

A very good morning to all of you. Thank you for coming to support your child or children in this yearly event. For the benefit of the older generation in our midst, I will summarise my speech in mandarin first. I am following the format of PM Lee's national day rally.

大家早上好。自从王瑞杰担任教育部长以来，我国的教育制度出现了许多变化。现在的模式是以学生为中心，品性为主。其实我们的学校自从创办以来就已经是以品性修养作为教育方针。

我们除了教孩童怎样念书，写字，也通过故事教他们处事待人的道理。随着科技的发展，世界的改变加速了。我们可以从网际网络上学到很多知识。

我们都希望孩子能成才，但不是每个孩子都能获得大学文凭。我们应该因材施教，帮助我们的孩子实现他们的本能。进不了大学不一定是没出息。最多只是起薪比大学生低。这还比韩国的大学生没工作好。

为了要使孩子考进大学，许多家长把孩子的时间表排得满满的，没让孩子有时间去想象。这样对孩子的身心发展有弊无利。除了读书和补习，我们也应该花多点时间带孩子出去玩。

无论教育制度如何变化，只要我们把孩子的品性修养搞好，引导他们实现他们的本能，孩子们最终都能够成为有用的人，为社会做出贡献。谢谢。

Our theme this year is on 'Loving Nature'. However, my speech will not be about nature or recycling because I am not a nature enthusiast. Maybe I should have asked Ms Wendy to give the speech. I will talk about education, which is my passion.

Our education system is changing rapidly, especially since Mr Heng Swee Kiat took over as Education Minister in 2011. We are currently in a "Student-Centric, Values-Driven" phase of Education. I am proud to say that dMP was 9 years ahead of MOE. Let me explain.

When we started the school in 2003, we wanted to lay a good foundation for students not only in literacy and numeracy, but also in values and character. As you know, we teach 3 values each term, focusing on values of being such as honesty, courage and self-discipline in the first half of the year, and values of giving such as loyalty, kindness and respect in the 2nd semester. We teach these values through stories and role-playing.

It is not easy to keep up with the changes in education policies. As such, I believe it is more important to focus on character development which does not change over time.

Our education system will keep changing and evolving to keep up with the rapid changes in the world. Factual and content knowledge used to be important but with the invention of internet, facts and content are

now easily available to anyone with internet access. What is a God particle? Google it. Who is the founder of internet? Google it. How to clean the inside of a digital camera? Watch a youtube video. Earlier this year I managed to remove some dust from my compact camera by watching such a video. Education is no longer just about acquiring knowledge. It is about how you make use of the acquired knowledge.

Fulfilling our children's potential is not about determining the end point and trying all sorts of ways to get there because every child has a different potential. You should instead discover the strengths and inclinations of your child and develop those talents accordingly. Sir Ken Robinson talks in great length about discovering talents in his book 'The Element'. According to him, there is bound to be some talent in every child. You just have to spend time to help your child discover it.

Since everybody's potential is different, not everyone can be a graduate. It does not mean that your child cannot be successful without a degree. It only means that he or she will get a lower starting pay. This is better than being a graduate without a job, as seen in countries such as Finland and South Korea, which has the best education systems in the world. With so many degree options available nowadays, if your child cannot get into a local U, they can start working for a while, find out what they are good at or interested in, then continue with higher learning later on. One of my classmates in my psychology course at a private institution 3 years ago decided to sign on the army for 3 years because he could not decide which course to take in the local universities. He accumulated some savings from his army career, finished the psychology course, then went on to complete a Masters in the US on organisational psychology. He is now ahead of his peers by taking this unconventional route.

All of us want the best for our children but everything comes with a price. Is it worthwhile sacrificing our children's childhood and free time so that they can enter the university and get a better job? The thing I worry more is whether we are also sacrificing our relationship with our children. With more expectations, there will be more tensions and stresses.

