

Opening Address By Mdm Halimah Yacob, Deputy Secretary General Of The National Trades Union Congress, At The 2nd IAL Adult Learning Symposium 2009 5 November 2009, 9.00 Am, The Pan Pacific Hotel

Mr Chan Heng Kee, Chief Executive WDA

Dr Gary Willmott, Executive Director IAL

Ladies & Gentlemen:

1. Good morning. I am pleased to join you today at this second IAL Adult Learning Symposium. I would like to extend, in particular, a warm welcome to our overseas participants and speakers.

Continuing Education and Training in Singapore

2. Singapore takes pride in our system of schools, junior colleges, institutes of technical education, polytechnics and universities which cater to the needs of our young people. We call this the pre-employment training system or PET. What is now recognised as equally important is the system of training which addresses the needs of our adult workforce. In Singapore we call this Continuing Education and Training, or CET for short. CET ensures that workers in different industries remain competitive and employable. It helps them refresh their knowledge and skills to do their existing jobs better, to assume larger jobs or to take on new jobs.

3. Given the pace of economic restructuring, CET is now a top priority for Singapore – not just in the government but also the Singapore National Employer Federation (SNEF) as well as the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). At NTUC for example, we have set up key institutions such as the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) and Learning Hub to help workers with their employment and training needs. Our unions and other related groups such as the Women’s Committee help promote CET as part of their core work.

The Central Role of Trainers and Adult Educators

4. The tripartite commitment in CET is expressed in the CET Master Plan announced by the Prime Minister in 2008. The CET Master Plan sets out the strategy to increase the capacity of our CET system by providing more training places and building up the quality of training.
5. The successful execution of the strategy under the CET Master Plan lies very much with you – our trainers and adult educators. The training organisations you run, the curriculum and assessments you design and the courses you deliver – all these have a significant impact on the effectiveness of our CET effort.
6. To nurture a professional community of CET professionals in Singapore, the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) was set up a year ago. This is one part of the CET plan to improve the quality of training in Singapore. IAL pursues its mission in three main ways: First, by raising the capability of adult educators. Second, through initiating research into CET and adult learning in Singapore. And third, by bringing together the ‘community’ of adult educators.
7. So how is IAL progressing thus far?

Training of Trainers

8. In the area of training trainers, IAL conducts courses in the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment – which I'm sure everybody here knows as 'ACTA'. This is the benchmark qualification designed to prepare our trainers to work in the Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system. Over the last year, IAL has trained close to **3,000** people in ACTA courses. In all, **229** have already obtained the full ACTA qualification through IAL. Under the SPUR programme, IAL has also provided more than **60** Professional Conversion Programme places. This apprenticeship-based course is a pathway for people with deep industry experience and knowledge to make a career shift to become trainers.
9. IAL intends to move beyond these programmes. It is now working on new courses and qualifications which provide pathways for development beyond ACTA.

Furthering CET through Research and Thought Leadership

10. Secondly, in the area of CET research, IAL has established an Adult Learning and CET Research unit. Over the past year, five internationally recognised Visiting Research Fellows from renowned institutions have been brought to Singapore to work with IAL on research projects. IAL has also established international agreements for staff exchange, joint research and collaboration with ten global centres of research and policy development in adult learning and CET across Asia, Europe, the UK and Australia.
11. The research programme has commenced with several key projects underway, for example a study of how older workers most effectively learn new skills to remain employable, and a study of the impact of our professional conversion courses in preparing people for new jobs.

12. Some of the other on-going research activities at IAL involve working with you – our practitioners. Examples include joint projects to study effective practices in CET and capability building efforts to help our trainers systematically improve their own work through classroom-based research methods and reflection on their curriculum development, delivery and assessment approaches. I believe these research efforts can enhance the effectiveness of CET in Singapore in the longer term.

Adult Educators' Network: Singapore

13. Let me now turn to the third area of IAL's work – building a professional community of adult educators.

14. While I refer to the community of adult educators in Singapore, it is not really a community per se as trainers are a very fragmented group. Many trainers are freelancers or private entrepreneurs while others work in training organisations or company-based training units. Some work in our polytechnics and ITE while others work in CET Centres.

15. It may be hard to form a single all-encompassing community. But as we step up efforts to develop the national CET effort, we can benefit from having closer communities of adult educators, particularly those with common interests in similar fields who can share knowledge, collaborate in their work, be supported in their professional development and contribute to the professional growth of one another.

16. To further this effort of community building among adult educators, IAL is establishing a network called the **Adult Educators' Network: Singapore**, or AEN for short. This will be a network dedicated to the growing body of about 3,000 people working in the WSQ system. It will provide support, learning opportunities, collaborative activities and resources for professional

development. Some of the activities and initiatives which the network has in the pipeline include the setting up of communities of practice and special interest groups, an e-journal for WSQ trainers, scholarships to support on-going learning and development, training awards and merchant privileges.

17. The network will be shaped and led by the WSQ professionals themselves while being supported by IAL. I understand from Gary that membership is entirely voluntary – people do not have to join the network to work in the WSQ system. But I would like to encourage all of you to find out more about the network and consider how it can contribute and add value to your role as a WSQ adult educator. You can do this at the symposium. There is a workshop on the AEN and I am told a booth at which you can sign up as inaugural members.

Conclusion

18. Ladies and gentlemen, this Adult Learning Symposium is yet another platform for adult educators to gather to exchange insights and learn from the best among their peers locally and overseas. All of you play an important role in our national CET effort. For it is ultimately your professionalism and continued capability development which will ensure that our workers have the best CET opportunities to upgrade their skills and raise their employability and competitiveness.

19. On that note, it gives me great pleasure to now formally open this second Adult Learning Symposium and to launch the Adult Educators' Network: Singapore.

Thank you.