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SPEECH BY MR WAN HUSSIN ZOOHRI, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY  
(HEALTH AND CULTURE), AT SI LING SECONDARY SCHOOL'S SPEECH  
DAY ON SATURDAY 25 AUGUST 1984 AT 9.00 AM

Let me begin my speech with a quotation from Sir Henry Hadow, the architect of the English education system. He said, "What a wise and good parent will desire for his own children, a nation must desire for all children."

This quotation is valid now as it was in the 1930's when it was made by Sir Henry Hadow, Chairman of the Education Consultative Committee. The present educational system desires the best for all children. It focuses its attention on every child in school. The present system, through the streaming mechanism, tries to identify the educational potential of every child. It wants to match the child's potential and ability with the educational diet he is able to take.

It is understandable that the streaming process has evoked much public controversy. What is often forgotten is that children of different abilities and potential cannot be made to undergo the same educational content. Granted that the streaming instruments are not perfect. But there are adequate checks and balances to rectify the weaknesses of the streaming instruments. These educational instruments are constantly monitored and reviewed and steps to fine-tune them are being taken.

The group of children who drew much public attention was the below average group. In the initial stage, there were teachers and parents who showed lack of understanding

and concern for this group. Some teachers teaching this below average children were not able to readjust their psychological and emotional frequency to that of the children they teach. Understandably, some teachers are themselves trapped in the doldrums of educational inertia and boredom.

Similarly, there were parents who were resigned to the same fate. They themselves stigmatised their children as backward and stupid. They would rather take away their children from the school and subject them to premature employment.

The purpose of my mentioning this group of below average pupils is to remind them that life in school is just the beginning or the preparation for entry into the adult world or the world of employment. By being in the monolingual or the normal stream class does not mean that their future is bleak. What is more important is to know their own strengths and weaknesses early and to make preparations or adjustments down the road. Life in school does not end in acquiring academic knowledge alone. What they lack in academic knowledge can be compensated by acquiring the more enduring qualities. These enduring qualities will eventually help them to progress in life. I would therefore urge them to realise the following points:

- 1 You must realise that learning does not take place in school alone. There are ample opportunities for you to better yourselves even if you have left school. What is most important is that you are prepared to continue learning and improving yourselves. In other words, you must acquire the spirit of perseverance.

- 2 Success in life can come in many forms. If you are academically less endowed, there are other non-academically oriented courses and employment open to you. The question is whether you are prepared to accept them. There are many vocational institutions in Singapore which you could enrol to make you economically productive. Here you must acquire that challenging spirit.
  
- 3 Success can only be achieved through hard work and discipline. You must develop these qualities while you are in school. With hard work and discipline, you can face the adult world with confidence and promise. Never be disheartened with initial failure. It is well to remember that profits and gain, success and achievement are derived only by the amount of hard work and discipline you put in.

In short, I want to emphasise that those who are by academic standards considered below average have other avenues open to them in order to be successful in life. In a fair and open society like ours, where vocational and employment opportunities are abundant, every Singaporean can strive to his maximum potential, each according to his own ability. The criteria for success are hard work, discipline, perseverance and the spirit of life-long education and self-improvement. These qualities can be acquired irrespective of what educational stream you belong in school. These are the more enduring qualities that you should develop while in school.

I would now like to say a few words about school and parental attitude. There is enough educational literature to say that there is a close association between parental support and encouragement and the pupils' educational performance.

In our present school set-up, there appears to be only limited school-parent interactions. Other than the regular Speech Day, Sports Day and the beginning of an academic year, there seems to be an absence of a regular or an on-going school-home relationship. This is an area which, I think, needs further development. Let me make an analogy.

If your son is sick or suffering from an acute ailment, you take him to see a doctor. The doctor prescribes your son the necessary medication. He then requests your son to come back for another appointment. Until he sees your son progressing with the treatment he gives and assures that your son is cured, he would ask you to bring your son back to his clinic as often as he thinks necessary.

Similarly, a teacher's relationship to his pupil is somewhat akin to that of the doctor to his patient. What the teacher teaches in school must be supplemented by parental support. This home support cannot be taken for granted. The school needs to know, especially for those children with problems, if parents are discharging their roles at home. This can only be ascertained through regular dialogue with the parents.

I realise that this school is aware of this aspect of parental involvement. I would urge that this area be given greater emphasis. There should be an on-going meet-the-parent session in school. This should be institutionalised in the school's calendar. Because of

manpower constraint, you could narrow your target group to the "children with problems" and also to "problem children". I also realise that this entails additional work and preparation on the part of the school staff. But I can assure you that as educators, the results gained in being able to resolve the children's "educational bottlenecks" through parental involvement are much more rewarding than the humdrum of classroom teaching.

To the parents, I wish to appeal that you are equally, if not more responsible, for your children's performance in school. Your care and concern, your home discipline and your supportive attitude towards the school are crucial to your children's educational success. The school and the home must be partners in the child's educational performance. Only then can the school and the society really play a symbiotic role in the nation's educational progress.

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