There was an article on Shanghai preschools in the TODAY paper last Thursday which highlighted that public kindergartens in Shanghai are not allowed to teach children how to read or write, English or Maths or Hanyu Pinyin. They emphasize learning through guided play. On the other extreme, there are kindergartens in Singapore that only teach all these but very limited free play. So which is correct? I believe there should be a balance in anything we do. In dMP, after the children complete the work assigned by the teachers, they are free to choose the material they enjoy working on. Most of the time they will work with 1 or 2 close friends. This is a good balance between formal work and free-choice work. The free choice work allows them to work with someone they like and enhances their social and emotional development.

Imagination and day dreaming are critical ingredients for innovation and creativity. If we pack our children's schedules fully with tuition and enrichment classes, they have no time for imagination and day dreaming. We should not just run their lives for them, but to allow them to have some free time to do something they like. Many parents think that children only learn when they are in some kind of classes or lessons. The truth is, children learn all the time. They are naturally curious and want to know about the

world. This is where the Montessori Cultural segment comes in. I think Ms Wendy has done a wonderful job in instilling in the children a sense of awe and wonder of the world we live in. The children love the cultural lessons – just to name a few: she teaches them prehistoric dinosaurs; science experiments about the properties of water; identifying the physical landforms such as islands and peninsulas in the world map in the classroom. I would like to quote an article from the Straits Times last Saturday with the heading ‘Singapore could be more tolerant of weirdness’ Dr Andrew McAfee, principal research scientist at MIT, said “The spirit so crucial to innovation stems from looking at the world as a really interesting place, a perspective which the Montessori Method inculcates in its students.” He went on to say that Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos and Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin and Wiki founder Jimmy Wales were all Montessori kids. So congratulate yourself for choosing the right preschool for your child.

Sometimes I think that one main drawback of our education system is the great emphasis on acing tests and exams, so much so that teachers end up teaching to the test rather than developing the curiosities of the children. It happens in our school too. Last week when we went to Punggol park, Ms Angela and Pan Laoshi asked if the children could go to the playground there. Ms Wendy was hesitant because she was worried that we did not have the opportunities to observe some of the milestones in the progress reports and this is the last Punggol park trip. I told her that the milestones can wait. Let’s give the children a treat since they performed so well during the rehearsal. I am sure some of them went home to tell you about the fun they had at the playground. We really need to learn to let go at times and not be so caught up with filling up checklists and milestones.

One consequence of the emphasis on exams is the reliance on tuition to do well. Wendy and I did not have tuition during our school days. So naturally we do not believe in tuition for our children, except for Chinese. We believe in paying attention in class, working hard independently and being diligent in completing our homework. We are very fortunate that our 2 children are following our footsteps.

I am not against tuition, as long as it does not come before the child’s other needs. A child in primary school needs about 9-10 hours of sleep daily. This is beneficial to their brains because it is during sleep time that the brain system reworks itself to form meaningful associations of what was learned during the day. We should allocate half the weekend for family time. So if tuition and enrichment classes are on Sat, Sun is for family time. Having 2 half days is not the same as 1 full day. 1 full day will allow you to take the children to places that take longer to explore. Without the full day, Wendy and I would not be able to bring our children when they were younger to wild wild wet for a whole Saturday. We still have many fond memories of those times we spent together as a family. I am glad to say that because of this bonding, my teenage son who is in Sec 2 now is still spending more time with us than friends during weekends.

Children should not be having tuition every day or having 2 tutors per subject. It is important to understand more about a child’s weakness before sending him for tuition. Let’s say it is due to inattention in the classroom. There is no point sending your child to another group class for tuition. You may need a private tutor.

Some parents say that they have no choice but to follow the crowd and send their children for tuition and enrichment for fear of losing out. Let me leave you something to ponder about: If we want our child to be different, we need to do things differently from the crowd. How do we expect our child to stand out from the crowd if he is doing the same things as everyone else? Discover the unique talent in your child and nurture it. I am sure he or she will blossom into someone special.

So to conclude, we should focus on building character traits that will last a lifetime. We will continue to work with you to inculcate values such as compassion, self-discipline and self-reliance in your children to lay a firm foundation necessary for lifelong learning. Hopefully, they will be able to discover their talent, fulfil their potential and lead a meaningful life. Thank you.