



Speeches

Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence, at the MOE Work Plan Seminar 2009, on Thursday, 17 September 2009 at 9.30am at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic Convention Centre

Teachers — the Heart of Quality Education

Mr S Iswaran
Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education

Ms Grace Fu
Senior Minister of State for National Development and Education

Mr Masagos Zulkifli
Senior Parliamentary Secretary

Mrs Tan Ching Yee
Permanent Secretary

Ms Yeoh Chee Yan
Second Permanent Secretary

Ms Ho Peng
Director-General of Education

Principals

Colleagues

2009 Year-in-Review

1 It is a pleasure to join you at this year's Work Plan seminar — my second, since I joined MOE last April. As a virtuous habit, we use this occasion as one MOE family to take stock of the progress made and rally around our priorities for the work-year ahead.

2 So, what has this past year been like? I think all would agree, it has been a busier year than usual. At the last WPS, I shared that one of my top priorities was to listen to teachers, principals and school leaders. As a result of your inputs, the PERI Committee was set up and chaired by SMS Grace Fu. Their recommendations have been accepted by the Government. We aim to have all government primary schools move to single session by 2016. To achieve this, we are building 18 more new schools and expanding up to 80 existing ones, even in the midst of a global financial crisis. MOE also stepped up hiring and this year was a bumper harvest for new teachers - we recruited 3,361 in total, compared to an average of 2,300 in previous years. We also started a new career track for Allied Educators, which attracted many applicants. Again a record number of 964 Allied Educators have been recruited.

3 I have met many Allied Educators during my school visits. They cheer me with their warm attitudes, good values and enthusiasm. Many are mid career entrants who are well qualified and held steady jobs prior to being allied educators, but switched because they wanted to respond to this "constant calling", almost an insatiable urge, some profess. I met one Allied Educator recently who has a Masters degree, with extensive corporate experience and now relishing his new role in counseling school children and their families from lower income groups in a neighbourhood primary school. We need more like him. Many Allied Educators want to upgrade and aspire to be teachers in a few years. I wish them every success and MOE will support this. This is positive for our system as a whole.

4 To respond to the financial crisis, MOE stepped up financial assistance and Edusave grants to schools last year. We put \$80 million more into the system. In my school visits, many principals and teachers have said how useful the increased funding has been to children from lower socio-economic groups. This is good.

5 Apart from PERI, three other significant events kept us all busy: H1N1 struck in April and here I must commend our schools for their dedicated efforts in containing the spread. A crisis team was formed at MOE to manage this effort. I know that schools worked very hard and it was a difficult and arduous task to measure temperatures twice daily, break up school communities into small groups so that they would not cross contaminate one another, and to deal with children who fell ill. All this, while having to continue with normal school activities. The able leadership of the crisis team and principals and the strong teamwork amongst teachers working in concert with parents to protect our students, kept them safe and prevented massive outbreaks. This helped to maintain public confidence. This is why PM made special mention of your efforts in his National Day Rally speech.

6 MOE also had to organise the inaugural Asian Youth Games (AYG) in the midst of H1N1. 5,600 teachers, students and other personnel volunteered. Feedback from Council members and visitors was uniformly positive and they judged it to be an overwhelming success. They were impressed with not only the organisation and smooth running but felt the warmth and enthusiasm of spirited teachers and students.

7 This year also saw over a thousand principals and teachers from 40 countries, converging in Singapore for the 9th World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals. Then, I also met with Ministers from other top-performing systems, for a roundtable dialogue.

8 Ministers and delegates from all around the world came to learn from our achievements in Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the McKinsey Report. US and Sweden were interested in areas such as mathematics and science, and vocational and technical education. Others like China were keen to learn how we develop quality teachers and school leaders.

9 Many schools here received these foreign delegations in July and impressed them with the quality of instruction and level of resources. Visitors noted the high level of engagement of our students. But most importantly, they noted that these positive traits were present across all schools and not just a few at the top.

