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SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT AND SECOND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
AT THE 17TH CONVOCATION OF THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE AUDITORIUM  
ON SATURDAY, 31 OCTOBER 1987 AT 10.00 AM<sup>2</sup>

Being at this morning's Convocation is almost a home-coming to me. Twenty years ago I was in your position sitting in the hall of the former Teachers' Training College at Paterson Road, waiting to receive my Certificate-in-Education, as you are waiting for your diploma now.

I began my working career as a teacher. During those three years of part-time course at the TTC, I had to cope with teaching, school work and studies. The former TTC campus was not as spacious and large as the IE Campus in Bukit Timah. Nevertheless, I enjoyed those days and the short, two-year stint at the Dunearn Vocational School.

Today, things are much better for trainee teachers as well as for teachers. Full-time courses allow you to complete your training in much shorter time. The Institute of Education also now offers PhD and Masters in Education as well as professional upgrading programmes for primary and secondary school teachers and Educational Administration Programmes for school principals.

Teachers now enjoy better service conditions and salary scales than their counterparts with equivalent qualifications in the civil service. All these measures are designed to attract committed and dedicated teachers into the teaching profession.

Teaching has been described, in a rather hackneyed way, as a noble profession. Unfortunately, few teachers see it this way. Many feel so bogged down by the weight of their work that they do not see their mission. They feel that besides teaching in the classroom, they have to deal with a lot of paper work concerning their students. But whatever "administrative" work they have to do, and these "administrative" functions change over time, their central mission has not changed.

What is the role of the teacher? A teacher is not just someone who imparts academic knowledge. He is also a moulder of character, a transmitter of values, and an inspirator of ideas. He helps to foster the intellectual, emotional and moral growth of the children under his charge. His efforts either ensure that our future generation grows up to be civic-conscious, socially compassionate, responsible citizens or selfish, self-centred, irresponsible individuals.

Teachers are remembered not so much for their knowledge but rather for the lessons in life which they teach their pupils. I remember two types of teachers. One, those who prepared their work, worked hard, cared for their pupils' well-being and overall character improvement and two, those who did the minimum and did not care if their students learn.

I was recently told of a story, no doubt apocryphal, of a junior college maths teacher. He was trying to solve a problem on the chalkboard but after two attempts, he still could not get near the solution. Obviously, he did not prepare his work. Some students murmured, "Oh, so boring!". And the teacher quickly cleaned the chalkboard and said that since they found the topic boring, they were invited to come forward to tell jokes to the class, whereupon some did.

To the dedicated teachers, teaching is a mentally exhausting job. But they derive satisfaction in seeing a job well done, and their students benefitting in the process. Even though not many students openly and directly express gratitude to such teachers, deep down their hearts, they appreciate them. These teachers I admire and respect. They certainly know that education goes beyond the textbooks.

For a growing, impressionistic student, there are two role models: his parents and his teachers. It is therefore important for teachers to be good role models for their students. They can encourage their students to be compassionate and caring by being so themselves. They can instill positive values such as honour, loyalty, teamwork, responsibility, industriousness, filial piety and so on by exhibiting these values themselves. Example is better than precept.

One way for teachers to pass on such values is by involving themselves in service to the community. In this way, they not only show an example to their students but they are also able to affect a wider community. I know that teachers today have a lot of work. Some may find it difficult to handle another role, besides their responsibilities at home and in school. But if they can find a way to organise and apportion their time, they will be able to make a major contribution to those in need. In fact, some teachers are already involved in community work.

In Singapore, we do not believe that the Government should shoulder the sole responsibility of looking after the needy and less fortunate in society. We have seen how state welfarism has engendered selfish individuals who only care for themselves and what they can get out of others. These individuals do not even care for their own families - much less their friends and neighbours.

We believe in tri-partite cooperation in many aspects of our life, including the area of community and social service. We believe that there should be a role for voluntary and private initiative. Participation of volunteers in community work involves them in such work and adds to their care and concern for other people. Many volunteers have found self-fulfilment and a sense of achievement and satisfaction in helping the less fortunate.

Volunteers are required in almost every field - in welfare work helping the disadvantaged and distressed, in promoting our cultural heritage and in grassroots organisations. There is much to be done, and much to be gained if we only have the desire to want to help. As teachers you know only too well the satisfaction you can get in helping others who need our help.

You can also help your students participate in community work by arranging for them to volunteer their services in welfare homes, be befrienders to the disabled and aged and "brothers" and "sisters" to less fortunate children and youths, and a host of other activities. You can start social service clubs in your schools for such a purpose. In this way, you will be promoting social defence and the building of a spirit of community amongst Singaporeans.

It is appropriate for me to acknowledge the contribution of the Institute of Education in helping the less fortunate. It responded readily to the plight of the special schools for trained teachers to teach disabled children by introducing a Certificate in Special Education Programme. The first batch of 37 teachers have completed their Certificate in Special Education and will also be graduating today.

The Institute of Education also responded to my Ministry's concern over the quality of child care training child care teachers for child care centres. To date, 420 child care personnel from both private and public organisations have attended various child care courses conducted by the Institute. I would like to thank the Director Institute of Education and the IE Council for their support.

Finally, may I offer my congratulations to all 836 of you for successfully completing your course of training. I am indeed happy to share your success. Your graduation marks the end of your formal training and the beginning of your career and I wish you all the best in your career.

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