update that PAL has been extended to another 24 schools this year.

6. We will redesign classrooms to encourage greater interaction and group learning, and develop 21st century skills such as effective communication and teamwork. We will also provide more out-of-classroom learning facilities, such as eco-ponds and science gardens. This slide shows East Spring Primary students learning about pulleys as part of their science lesson. The next slide shows Tampines Primary's eco-garden where a teacher is conducting a lesson outdoors. This allows students to learn from first-hand experience, rather than just through pictures or books.

7. For schools undergoing upgrading, we will provide additional space so that VWOs can provide student care services after school hours, as Ms Denise Phua

suggested. However, we will leave it to the school to decide depending on their pupils' needs. There are currently Student Care Centres in 36 of our primary schools. MCYS also has financial assistance schemes for lower income households.

8. At present, almost half of our primary schools have already become single session. As we push ahead with upgrading, almost all government primary schools should be able to transit to single session by 2016.

Co-Location of Pek Kio Community Centre and Farrer Park Primary Indoor Sports Hall

9. As we upgrade schools, we have been experimenting with new and innovative models to improve land-efficiency and facilitate community sharing. Today, I am glad to share an upcoming project to co-locate Pek Kio Community Centre with the Indoor Sports Hall of Farrer Park Primary. This will allow the school and CC to share facilities and collaborate on programmes. Details will be announced by PA (the People's Association) later.

Greater Focus on Engaging Pedagogies and Individual Pupil Development

10. We are not investing in infrastructure alone. Arising from PERI's recommendations, we will make learning even more engaging. For instance, MOE has developed additional Mathematics resources for P1 to P6 to support a more customised approach to the teaching of maths concepts. The aim is to give pupils a strong foundation in Mathematics. The resources include manipulatives, game sets, picture cards and posters. Here you can see students holding different shapes to have a better grasp of concepts in the teaching of Maths. We will be equipping all classrooms with these new resources over the next three years. Similar provisions are planned for all other subjects.

11. MOE has also been working with primary schools to place more attention on character development in each pupil. Let me give you an example of what happens in New Town Primary School. Each class has both a Form Teacher and a Co-Form Teacher who follow the class for two years.

12. Miss Mohan, a form teacher, meets her P1 class each morning and spends the time interacting or reading together. Each week during the Form Teacher Guidance Period, she bonds with the class through games, interactive activities, and role play.

13. Miss Mohan meets her pupils one-to-one, and she meets each pupil at least twice a year. Such interactions are used to discuss the reflections that pupils have captured in their learning journals. This allowed Miss Mohan build trust and rapport with her pupils, better track their development, and provide more detailed feedback to their parents.

14. Such good practices to strengthen individual pupil development are also being introduced to other schools. I'm pleased to note that since 2009, more than half the primary schools have already implemented these practices. MOE will continue to support schools to implement PERI's recommendations by providing the necessary

expertise and resourcing support for instance by recruiting more PE, Art and Music teachers.

Greater Student-Centric Focus in Teaching of MTL

15. I will next touch on the teaching and learning of Mother Tongue Languages (MTL) which Mr Ang Mong Seng, Mr Chan Soo Sen, and Mr Low Thia Kiang have spoken about.

16. Sir, in Mandarin, please.

17. 母语教育的宗旨是帮助孩子竭尽所能，充分发挥其潜能，以达到孩子能力所及的最高水平。最近，教育部检讨母语教学，目的是希望我们的学生能够乐学善用母语。检讨委员会提出了母语教学的三大目标：沟通、文化和联系（Communication, Culture and Connection）。委员会深刻了解到要让孩子掌握语言的最有效方法，就是让学生在活学活用中、在真实的情境下，主动积极地使用语言。教学策略和考试方式也将会更紧密地挂钩，帮助学生有效地掌握母语。刘程强议员可能没看过我们在新闻发表会上示范的录像片段，那是一个以团圆饭为主题的短片。老师会针对短片内容和学生进行对话。这个例子说明了在重视语言的使用和能力培养的同时，文化与价值观的传承并不会被忽视。相反的，两者有着优势互补的作用。正如委员会所指出，能在生活中活学活用华语的学生，更能了解自己的文化和传统。