10 It has been a busy year but one that has been productive and fulfilling. We worked hard but all of us can rightly feel satisfied that we have accomplished much this past year. We have started new initiatives that will build on our strong fundamentals as well as guide us forward in the right educational direction.

11 Amidst all the activity, I continued my conversations with the many Principals and teachers during school visits and special lunches. I purposefully asked for presentations to be kept short because I wanted more time to be able to talk with you. From your inputs, I want to talk about two important issues today. The first is on language instruction in our schools and second teacher development.

Language and Communication Skills

12 I want to focus on language instruction because it is a recurrent theme in almost every conversation with teachers, parents, other stakeholders and students themselves. Our bilingual policy has served us well. In fact, more school systems elsewhere are opting to teach their students a foreign language in response to the rise of China and India and a more globalised world. Some schools in Finland and US have chosen Mandarin as their foreign language and it is no longer an unusual sight to see classes of non-Chinese reciting Mandarin nursery rhymes. In my last visit to PRC a few months ago, they told me that more Koreans and Japanese have enrolled their children into schools in China, because they see a growing market and importance there.

13 At the same time, growing numbers of Asians from India to China, from Korea to Indonesia, are learning English so as to plug into the globalised world. Now more than ever, the strategic advantage of our bilingual policy to Singapore and Singaporeans has become apparent.

14 However, our task to teach both English and the MTL well to our students here is challenging because of our complex language environment. And the landscape is changing rapidly. Let me explain. [slide (<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/images/2009/wps/pr-students-english-speaking.jpg>)] This slide shows how since the 1980s, more of our Primary 1 students are coming from households where English is the dominant home language. Let me illustrate how dramatic and quick these changes have been. Only 1 in 10 of Primary 1 Chinese students in 1982 (quarter century, age 33 today) came from homes that used English — the figure today is nearly 6 in 10. For Indians it has moved from 3 in 10 to 6 in 10; Malays — 0.5 in 10 to 3.5 in 10. A seismic shift in language environment has occurred within one generation. Those above 40 years of age today would have grown up in homes that spoke their MTL, either predominantly or partly, either with parents, grandparents or siblings. But increasingly, children of all races now come from homes that speak English predominantly or only.

15 How do we respond to this fundamental shift in the language environment of homes in Singapore? We want to maintain our bilingual policy but how should we adapt it, so that it continues to be relevant and effective? I believe we can achieve an acceptable standard of English and also help our students gain proficiency in their MTL. We can teach both EL and MTL well, but it will require different methods of instruction. We have already begun to adapt through STELLAR and the new MTL curricula being implemented in schools, to evolve better approaches to the teaching of languages for more effective outcomes in our learners. Effectiveness must also be measured by how students can express themselves clearly and communicate with impact, and not just a good grade on their report cards. Let me first touch on English and then move on to MTL.

Speaking English Well — A Key Asset

16 Since returning to MOE last year, I have received much feedback from stakeholders and our teachers. The standards of English can be raised and we ought to be speaking better, they tell me. This goal is in line with our student outcomes for Curriculum 2015 and the PERI Committee's focus to nurture each child into a confident person, a self-directed learner, an active contributor and a concerned citizen. Recently, as we do annually, MOE briefed the Public Service Commission (PSC) members on these directions. One PSC member spontaneously shared how these simple goals resonated, and he was glad that we were headed in that direction. He and many others were delighted that we are focusing on 21st century skills, because all of us recognize that these will be needed for our students to perform well in society and life.

17 The Education Ministers whom I met during the international roundtable were also unanimous in recognising these traits as not just good to have, but increasingly necessary for students to participate actively in modern economies. These conclusions gel with a survey conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers in 2007. The survey covered almost 3,000 new graduates from China, the US and the UK, where 94% believed that they would work across geographic borders more than their parents did. We have a duty to prepare our students well for the world that they will live in.

