

SPEECH BY NIEC DIRECTOR & CEO MRS LOKE-YEO TECK YONG AT THE NIEC CONFERENCE 2024 ON 17 OCTOBER 2024, 9.00AM AT HIBISCUS BALLROOM, SANDS EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTRE

Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Education,

Mr Eugene Leong, Chairman of the NIEC Board of Directors and Board members,

NIEC Staff, Students, Alumni,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

1. Good morning. A very warm welcome, everyone, and especially to all participants from our early childhood (EC) fraternity in Singapore and from overseas. This Conference is a watershed event for the National Institute of Early Childhood Development as it is especially organised to mark our 5th Anniversary. We are indeed happy to put EC professionals at the heart of our Conference programme.
2. Being here, we are united by a shared passion for quality early childhood education and what EC professionals can do in the best interest of children. Today, NIEC stands with EC educators who do your best to nurture children and support families daily.
3. The Conference theme, "*Inspiring Excellence in Early Childhood Practice*," puts EC educators at the heart of practice, centring on the child and with our context in mind. For those of you who attended our pre-conference activities yesterday, you are already primed to learn more.

Early Childhood Education & Professionalism of Educators

4. We are all here because we strongly believe that quality early childhood education enables holistic development of children, giving them a strong start in life to take on lifelong learning with confidence.
 - Neuroscience confirms the criticality of brain development in the early years. Early interactions shape the brain's architecture, laying foundations for lifelong impact on learning, health, and behaviour.
 - Coupled with this, the seminal work of Professor James Heckman links the impact of high-quality early childhood education on holistic child development to the reduced need for future remedial education and social services. Many countries are investing in quality early childhood education, particularly for vulnerable children, to promote equity and long-term economic and social benefits.

5. A quality preschool education requires well-respected and well-trained EC educators. EC educators must be recognised for their invaluable work with children. They must be supported with the right opportunities to continuously upgrade their skills as part of their professional growth. Hence, the professional image of educators, their well-being, their access to available quality training and professional development would be key to building up the fraternity.

NIEC in Singapore's Early Childhood Landscape

6. The Singapore Government invests heavily in the EC sector to ensure accessibility and affordability to quality early childhood education. As part of the overall national strategy, NIEC was established as the national preschool teacher training institute in 2019. Created through the consolidation of EC training expertise and courses previously offered across four institutions, NIEC provides a comprehensive range of quality courses to meet educators' needs.

7. NIEC takes pride in having the largest practitioner-based faculty in Singapore and believes that quality faculty is key to quality training. We adopt a workplace-ready and practice-oriented approach to teacher training that equips educators with the values, skills and knowledge to effectively work with children and families. We promote professionalism through our specialised courses for timely upgrading of knowledge and skills. We believe in building up the EC fraternity to be reflective practitioners, relationship builders and resilient learners to navigate multiple roles in the workplace.

NIEC's Impact on EC Educator Training

8. Over the past 5 years, NIEC has rolled out new courses to meet national priorities and ground needs, ranging from building capabilities in the teaching of mother-tongue-languages, outdoor learning, leadership development to inclusive practices. We have had the privilege of training over 20,000 educators and the numbers are growing.

9. As we reflect on our progress, NIEC would not have come this far without the support of many partners, particularly our key partners, the Ministry of Education, the Early Childhood Development Agency and Preschool Operators. I would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to all partners for believing in NIEC's mission and working alongside us. With their involvement, we regularly

update our training contents and strengthen the link between research, training and practice, to enable our students to excel as EC educators.

10. We are heartened that preschools have embraced NIEC as their primary training institute. They have strongly affirmed our graduates' ability to apply knowledge and skills effectively. This not only reflects the quality of our training but also strengthens our conviction about the on-going work to enhance our student experiences.

Conference Highlights

11. Today, we put EC educators at the centre of quality early childhood education and what it means for you to do your work well: starting with you at the heart of practice, extending outwards to your teaching practices and then your practice within the broader context of EC trends, policy and research. Our three esteemed keynote speakers will be presenting insights into the Conference strands and engaging us in a panel session to end off the day. Looking ahead to tomorrow, we have a rich array of over 30 concurrent sessions presented by international and local speakers, held virtually.

Closing Remarks

12. Rounding up, I hope you will take away the following ABC from my address:
 - **A is for Appreciation:** Appreciation to our partners, staff and students for being part of NIEC's journey. Appreciation to MOE and ECDA for their invaluable support as well as to our Conference sponsors, Ngee Ann Kongsi and the Education Services Union, for their generous contributions. Appreciation to the NIEC family for rallying together to organise this Conference, amongst the many things we do.

- **B is for Broadening our Networks and Influence:** NIEC is an integral part of the EC landscape; we are here to partner you as it takes a village to raise a child. Do stay connected with NIEC as we strive to be the flag-bearer of quality EC educator training, to enable you to nurture, inspire, educate and care for every child.
- **C is for Celebration:** We are happy to celebrate NIEC's 5th Anniversary with the EC fraternity and international friends, and in doing so, celebrate the very meaningful work of educators!

13. Look around the ballroom, we have an extensive fraternity of dedicated professionals to want to do good for children and families. Each of you brings along your life experiences and professional insights to enrich the learning at this Conference. As we lean in together, may your participation today generate further conversations and reflections in the coming days, and may you deepen your conviction about why you are in this purposeful profession.
14. Have a fruitful Conference ahead. Thank you.