(Translation: MOE's educational goal remains to support and enable every student to learn MTL to the fullest of his or her potential. To achieve this, the recent MTL review articulated the objective of nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users of MTL. The Review Committee also recommended that the goals for MTL learning be centred on 3 'Cs'– Communication, Culture and Connection. It further recognised that language is best learnt when students are taught to use the language in an active and interactive manner in real-life settings. In order to help students achieve proficiency in usage, teaching methods and national examinations will be better aligned. Contrary to what Mr Low has suggested, Nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users does not mean that transmission of culture and values will no longer be important in the teaching of MTL. Mr Low may not have seen a video clip that was shown at the recent MTL Review press conference which featured a reunion dinner. It is an example of what students will watch in the classroom, to trigger further discussion. Not only will such activities strengthening their oracy, it also reinforces understanding of their culture and values. Therefore, as pointed out by the Review Committee, students who use MTL as a living language are more likely to better appreciate their cultures and traditions.)

18. 母语检讨委员会认识到学生因家庭语言背景不同，而有不同的学习起点。在教学方面，我们应该以学生为本，因材施教。根据学生的学习背景采用适当的教学策略。这包括采用激发学生学习动力的策略，以营造积极的学习环境。同时通过贴近生活的情境，有系统地为学生的听说能力打下稳固的基础。教师将使用多样化的教学策略，如通过小组活动促进学生之间的互动，通过歌曲、歌谣、录像和角色扮演来加强口语互动的训练，使学习更生动。

(Translation: The MTL Review Committee recognised that students have different starting points because of different home language environments. As such, a more customised, student-centric approach in the teaching of MTL will be taken. Teachers will be equipped with a range of appropriate pedagogies to cater to different learner profiles. For example, these include motivational strategies to build a positive affirmative learning environment and adopting a more systematic approach to build oracy foundation through contextual learning. Teachers will also be equipped with a variety of classroom strategies, such as the use of group work to encourage interaction, and the use of songs, rhymes and videos as well as role-play to strengthen oral interaction and make learning more engaging.)

19. 母语课程也会增加资讯科技的使用。为了支援教师的教学和评估，教育部将提供更多的多媒体资源如录像、动画及互动游戏。此外，教育部也将创设网上互动平台，帮助学生更好地学习。

(Translation: Another way of customising MTL instruction would be through information and communication technology or ICT. To support teachers to better use ICT in teaching, learning and assessment, multimedia resources such as videos, flash animations and interactive games will be provided. In addition, a web-based interactive portal will be provided to all schools to facilitate students' learning.)

20. 要落实这一切，华文教师扮演着关键的角色。华文教师以及其他母语教师多年来为教学奉献，在工作岗位上竭尽所能，他们的努力是值得表扬，受到肯定的。母语教育最终能否取得成功，取决于教师在课堂上的教学。因此，教育部将加强对师资的培训，帮助他们制定针对性的教学策略。为了了解不同年级华文教师（如小学低年级、中学级）不同的培训需求，新加坡华文教研中心在 2008 年对 2,200 名教师进行了调查，并根据调查结果开办了多项有关语言技能（如写作、阅读理解）和教学策略（如借助资讯科技或故事书进行教学）的课程。目前，我们也正在拟定教师专业能力框架，以指引师资培训。教育部将与国立教育学院、新加坡华文教研中心合作，给予教师培训和支援。教育部也会在 2015 年之前增聘 500 名母语教师。

(Translation: To effectively implement these changes, teachers will play an instrumental role. Over the years, our MTL teachers have made significant contributions in improving teaching approaches. Their efforts are commendable. As teachers are key to whatever we do in education, we will need to first enhance our teacher training, so that teachers can in turn cater to varying student abilities and starting points. In 2008, the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language (SCCL) surveyed 2,200 Chinese Language teachers to identify their training needs and develop courses according to the level that they are teaching (e.g. lower primary, secondary), language skills needed (e.g. composition or comprehension) and teaching pedagogies (e.g. use of ICT or story book). Going forward, to guide training, a teacher-competency framework will be developed. MOE will work with the National Institute of Education (NIE) and SCCL to provide training and support to Chinese Language teachers. MOE will also deploy an additional 500 MTL teachers by 2015.)

21. 针对华文教育，曾士生先生提出了我们要怎样培养华文精英的问题。那些母语能力强、对母语感兴趣的学生，也是这次母语检讨十分关注的对象，我们将帮助他们提升语文能力，以达到更高的水平。

(Translation: Mr Chan Soo Sen asked how we can produce "high peaks" in Chinese Language. In fact, the development of even higher levels of language proficiency for students with the ability and interest is also an important part of the more customised approach to MTL.)