18 Language ability is therefore an important skill that we must cultivate in our students for this globalised world. Singapore made the right decision in the 1960s to adopt English as the common language of instruction. Parents even then in the 60s could already see its growing importance. They opted for their children to study in English-medium schools. We could not have anticipated the wave of globalization that would sweep the world two decades later, but when it came and with English as its lingua franca, Singapore was lifted even higher than we had imagined. Even in France, nationalistic upholders of their own language, a survey showed that 80% of the French people acknowledged that English is the most useful language to know in Europe, apart from their own mother tongue.

19 Our emphasis on English has indeed paid off. But teachers tell me the standard of English can be improved and attention must be paid not only to reading and writing, but speaking as well. In fact, the majority of our students are strong in reading literacy, as measured by PIRLS. But language instruction should also lead to better communication skills. While most teachers are proud of our standards in say Maths and Science, we are less enamored of our standard of English. This is a sensitive subject and I raise it not to demoralize teachers and students, but to signal that we should begin concerted efforts to raise the standard of English.

20 Let me be clear. We are not setting the goal to produce in all our students world class debaters or winners in elocution competitions. But we do want the majority of our students to be able to speak proper English, express themselves clearly and be understood. To be able to communicate well will become increasingly important in their working lives, whether they work here or abroad. At the basic level, those who can communicate their ideas to market their ideas and products, or convince others will have an edge over others.

21 To put this into perspective, our schools have made progress in English since the last review in 2006. For example, the STELLAR (Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading) programme has been implemented at Pr across all schools this year, and will be phased in at all other levels by 2014. Through STELLAR, the use of show-and-tell, role play and dramatization develop oracy skills among our young. We are already seeing results. At East View Primary School, teachers observe how previously unwilling readers are now reading aloud to each other. Weaker pupils are able to read and speak confidently in front of their classmates. At Princess Elizabeth Primary, pupils express themselves better and speak with more confidence during their oral examinations.

22 We should maintain the momentum to improve the standard of English. Some schools are prototyping the Programme for Active Learning (PAL), recommended by PERI, next year. One of them — Park View Primary — intends to bring its pupils on more outdoor excursions to parks and museums as part of their art lessons, and have them present their work through story-telling sessions to a live audience. It will help build confidence and reinforce oracy skills.

23 I am also cheered that teachers recognise that they must be role models whether during teaching or conversing with other teachers and students. School leaders too, play an important part in setting high expectations. Some schools do pay more attention to spoken English and as a result produce students who speak well and reflect favourably on their teachers. At CHIJ Kellock for example, there is a conscious effort to speak good English, and to make English learning fun - school corridors are decorated with posters spelling out common grammar mistakes. The school also has a Speak Good English Fortnight to give special focus to this effort, where platforms like story-telling sessions, and speech and drama are used to encourage pupils to speak up and speak well. "Taboo" phrases are highlighted so that pupils are aware of how they speak. The pupils catch on and look forward to new "taboo" words so that they can catch their friends or teachers using it.

24 Another example is Bukit Panjang Government High. The school includes public speaking lessons in their English lessons, at least once a fortnight, for an hour each time. Extra enrichment time is also provided for the N(A) and N(T) classes, to help the students build confidence in speaking well. I want to commend these schools that invest time and effort to help their students communicate well. This is a wise investment and a valuable cache that they have provided for life in their students.

25 We are not alone in aspiring to raise the standard of English and help our students speak better English. Many countries in the region and globally want this too. You would have recently read of developments in Malaysia — the Government plans to revert to the use of Bahasa Malaysia in state schools to teach Maths and Science from 2012 onwards. But they also want to enhance the teaching of English as a

separate subject, by hiring additional English teachers and doubling the time allocated to teaching English in schools. MOE receives many requests from educational officials in ASEAN countries to assist them in teaching English. There is a shortage of good English teachers worldwide.

