Address By Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister Of State For Education and Manpower at the Opening of the International Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Symposium on Wednesday, 7 March 2007, at 9.00 am at the Republic Cultural Centre, Republic Polytechnic

Salutation:
Prof Low Teck Seng, Principal & CEO, Republic Polytechnic
Mr Glen O' Grady, Director/Symposium Organising Committee
Distinguished keynote speakers
Guests, delegate
Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to be here today at the opening of the 1st International Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Symposium. Let me first welcome all of you, especially our overseas speakers and delegates. I hope you will have a fruitful and memorable time here in Singapore.

Responding to Social Changes

2. The emergence of the information society and knowledge economy has had a profound impact on the way societies function and how we work and live. It has changed the way we think about and process knowledge and information. Today, value is created not merely by keeping costs low or being more efficient; what matters is how quickly we can analyse, assimilate and use relevant information and create value out of intellectual property.

3. Therefore we need to ensure that our young people are equipped with the appropriate skill sets to effectively interact with the vast amounts of information available, make connections across different disciplines and sift out what is most relevant, valuable and useful.

4. To respond to these needs, the training provided by our institutes of higher learning has consequently become more multidisciplinary and broad-based. At our polytechnics, students are no longer trained to be adept just within their fields of study, but receive exposure and grounding in diverse areas ranging from Science & Technology, Business & Management, to Humanities and Social Sciences. Increasing emphasis
has also been placed on nurturing students to develop an innovative mind and entrepreneurial spirit.

5. Republic Polytechnic’s efforts to make Problem-Based Learning an integral part of their pedagogical philosophy is a positive step to preparing students to be effective in today’s socioeconomic landscape. They have pioneered a unique One-Day, One-Problem™ process, where students work in teams and collaborate to reason out a credible solution to the problem of the day.

6. In their courses of study at RP, students construct their own knowledge by actively engaging real-world problems daily. In the process of working at their own solutions, they become adept at sifting through information, brainstorming creative solutions and executing their ideas.

Maximising Opportunities and Learning

7. RP’s objectives is in line with the Ministry of Education’s larger vision of Thinking Schools, Learning Nation – a vision for Singapore to become a nation of critical and impassioned thinkers who will continue to be inquisitive after they leave school.

8. At the core of this vision is the belief that each child is different, with different aptitudes and varying abilities, and that all must be given opportunities to maximise their potential. Recognising this, the Ministry of Education has moved towards greater diversity in our education system to provide more room for different talents to grow.

9. From setting up specialised independent schools like The Sports School, to supporting integrated programmes that provide a seamless upper secondary and JC education, we strive to create more diverse pathways to education for every child and youth, while continuing to equip them with the necessary skills to fit into our competitive economy. Republic Polytechnic’s pedagogical approach grounded in PBL is part of this diversity of learning platforms to optimise learning for our students.

Conclusion

10. To keep pace with the evolving needs of our society and economy, we must continually look at ways to improve and sharpen not only the training and curriculum offered to our students, but also the approach in which we facilitate learning, so that they remain relevant in a fast-changing world. Platforms like this Symposium provide valuable avenues for that constant and critical re-assessment. They not only serve to validate what we have been doing, but also help us to probe, expand and refine our ideas and strategies, so that we can evolve a richer set of tools and perspectives to help our students learn even better. I commend the Republic Polytechnic for the initiative.

11. With leading PBL experts from more than 20 countries participating in this Symposium, I am confident that it will be a fertile ground for many new and innovative ideas to be exchanged, challenged and developed over these 3 days. I wish all of you a stimulating and fruitful Symposium.

Thank you.