
Title	"LIFE-LONG LEARNING": The Singapore way
Author(s)	Lui Hah Wah Elena
Source	Taipei International Conference on Community Education, 10 – 12 December 1996, Taipei, Taiwan

Copyright © 1996 The Author

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

Citation: Lui, E. H. W. (1996, December). *"LIFE-LONG LEARNING": The Singapore way*. Paper presented at the Taipei International Conference on Community Education, Taipei, Taiwan.

This document was archived with permission from the copyright holder.

1996 TAIPEI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY EDUCATION

“LIFE-LONG LEARNING” - The Singapore Way

by Dr LUI Hah Wah Elena

Senior Lecturer, National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Growing up in this modern society, all of us, voluntarily or involuntarily, directly or indirectly, are engaged in some sorts of learning activities ever since we were born. Actually, in today's high-tech world, with the new services and products made available by the advanced technologies, during pregnancy the foetus could have the 'head-start' in learning many things long before he or she is delivered. Therefore the popular saying "from cradle to grave" should be modified to "from womb to tomb" in order to have more comprehensive coverage of the "*life-long learning*" process. Speaking from the Singaporean's perspective, I proclaim that "*life-long learning*" is the most vital mean for me to cope with all the daily demands in both personal and professional lives. At this panel, I would like to share with all the conference delegates my observations and experiences in the Singapore way of *life-long learning*.

Singapore is a young nation of 31 years old with a total land area of 647.5 square kilometres (main island plus some 64 small islands) and a population of 2,986,500 as at June 1995. Its population density rose from 4,001 residents per square kilometre in 1985 to 4,608 residents per square kilometre in 1995. This multi-ethnic country has 77.4% Chinese residents, 14.2% Malays, 7.2% Indians and 1.2% other ethnic groups. The four official languages are Malay (national language), Chinese, Tamil and English (administration language), Hanyu Pinyin and simplified characters are the unique features of Chinese language used in Singapore. The "Speaking Mandarin" nation-wide campaign together with the bilingual education in schools in the past two decades have reaped some fruits. "Mandarin is being increasingly used among the Chinese in place of the main dialects - Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese and Foochow." (Singapore Facts & Pictures 1996, p. 3). In October this year, I was invited by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce to give a talk on "Positive Thinking in Learning Mandarin". Based on my own experience in learning Mandarin, I wrote a 5-phrase verse (Appendix 1) to encourage more people to learn to speak Mandarin. This is one of the very relevant and authentic examples of my *life-long learning* in Singapore.

As one of the "Newly Industrialised Economies" (NIEs) in Asia, Singapore needs to stay competitive in order to sustain its economic growth. Prof Sim Wong Kooi, former Director of Institute of Education, Singapore, observed that: "In so far as Singapore is fast becoming a global technopolis but has to maintain a delicate balance in dealing with its diverse population as well as with the even more diverse international market place, the pursuit of excellence will be a continuing saga." (1990, p. 198). He envisaged that in the future a more balanced curriculum in the education system would be offered to enhance young Singaporeans' total development encompassing intellectual, vocational, physical, moral, social and aesthetical aspects. The relationship between individual and societal needs depicted by Prof Sim in Figure 8.5 (Appendix 2) reflects the interdependence of man and society, and the core values of "Common good above self-interest" and "Community cares for individuals". For almost ten years, Pastoral Care and Career Guidance prevails in many secondary schools and soon will take roots in primary schools in Singapore. Such

personal, social, and career guidance programmes coupled with creative and critical thinking activities will equip students with excellent skills, most up-to-date knowledge and sound work ethics which are fundamental requirements for high productivity in all industries.

“Strive for excellence”, the ethos advocated by the Government, has tremendous impact on the children and youth in Singapore. Stress management becomes an essential life skill they need to learn in order to survive in the education system. Keeping a healthy life style is an important issue in their daily life. “Sports for Life”, a relatively new campaign, and the “TAF” (Tough and Fit) scheme in schools plus many other national campaigns such as “Anti-drug Abuse”, “Road Safety”, “Clean and Green Environment”, etc. are the community education devices to develop a healthy nation. Many parents, grandparents, and members of the public are engaged in or influenced by these social education events and publicities. Currently, several cabinet ministers have highlighted the significance of community bonding and national identity among Singaporeans. On 13 Nov 1996, Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan told the media: “ Social cohesion is the key which will make Singapore a home people belong to, not a business centre where people come to make money and leave to retire elsewhere after they made their fortunes.” (News Focus, The Straits Times, p.3) In addition, Singaporeans are encouraged to take part in voluntary services to help the less fortunate people and pave the way for a more caring, enlightening society. In Volunteers ‘96 Presidential Citation, Singapore’s President Ong Teng Chong said: “Voluntarism is the hallmark of a gracious society... With every passing minute that you spend as volunteers, you give a piece of your lives, and in doing so, enrich the lives of others...” (Appendix 3 , by courtesy of the National Council of Social Service). All these messages underscore our commitments in sharing our lives with and caring for fellow Singaporeans. Eventually, life-long learning takes place in such process of sharing and caring.