26 To give this important effort a big push, MOE has set up an English Language Task Force headed by DGE, with SMS Iswaran as advisor. They are studying a number of key strategic measures which they will announce in due course. One of their recommendations is to set up an English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS). I support this idea. It will help us build deeper capabilities in EL proficiency training for teachers. We need more specialist teachers and linguistic experts to develop effective strategies. Ours is a complex environment where children are exposed to different syntax, grammar and structures in multiple languages from young. We need to pool much needed expertise and training resources in teaching English to bilingual learners at the national level. ELIS should be a hub for teachers to share effective strategies to develop students into confident and articulate speakers. The Institute will also provide pathways for more linguistic experts who can help improve classroom practices across all schools. In the longer term, the Institute can even cater to EL teachers in the region and beyond. Singapore can aim to become an English teaching hub for Asia. But to do this, we must first raise the level of English within our schools.

27 So, my first challenge today for our teaching service is — raise the standard of English. Just as we are renowned for high standards in Maths and Science, we should aim to be known for producing students who express themselves well in English. For the teaching fraternity here, we want to be proud of that ability in our students.

MTLs - Helping our students use it

28 This progressive trend where a growing number of households use English will impact greatly on the teaching and learning of MTL. We will maintain our bilingual policy because it will increasingly be a valued asset. Experts predict that this will be the Asian century, with the rise of China and India. Our immediate neighbours, Indonesia — the fourth largest democracy in the world — and Malaysia offer abundant opportunities and knowing their language will be advantageous. But if our bilingual policy is to remain relevant and effective, we must deal with the reality decisively. We must first accept that our students today and more so in the years ahead will grow up in a language environment radically different compared to that of previous generations.

29 Recently I spoke with a father who studied in our SAP schools. He is now nearly 40 and steeped in CL - reads CL newspapers, books and enjoys classics. His wife too was from a SAP school and they speak to each other in CL. They speak CL too to his parents. In fact his father was a CL teacher in that same SAP school. So the language environment is predominantly Chinese. He has a five year-old son, and he told me his son prefers English and did not like to use Chinese. The grandfather, the CL teacher is urging him to do something about this. He is trying but finding difficulty. I asked him how our CL teaching in primary school can help. He advised me to make the teaching of MTL more fun and relevant to daily life. Focus on speaking and using the language, even if it meant less focus on formal writing. He was cheered when I said indeed that was the direction we were taking. I asked him if the grandfather would be upset, with this approach of teaching CL. He replied honestly, that what mattered to him was that his son would learn to use the language and liked it.

30 This challenge is not confined to MTL-CL alone. In my recent school visit, one teacher who teaches MTL told me that while her children spoke Malay at home, her nephews and nieces did not. Another Tamil teacher commented that the Tamil her children learnt in school was too formal and did not lead to them using more of the language at home.

31 We need to face these challenges for MTL squarely. English as the lingua franca of ICT will exacerbate the lack of exposure to hearing and speaking MTL. Language must involve listening and speaking. You need to hear it and speak it to remain proficient. Currently, MTL lessons at primary level take up around an hour per day or 20% of curriculum time. Of the remaining hours at home, current surveys show that 70% of those aged 7-14 spend on average half an hour to 2 hours online, most likely using English. This is the living — the listening and hearing — environment of our students today.

32 The profile of mother tongue language teachers has also evolved — more of them are coming from bilingual backgrounds and understand the practical challenges of teaching the mother tongue languages in a predominantly English speaking environment. For example, 70% of Singaporean CL teachers had learnt English as first language, up from 27% in 2000.

33 These trends affecting students, teachers and indeed society as a whole led to the CL review in 2004, and the ML and TL reviews in 2005, where the main goals were to customise the teaching of MTL to learners with different learning needs, and enthuse our students in using their mother tongues. The changes arising from the review thus focus on differentiated instruction, greater emphasis on oral skills and reading, as well as greater use of info-communications technologies.

34 The first batch of students will sit for the revised format PSLE next year. The new secondary curriculum will be rolled out in 2011. Let me give a progress update on these changes, many of which have been positive.

35 The initial results of the new primary CL curriculum are promising. The modular approach has led to improved oracy as well as an increase in the level of engagement among pupils. In particular, the bridging modules have benefited our weaker CL students, many of whom come from English Language-speaking homes.