22. 为了增加学生学习高级华文及了解中华文化的机会，教育部将从明年起增设第十一所特选中学——南侨中学。我们也继续推动双文化课程和华文语文特选课程。除此之外，我们还会增设一门新的华文高级水准科目“语言学与翻译”。这门科目有助于培养学生掌握华语的语言结构，并且对培养精通英文和华文的专业人才大有帮助。

(Translation: We have provided for Special Assistance Plan Schools - in fact, we are adding Nan Chiau High next year. We also have the Bicultural Studies Programme and the Chinese Language Elective Programme. On top of this, we will be introducing a new Chinese Linguistics and Translation subject at the 'A' Levels. This subject will provide students with a fundamental understanding of the constructs of the Chinese Language, so as to groom future bilingual professionals with mastery in both English and Chinese Languages.)

23. 值得欣慰的是，以往的母语教育检讨已见成效，修读‘O’水准高级华文的学生人数，从2004年的19%增加到2010年的28%。由此可见，学生对华文的学习兴趣更加浓厚、也更具信心了。

(Translation: In fact, the enhancements made in past reviews have resulted in a larger proportion of O-Level students offering Higher Chinese Language (HCL). The percentage of the O-level cohort offering HCL has increased from 19% in 2004 to 28% in 2010. This shows that our students increasingly see the importance of the Chinese Language and are developing a deeper interest in it.)

24. I fully agree with Mr Ang Mong Seng that we need a conducive environment for students to learn and use the language outside of school. Minister has announced additional funding to the language promotion committees, which will support meaningful programmes. For instance, the Committee to Promote Chinese Language Learning (CPCLL) has launched a Cultural Performance Exposure Scheme to engage youth from different home language backgrounds. Take up has been positive - increasing from 20 schools when it started in 2009 to more than 70 schools this year, benefiting 10,000 students. The Malay Language Learning Promotion Committee (MLLPC) organises an annual Malay Language Quiz (Kuiz Cepat Tepat) in collaboration with MediaCorp, attracting participants from 110 schools, capturing some 100,000 viewers. The Tamil Language Learning Promotion Committee (TLLPC) co-organises with the Tamil Language Council, a range of activities for the Tamil Language Festival which include a debate series, forums and drama festival.

25. Parents too can play an important part by giving their children early exposure and creating opportunities to use their mother tongue. It is heartening that the 2010

MTL survey revealed that the majority of parents, regardless of language spoken at home, acknowledged the importance of learning MTL.

26. I am glad to note that public feedback on the recommendations of the MTL Review Committee has been largely positive. Many parents and community groups agree with the rationale for the changes and affirmed our bilingual policy.

(II) GENERAL EDUCATION MATTERS

27. I will now address specific issues raised by Members.

School Curriculum and Hours, Private Tuition

28. Mr Lim Biow Chuan, Mr Ong Kian Min and A/P Paulin Straughan touched on school curriculum and hours. Some members also spoke about private tuition earlier. Let me take these issues together.

29.. MOE believes in a balanced and holistic education for our children, and we are rebalancing the system to focus more on 21st century skills and values, as well as non-cognitive aspects of development. We also review the curriculum regularly. As part of the Teach Less, Learn More initiative, curriculum content in recent years has been reduced by as much as 30%.

30. Guidelines have been provided to School Leaders to ensure careful consideration goes into setting schools' start and end times, as well as holiday homework. The curriculum is also designed to allow schools to complete the syllabus within school hours and prepare students adequately for examinations. To help weaker students, teachers may conduct remedial lessons out of their good intention. Such lessons are not compulsory. Parents will be informed in advance, and have the choice to opt their children out. Where holiday homework is given, teachers typically do so judiciously, and purposefully.

31. Beyond what schools provide, some parents choose to provide their children more support through tuition. This is a choice for parents to make. They would need to assess whether this will overburden the child and whether the child would benefit more by spending the time in other ways, such as reading or exercising. While some students find private tuition helpful, it could lead to undue stress and underperformance for others. There are also many students who succeed without tuition, by paying attention in class, consulting teachers and working consistently throughout the year.