Educational & career planning, career development, professional up-grading and continuing education are the “can’t afford to miss” items on the agenda in the adult life. Beyond the training courses, career guidance and up-grading opportunities provided in schools, technical institutions, polytechnics and universities, there are many training courses offered by foreign institutions of higher learning and multi-national companies through distance learning, twinning, or exchange programmes. In recent years, hundreds of programmes at post-graduate and post-secondary levels are mushrooming in this tiny island, Singapore. Such phenomenon shows Singapore young adults’ trend in up-grading themselves and realising their dreams. As the federation of professional bodies, the Singapore Professional Centre encourages its members to engage in professional development activities such as international conference on open learning, seminars on the ethics and qualities of professional services. The Centre also awards the “Certificate in Continuing Education and Development” to give formal recognition to the Continuing Education Units (CEU) obtained by its members in professional up-grading. As for personal growth, leadership development and other aspects of continuing education, many Singaporeans have benefitted from participating in numerous programmes and events organised by the People’s Association which is the umbrella body of community centres/clubs, residents’ committees, youth groups, senior citizens clubs, etc.

There is yet another important ‘subject’ that Singapore adults ought to take: “Family Life Education” including parenting education, financial planning, consumer education, living with elderly parents, etc. The Ministry of Community Development, in advocating “Singapore - A Pro-family Society”, invests great effort in various programmes such as National Family Day, Family Support Services, public talks and educational publications. The Government also helps play the role of “match-maker” in setting up special services such as the Social Development Unit (SDU) to organise social events to facilitate young adults’ meeting and dating.

Having a successful career and a happy family is not the end of this paper. The happy ending comes in the "Happy Age", 55 and beyond. "Lé Ling" (乐龄) is the term coined by me some 20 years ago when I initiated the establishment of Singapore Action Group of Elders (SAGE). It is a movement as well as an organisation aiming to promote gracious and productive aging by using the pro-active and developmental approaches in mobilising and motivating senior citizens to adopt the positive attitude towards aging and educating the young to have optimistic outlook of "being old". At this stage of life, one should carry on learning new things and may get some training for a new job which demands less energy and time to manage. "Live up to old age and learn up to old age" is the noble spirit that every one of us must uphold. To engage in various social, cultural, and recreational activities and physical exercises to stay healthy ("a-go-go") and perhaps take up religious studies to prepare for the concluding chapter of this life. By so doing, one may have a more pleasant departure from this world.

All in all, I do believe that *life-long learning is from womb to tomb*. And I have summerised the main features of community education in Singapore in Appendix 4 to support my presentation of this paper. Last but not the least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the hosts of this conference for their gracious hospitalities and the conference delegates for their interest and support in my presentation. To all of you, "Thank You Very Much !"

References

Singapore Facts & Pictures (1996) Ministry of Informations & The Art. Singapore

_____ (1996) "Voluntary Certification of Continuing Education and Development in the Profession Scheme", *The Singapore Professionals. Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre.*

Yip, S.K.J. & Sim, W.K. (ed.) (1990) Evolution of Education Excellence. Singapore: Longman

POSITIVE THINKING IN LEARNING MANDARIN

Dr LUI Hah Wah Elena

雷榎华博士

" Positive Thinking " is the key to open many windows/doors in today's learning world. In order to master a language which is neither 'native' nor 'mother-tongue' to us, we really need to capitalise on our intrinsic motivation, initiative, self-confidence and positive thinking in the course of integrating such a 'foreign' subject into our daily life. Speaking from my own learning experience, I would like to share with adult learners of Mandarin the following pointers:

- * Get rid of the negative thoughts, such as

- " I don't need Mandarin to seek my roots, ... "
- " I'm so busy, where got time to learn Mandarin!"
- " If I made mistakes, people would laugh at me ..."
- " Isn't it too late for me to learn Mandarin now?!"

- * Stay POSITIVE in learning Mandarin

- " Hey, take it easy !"
- " Never too late to learn ..."
- " There is a will, there is a way !"
- " Learning from mistakes, and don't give up!"