36 For Malay and Tamil language, the emphasis has similarly been on more customisation to cater to different groups of learners, with greater emphasis on developing confidence and fluency in oral communication, using real-life settings. Teachers have also taken advantage of multi-media resources and Web 2.0 tools to create more authentic and lively environments for language learning.

37 In West View Primary school for example, the ML teachers use podcasts to improve listening comprehension skills among the P6 pupils. The pupils download a podcast on current affairs issues presented by Warna Radio Station and discuss them in class. In Crescent Girls School, the TL students record their speeches and news readings, upload them online and receive feedback from both their teacher and peers. As a result they are speaking more Tamil.

38 In Victoria school, I hear that the CL teachers are now exploring the use of Facebook and Twitter to teach narrative and descriptive writing. They find Facebook more interactive than blogs and discussion forums, while Twitter will allow students to capture their reflections on mobile phones through “tweets”, even as they are on the move during school excursions.

39 More and more, our teachers are making use of creative teaching methods and everyday technologies, to encourage functional use of the mother tongues in daily life.

40 The second challenge for language instruction is therefore to help our students use their MTL and have a foundation upon which to build further. The 2004 and 2005 reviews for MTL have produced results and we will progressively step up efforts in that direction. Put simply, we want our students, after all the effort in learning MTL for 10 years or so, to use it and better still read the newspapers and books in their MTL because they have cultivated an interest. If our students are put off their MTL when they leave schools, then I think we have failed in our efforts. Especially in the learning of MTL, we may have to move away from teaching to the test, to focus on other equally important outcomes of usage and appreciation. I want to assure everyone that despite the push to raise the standard of English, we will not reduce curriculum time for MTL. But, with the same time available, we will have to find more innovative ways to teach MTL.

41 I am also glad to report that more of our students are pursuing higher levels of mother tongue languages. Last year, 24% of O-level MTL candidates offered higher mother tongue, compared to 15% in 2000. Special programmes such as the Chinese and Malay Language Elective Programmes at A-levels, the Bicultural Studies Programme (Chinese), and our SAP schools for CL, have also enabled those with the ability, to attain a higher level of proficiency, and master a deeper appreciation of the language, literature and culture.

42 As a system, we have therefore evolved differentiated approaches to cater to students with different learning abilities and English language environments at home. We have increased the weightings of oral and listening comprehension in the MTL national examinations, to place more emphasis on the use of language in authentic, everyday contexts. The MTL ‘B’ curriculum caters to our weaker language students, with more focus on oral skills.

43 For CL ‘B’, we can go further. We ought to glean useful learning points from practices elsewhere — in the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK), the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement (USA) tests that teach CL to students with minimal exposure to the language in their living environment, which indeed approximates the environment of students taking CL ‘B’ here. Some years ago, a pilot program was launched to use English to teach CL (“Bilingual Approach”). The pilot showed that this approach was useful for students who were weaker in the language. The students showed more enthusiasm during CL lessons because they could better understand the lessons, and were more ready to ask and answer questions. This approach has proven useful despite initial misgivings and our CL teachers receive training on how to use this pedagogy, during their NIE training. We must continue to be open and adopt effective and proven methods, and allow our teachers to use a range of methods based on the varied learning needs of our students.

44 To facilitate the teaching of MTL in a more challenging and dynamic language environment, we have also set up the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language earlier this year, to develop a niche in in-service CL teacher training and serve as a test-bed for innovative teaching methods. For Tamil language, we have the Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre, which serves as a national Tamil Language Resource Centre for teachers and students. I think there are good reasons for a similar outfit for Malay. I have asked SPS Masagos to lead a review to decide if we need one for Malay language.

45 This push to raise levels of proficiency in language instruction is an important one for our education system. We want to raise the standard of English and to ensure that our students speak better English. We want them to be able to use their Mother tongue. I recognise that efforts must be sustained and MOE will provide added resources and attention required. If we succeed, we will add a substantial asset to all our students in addition to the high standards of maths and science. We must do this well.