32. I would like to quote you an example of such a student. H Sharanya Pillai who was from Riverside Secondary is a case in point. She scored nine A1s during last year's O levels and was one of the top students, without the help of tuition. She comes from humble background – according to the ST report, her father is a security guard, her mother a part-time retail assistant. With a monthly household income of \$1,300 it is no surprise that tuition was probably something she did not even consider. But she managed her time well – minimising on travelling time by attending a secondary school 10 minutes away from her home, she had more time to study and rest. She even did the Chinese Special Programme where she got an A1. She aspires to be a doctor some day, and we wish her well. This is just one example

of a student who excelled through the support of her school teachers, her family and her own hard work and determination.

33. Schools also conduct co-curricular activities to offer students a holistic and broad-based development. For Secondary schools and JCs, some CCAs might start later in the day when it is cooler, or in the evenings for valid reasons (e.g. camps, concerts).

34. Our approach is to give our schools the autonomy to vary the hours of instruction time based on what is best in the educational interests of their pupils. Specifying that all activities should end by 6.00 pm, as A/P Straughan has suggested, could curtail meaningful activities. Nevertheless, MOE will continue to promote the importance of healthy work-family-life balance for teachers and pupils.

35. With regard to primary schools in particular, MOE's guidelines for single-session school are that P1-2 pupils could have a slightly extended curriculum day ending at 1.30 pm. This is taking into account the increased emphasis on non-academic aspects of the curriculum. P3-6 pupils could have up to two longer days in a week, to include enrichment or CCA activities, though these are entirely optional. Since primary schools have gone single session, we note that school hours have remained within these specified guidelines.

(III) MORE SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

36. Turning now to Special Education.

Support for Special Needs Children and SPED Schools

37. Ms Sylvia Lim suggested a central agency to provide information to parents. Currently, MOE's website provides information on Special Education schools and the programmes that they offer, as well as educational pathways for special needs students. In addition, the Centre of Enabled Living (CEL) was set up in 2009 to be such a first stop information and referral centre for eldercare and disability services.

38. Ms Lim also asked about means-testing of SPED school fees. Allow me to clarify that government funding to SPED schools is not based on any means-tested formula. Rather, MOE provides SPED schools an annual per capita grant of two-and-a-half times that of primary education in a mainstream school. On average, MOE invests \$17,000 annually in each SPED school student, much more than the \$7,000 for students in mainstream primary schools. This significantly subsidises the cost of education for special needs students.

39. Parents pay school fees charged by the individual SPED schools, which are run by Voluntary Welfare Organisations. The schools have various financial assistance schemes to help those in need. With the extension of the Financial Assistance Scheme to SPED schools, those in need will get even more support. For a low income family with a child with multiple disabilities attending the AWWA school, for instance, this can be about an additional one thousand dollars or so in assistance a year, on top of the \$17,000 MOE is already investing. This also means that SPED schools can re-position their own assistance schemes to support more students.

40. Currently, most SPED schools have sufficient places to meet the demands for admission. Students who were unable to enrol in SPED schools of their choice are currently enrolled in other SPED or mainstream schools, depending on their needs.

Building Inclusive Educational Institutions

41. MOE has also enhanced the capabilities of mainstream schools to cater to students with mild special needs. We agree with Ms Denise Phua that our educational institutions need to be inclusive and thank her for her suggestions. Ms Phua would be glad to note that we are doing more to support those who are hearing or physically-impaired or are visually handicapped, in our mainstream schools. MOE collaborates with VWOs to support the learning needs of these students.

42. We are similarly extending support at the Post-Secondary Education Institutes (PSEIs). Such support is provided through a three-step process. The first step involves the identification of students and their special needs. For instance, the universities identify any special needs students might have during the admissions process, which includes medical examinations. Second, these students are then put in touch with counsellors who customise appropriate arrangements, such as facilitating physical access. Academic faculty may also modify teaching and examination methods appropriately, such as through providing extra notes, scripts with larger fonts or additional time for exams. Third, teachers and faculty are trained to provide learning support and pastoral care to these students.

CONCLUSION

43. Sir, I have outlined the efforts MOE will be making to enhance the learning experience of our students. Our focus will be to equip our students for the 21st century through a holistic education – providing them with the necessary skills, values and knowledge to succeed. MOE is committed to ensuring opportunities for all Singaporeans to realise their full potential, regardless of background.

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