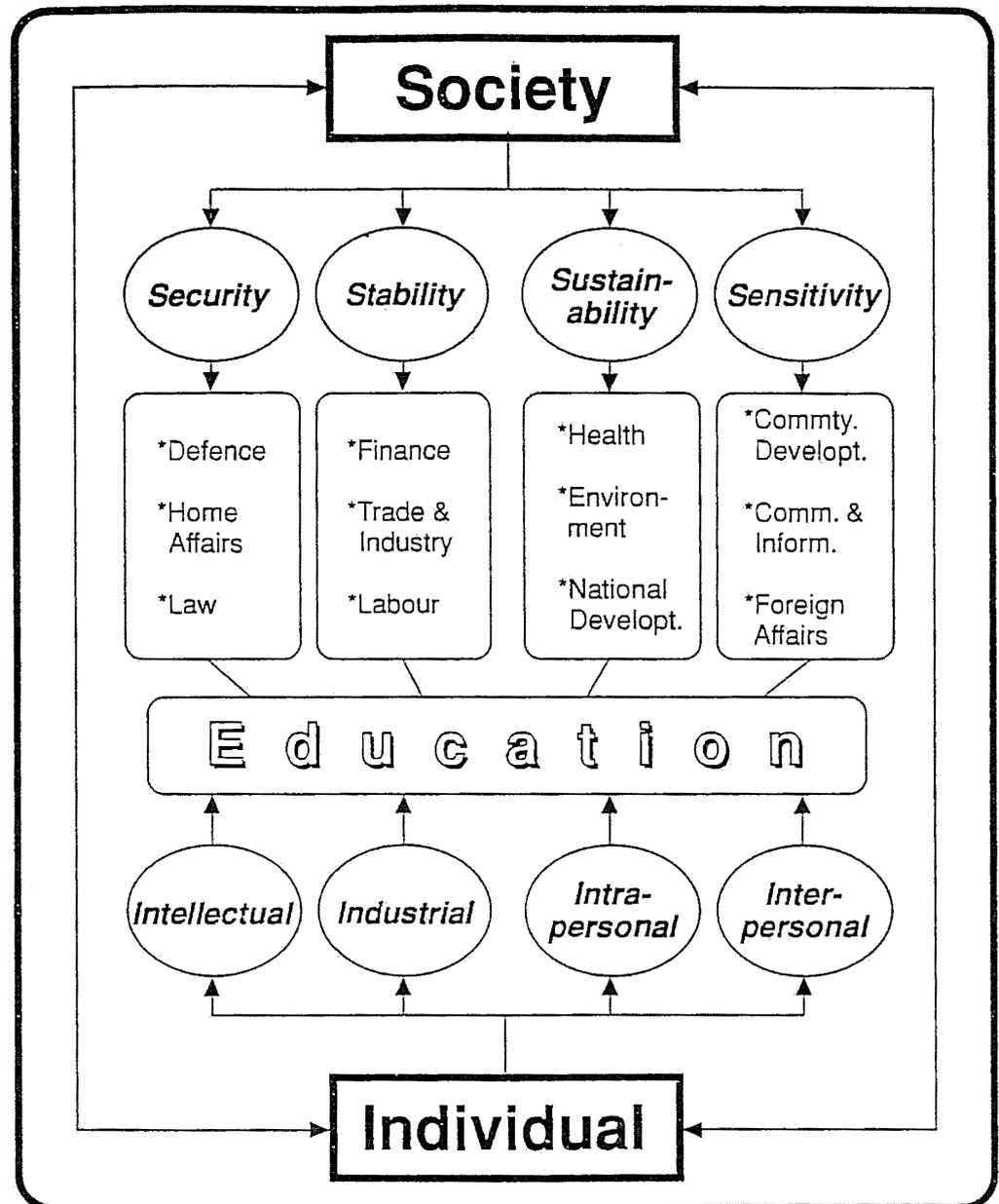
- * Cultivation of personal life

- * Conducive learning environment

- * Practice makes perfect

In the process of formulating this talk, I caught the inspiration of writing a simple verse in Chinese to highlight the essential elements in mastering Mandarin. This verse together with the Hanyu Pinyin and English translation are at the next page.

Fig. 8.5: Relationship between Individual and Societal Needs



A final example is a conceptual framework showing the relationship between Individual and Societal needs and the different Ministries that are directly involved (Fig. 8.5). The framework posits that, in the first place, Society has four main types of needs, each of which is being taken care of by several Ministries as follows:

1. **Security** needs in terms of personal safety and legal protection, which are taken care of by the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and Law.

Volunteers



**Helping hands,
straight from the heart.**

V O L U N T E E R S ' 9 6

PRESIDENTIAL CITATION



Voluntarism is the hallmark of a gracious society.
With selfless dedication, volunteers give of their time,
talents and skills.

With each passing minute that you spend as volunteers,
you give a piece of your lives, and in doing so, enrich the
lives of others.

Your personal commitment and dedication are to
be applauded.

I commend you as volunteers.
May your footsteps pave the way for a more caring,
enlightened society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ong Teng Cheong'.

Ong Teng Cheong
President of the Republic of Singapore
and
Patron-in-Chief
National Council of Social Service

APPENDIX 4

Schooling (Formal Education)			Child Care & K1-2	Primary School	Secondary School	ITE/Pre-U/ Junior College	Polytechnic/ University	Employment	Retirement
AGE	• - • →	0 → 2	3 → 5	6 → 12	13 → 16	17 → 18	19 → 24	25 → 55+	55+++
Media Exposure TV/Radio/Publications		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Computer Applications			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
COMMUNITY EDUCATION:									
• Core Family Values & Parenting Talks/Seminars							✓	✓	
• Courtship & Pre-marital Counselling	(✓)				✓	✓	✓	✓	
• Conception & Foetal Ed.	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
• Cash/Savings & Consumer Education		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Clean & Green Environment			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Campaigns:- - Courtesy - Speak Mandarin - Sports for Life - Anti-drug Abuse - Road Safety - Be a Volunteer		✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
• “Count on Me, Singapore” (Total Defence, Productivity)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (National service for boys)	✓	✓
• Cultural Learning & Religious Studies		(✓)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