Growing a World-Class Education Service

Teacher-Driven Culture of Professional Excellence

46 Next, let me speak on enabling teachers to develop themselves. A good education system depends on high quality teachers who constantly seek to improve their practice, supported by school leaders and administrators, and resources from departments and agencies within MOE.

47 Our HR schemes have succeeded in attracting and recruiting good teachers. We set a target of 30,000 teachers in our schools and have achieved this. By 2015, we should have a teaching force of some 33,000 teachers and be recruiting from the graduate pool or those who qualify for an undergraduate degree.

48 Currently, 75% of our Education Officers have a bachelor's degree, of whom 10% hold Masters degrees and above. We will continue to support teachers who wish to upgrade their qualifications. New initiatives like the Professional Development Packages, Masters and Doctoral Study Leave, and Teachers' Work Attachment have been well received. About 1,000 teachers are currently making use of these schemes to pursue higher qualifications.

49 MOE will open up more pathways for professional upgrading. Next year, NIE will launch the practitioner-based, part-time Master of Teaching (MTeach) programme, to cater to teachers with 2 to 5 years of teaching experience.

50 But we also need courses that can improve teaching practices in classrooms. These should cater to different subjects as well as teaching students of varying abilities. Some teachers want to learn better ways to help slow learners, as they are in charge of learning support programs. Other teachers want to know how they can stretch high ability students. Different subject teachers have expressed specific needs too. I spoke to a well trained Art teacher obviously passionate about his role in a JC but wished he could have more opportunities and a formal community of Art teachers that he could share best practices and challenges with. Physical educators and music teachers in our schools share this same aspiration. How do we cater to these diverse needs? Neither NIE nor current Masters and PhD programs address this optimally.

Professional Learning Communities — Teachers driving professionalism

51 We need to build capacity for teachers themselves to take the lead in professional upgrading. Around 50 schools today are piloting the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs). For example, the teachers at Ngee Ann Secondary have organised themselves into learning teams by subject, and the school is taking advantage of its niche in ICT, to leverage on online platforms so that teachers can connect with one another, apart from having face-to-face meetings. Another example is Tampines Primary, where teachers conduct peer lesson observations, with a post-lesson observation conference to provide feedback and exchange best practices with one another.

Teacher Development Center

52 This quest for professional excellence is very much in line with the vision that DGE spoke about at the Teachers Mass Lecture where the fraternity of Singapore teachers want to Lead, Care and Inspire. Teachers must lead their own professional development. DGE also spoke of how the fraternity should have a professional home of its own — a Teacher Development Centre (TDC) run by teachers, where educators can come together, share and exchange ideas on learning and teaching, engage in research, or simply meet up with colleagues who share common interests. The centre could serve as a source of expertise for the PLCs, by creating space for teachers to share good examples and research about what works well in the classroom. Communities of teachers in Maths, Science, Art, Music, PE and other subjects, can discuss common issues and adopt best practices within the TDC.

53 I fully support a TDC to enable teachers to reach a higher level of professional competence and standing. I have asked DGE to flesh out how this TDC is to be run — its goals, mandate and organisational structure. For this to succeed we must provide adequate resources and funding, including the right people and talent to perform administrative tasks, so that teachers are not further burdened unnecessarily. The centre must also be accessible to teachers from all schools. Such a centre must inject new levels of expertise in the area of teacher development, and serve as a key enabler in achieving the vision that the fraternity has set for itself. To free up time for more teachers to pursue professional development opportunities, MOE will look to provide schools with additional teachers, as we expand the teaching force.

54 MOE is willing to do its part to support the PLCs and the TDC, but the teaching community must also come forward to drive it and own your system for professional excellence.

Strengthening Teaching Expertise

55 The TDC will be an added engine to help us strengthen the teaching service. To facilitate, we will expand the options for teachers to deepen their expertise in teaching. Currently, we have 23 Master Teachers (MTTs) and 1,029 Senior Teachers (STs) in our system. We can aim to have more.

