

Address of Hon L.D.Dookun-Luchoomun
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and
Technology

Launch of “Integration of ICT in Early Childhood Education”

Protocol

A very good morning to you all

I am delighted to be in your midst this morning on the occasion of the launch of the *‘Integration of ICT in Early Childhood Education’*.

Today’s event is the culmination of efforts from different quarters—because we have all, for quite some time, realized the significance of integrating digital technology in educational institutions at all levels. I am therefore particularly pleased that we are witnessing today the effective integration of ICT in preschools.

Nothing can be more appropriate given that pre-school is the very foundational stage for embedding the digital culture.

Interestingly, many of our pre-school children already have a rich exposure to ICT at home. How often have we seen devices provided by parents acting as baby-sitters as well as aids to the sensory development of children? Given this national context in which technology has become commonplace and taken in our stride, it stands to logic that our Educators, too, should be suitably equipped and have a working familiarity *‘avec la chose numérique’*.

Besides, in today’s world driven by technology, for any enterprise to succeed, it will have to rely on ICT – early childhood education as a noble enterprise facilitating learning , is

and can be no exception. ICT has its legitimate place there as well. We know the extent to which **ICT** encourages collaboration and co-operation among children. They can share positive learning experiences among themselves. Equally, the pre-school units can strengthen the linkages between themselves and the community thereby increasing the engagement of parents.

And, like I said, that can only happen when our Teachers, our Educators are suitably equipped.

Unfortunately, this has so far not been the case.

You will agree that our recent experience during the unprecedented school lockdown due to Covid 19 has been an eye opener.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly indicated that the trend shaping the future of education is e-learning, we all witnessed that the majority of children in the early childhood sector could not stay connected with their teachers. It has been a great pity that neither teachers nor the children themselves were adequately armed and prepared to use technology as a pedagogical tool.

In most cases, the result was disturbing: learning was disrupted for these preschoolers.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been this realization that has driven us towards to the introduction of ICT in early childhood education.

In today's context where education is being re-imagined, it is crystal clear that if teachers are not connected, they cannot learn. There is , as you well know, so much that can be done with a digital device. For one thing, you can access the unlimited supply of resources which the net provides. For another, you can stay connected with one another and engage in the sharing of good practices. I am sure the tablets will be one of the tools that will allow you to create a professional learning community for the sharing of resources, ideas, experiences and practices and thus further your professional skills.

And I need hardly stress how much this, in turn, will enhance the learning experiences of our young children in the classroom.

So, dear Teachers, I have absolutely no doubt that you will make optimum use of this digital tool for learning, for self-directed learning.

Just a quick word of caution, though.

You may expose yourselves as much and as long as you wish to the devices so as to generate relevant content and information: please remember that our children should be warned about over exposure to the digital screen. Research has clearly demonstrated the harmful impact this is likely to have on them. So, do make sure if devices are used by your learners in the room setting, a balance needs to be struck.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The introduction and use of tablets by teachers is just the beginning of our strategy of e-learning .

Allow me to share with you this fact: any sound ICT Strategy for the education sector must inevitably englobe four areas of focus.

One relates to the relevant ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity.

Another is ‘Enhanced Teaching/Learning and the development of Pedagogical Content.

A third is the Management system.

And the fourth is the building of Capacity and the Professional Development of Teachers.

All the major International agenda on Education, whether it is the Education for All, EFA, or , again , the Sustainable Development Goals,(SDGs), all have emphasized the importance of early Childhood Education and, especially, the vital necessity to build the capacity of those who deliver it—YOU, dear teachers.

This is why I would like here to commend the initiative of the Director of ECCEA for organizing, in collaboration with the MIE, a tailor-made, a bespoke training programme

for you. This will ensure your preparedness in integrating ICT in your teaching for more meaningful learning. I am banking on the fact that this training program will equally enable you to gauge the limits and possibilities of technology.

Let me go one step beyond that. Our aim is for all of you—in fact, ALL Educators of preprimary to pursue on-going professional growth.

I want you to rest assured that you will be included in the “*nouvelle mouvance*” I am insisting upon. Continuous Professional Learning and Development (CPLD) has to remain a constant, a given in our education system as a whole. Learning doesn’t ever stop and the building of professional capacity is a pre-requisite across the education system. And I don’t intend to rest till this becomes an integral part of the teaching profession.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I remember when we initiated our reform agenda, at the time we introduced the major reform based on the consolidation of nine years of basic education, a criticism was levelled that my Ministry had driven the pre-school sector to the fringes, that nothing much was done for that sub-sector.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Right at the outset, the evidence was clear that children who have a strong early learning foundation and well-being will have better life chances. We were committed then and we are committed now to support the provision of inclusive and quality pre-primary education so that all children benefit from positive early childhood experiences.

After all, we have to be accountable for our actions. Thus, I cannot refrain from repeating myself time and again that the trust parents place in sending their children to school should not be misplaced or even *perceived* as misplaced.

Allow me to take this opportunity here to mention some of the measures taken in our endeavor to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and the wellbeing of our children:

No 1. Government has agreed to support children from vulnerable families through a monthly cash allowance.

No 2: It is an unfortunate fact that many economically disadvantaged children attend preschools that are under-resourced. To reduce the disparity among preschools, under-resourced ones have been allocated a one-off grant for the purchase of pedagogical materials.

No 3: Improvement of quality is addressed mainly through the national curriculum framework which levels quality across different providers. As you most probably know, the review of the National Curriculum Framework is currently on by the MIE and we expect to start its implementation next year.

To this effect, the learner development profile which monitors learning will also be reviewed in the light of the new NCF.

And as far as teacher quality is concerned, we are coming back to the basics. Engaged teachers with the right kind of professional touch and motivation are the most important factor leading to the greatest impact on quality.

That is why I constantly harp on and reiterate the fact that Educators should continually improve their practice through on-gong continuous professional development programmes. This will keep you abreast of latest developments in the field of early learning,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I end, may I be allowed to state something that is close to my heart.

One of the unfortunate realities in education in Mauritius is that many adults favour a strategy *qui a tendance à bruler les étapes. Ainsi, ils s'accordent à dire que la phase*

préscolaire sert à développer la faculté cognitive sans pour autant accorder de l'importance au développement socio-émotionnelle.

Or cela est inquiétant. Nous savons que le développement de l'enfant passe premièrement par son développement émotionnel qui mène vers un développement social afin d'atteindre la capacité cognitive.

Le développement holistique qu'on attribue à l'éducation commence par là.

Bruler les étapes et insistant sur l'accélération pour une 'litéracie' et 'numéracie' plus poussée dès le jeune âge a des conséquences néfastes.

We should concentrate on the heart first and the mind after. As a well known proverb from Botswana puts it,

“What you help a child to love is more important than what you help him to learn.”

So remember that you are all working with children at a stage when their development is at its most sensitive.

Be alive to this.

What happens early in life impacts a lifetime.

So, tell yourselves you hold the future of society in your hands.

I wish to place on record my appreciation of the work of all preschool Educators—you who are here as well as those actively engaged in this activity outside this meeting place.

I wish you a very productive and enriching learning session for the rest of the day

I thank you for your kind attention.