56 Master Teachers are role models and mentors. As Teachers of Teachers, they play a valuable role in curriculum reforms, championing new pedagogies to improve teaching practices in our schools. For instance, Ms Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray, a Master Teacher in the English Language, is known not only for her expertise in teaching the language, but also her capacity to develop others. She has shared her wealth of knowledge through workshops for Senior Teachers and potential Master Teachers at the zonal level, and coaches the Beginning Teachers in her cluster. Many teachers find her a nurturing and inspiring role model.

57 In recognition of these roles and responsibilities, MOE will create a new Superscale-grade Principal Master Teacher (PMTT) position as the apex of the Teaching Track. We currently have 4 MTT Level 2s who will now hold the apex appointment as PMTTs. We also have 19 MTT Level 1s just below these four and their job grades will be raised from SEO 1A1 to SEO 1A2 to reflect their larger roles and responsibilities. The PMTTs and MTTs will divide their time between teaching in school, leading the professional development of their colleagues, and engaging in pedagogical research and innovation. They will also be a critical link between curriculum developers in MOE and teachers in our schools. PMTTs and MTTs will also play key roles within the Teacher Development Centre.

58 We will also create a new position in schools called the Lead Teacher who will be a subject expert holding an SEO 1A1-level appointment. The Lead Teacher will lead the Senior Teachers and partner the Heads of Department and Vice-Principal (Academic) to build professional capacity within the school team and also play an important role in developing schools into vibrant professional learning communities. We expect some outstanding Lead Teachers to eventually progress to become Master Teachers.

59 In addition, MOE will also increase the positions for Senior Teachers in schools. These changes will signal that our teaching service encourages, recognises and rewards excellent teachers.

60 To summarise, this diagram shows how the teaching track will be strengthened through these changes. [slide (<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/images/2009/wps/teaching-track.jpg>)]

61 There will also be more opportunities for Master Teachers and Senior Teachers to develop their expertise further. For example, this year MOE sent 1 Master Teacher and 2 Senior Teachers for the Distinguished Fulbright Awards in Teaching programme, where they will be attached to the Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt University in the US, to be exposed to best practices in educational research, and also interact with other teachers from around the world.

62 Taken together, these measures will help create a stronger structure of pedagogical excellence across the system - at the school, cluster, zonal and national level.

Benefits to students

63 All these changes must ultimately lead to improvements in the education our students receive, because they are at the heart of all we do. We are building capacity within the system but it is at the school where you as Principal with your teachers need to make meaningful changes that impact students positively. Let me provide one example.

64 This year, three schools — N(T) Mark II schools, Si Ling Secondary, Bedok Town Secondary and Shuqun Secondary, introduced new N(T) subjects in collaboration with ITE, to bring about greater focus on practice-oriented skills. Mobile Robotics in Shuqun Secondary has been very popular with students. Apparently the students are so engrossed in the lesson that the ITE lecturers teaching the subject have a hard time getting them to stop work at the end of the class! The school also started a modular adventure learning programme once a week, where students get to experience different types of sports and attendance rates have gone up.

65 I encourage more schools to come up with innovative ways to strengthen holistic education for our students.

Conclusion

66 To conclude — for this Work Plan Seminar, I have laid out two significant challenges for us to undertake, and if done well and successfully, will have far ranging impact for years to come. The first is a big push for language ability. As those responsible to mould the future of our nation, it is our educational goal to ensure that our students speak better and become effective communicators in English. We want them to be able to use their mother tongue in their daily lives and have a good foundation should they decide to deepen their proficiency. This requires sustained effort and the setup of language institutes will create capacity and focus within the system to help us.

67 The second, the set up of language centres, a network of PLCs and a Teacher Development Centre, puts teachers in the driving seat of their own professional development and will require more specialist teachers and subject experts. This will increase expertise and raise standards of practice to help achieve our educational goals. Our measures to strengthen the teaching track will reinforce these efforts.

68 These are significant challenges but I am confident that once again, our educators will rise to the challenge to give our children an even better education.

69 I wish you all a fruitful work plan seminar. Thank you.