

**Speech of Hon. (Mrs.) L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education & Human Resources
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research
Launching of “Kiddy Science Fair”
Wednesday 16 November 2016**

Good morning

It gives me great pleasure to be here at the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre today on the occasion of the launching of the 2016’s edition of the **“Kiddy Science Fair”**. This is the second edition of a Science Exhibition that our Educators and children of pre-schools have worked on with such care and dedication.

Bravo to every one of you. I also commend this laudable joint-initiative of the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre and the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority. Here we have for the second year running a platform for Educators to showcase their knowhow and experiences in the field of early childhood education (ECE) in Mauritius. It is indeed such experiences as well as the right kind of ideas and innovations that will provide a boost to this crucial sub-sector of our educational system.

Distinguished Guests and Participants

I guess we all realize the benefits to be gained by such an activity: not only are pupils and teachers given the opportunity to showcase, disseminate and share knowledge related to science and technology , but it also forms part of my ministry’s overall strategy to promote science and technology through, among other, hands-on activities.

We all know that science takes root when we start questioning the things around us, when we develop a wide-eyed sense of wonder as to how the world and its several manifestations work. Why do flowers bloom and wither? What is the phenomenon of the Supermoon whose enhanced luminosity we witnessed day before yesterday? Why do we have to wait for another 69 years before the next lunar glow?

Lest we forget, it is this questioning spirit that drives us to form hypotheses and test ideas. Passion, stemming from this interest, is what will propel us forward to discover the universe around us.

It is this passion, this excitement and enthusiasm that I witnessed last year during the first Kiddy Science Fair that saw the participation of around 120 pre-primary schools from the 4 Educational Zones. At that time, the projects covered all fields of sciences, including astronomy, environmental problems, health issues, and so forth. I wasn't surprised therefore when I was informed that about 1200 pre-school students and about 600 adults visited this exhibition.

I expect this year's Exhibition to go a few notches higher, what with the earlier experience that has been garnered. In fact, the variety of displays does testify to the impressive spectrum of skills and creativity of our young people

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The latest scientific research about how the brain learns—what we call 'brain-based learning"—shows that students learn differently as they age, grow, and mature socially, emotionally, and cognitively. It reinforces what has been accepted since long, namely, that children

have to be ‘captured’ in their formative years for a lasting impression and imprint.

It is this characteristic feature that we have to base ourselves upon if we want to establish a solid science base in our children. Every child is a natural-born scientist. At a young age, children perceive the world differently, and are very open to exploration. Our role at this stage is to help them nurture this sense of inquisitiveness and curiosity—we have to egg them on to find out more.

In other words, we should give them every opportunity to play. Play is more than just fun: it helps young children to learn about the world around them. It compels them to challenge themselves, to build friendships, and, above all, imagine endless possibilities.

Play thus helps young children by building a strong base on which to develop science understanding best.

Certainly, this takes place in formal learning settings where Educators, through their planned lessons, provide opportunities for children to explore, inquire, discover, and construct within the natural environment.

But this base is also constructed in informal settings and parents have a strong role to play at that level as well.

Illustratively, engaging with natural environments in a non-formal setting can provide opportunities for children to examine and duplicate the habitats of animals and insects, explore how things move, investigate the flow of water, recognize different textures that exist, and so on. In addition, children gain through opportunities to

engage in science learning in such settings as museums, Science Centers and outdoor play, under proper guidance and supervision.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The mission of my Ministry is to develop a culture of achievement and excellence through the promotion of an efficient and effective education and training system that is inclusive and integrated, comprehensive and holistic. This mission rests on a major premise for its successful attainment: the unwavering support and commitment of our teachers.

Dear Educators, you are one of the main pillars on which the foundation of quality education rests.

With that in mind, my Ministry is accelerating the capacity building and professional development programs for the pre-primary sector so as to enhance the quality of pre-primary education dispensed.

Thus, my Ministry and the ECCEA, in collaboration with the MIE, UTM and the Open University, are gradually escalating from the basic proficiency courses to Diploma and Bachelor in ECE.

My wish is to witness a highly professionalised early childhood sector in the years to come.

You can therefore imagine how crucial I consider ECE to be in the progress of our country. We want to equip our children with the best possible education so that, later on, they become very valuable assets to our country—but especially, they become responsible citizens who can look at themselves in the mirror and not blush at the sight.

Before I conclude, let me express my appreciation for the Board and Staff of the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre that have been regularly organising several science competitions, workshops and outreach programmes.

I am glad to note the newly-struck partnership of the Centre with the Pre-school sub-sector. I would suggest having customized activities for Educators and the children. I know that the Centre and the ECCEA are working jointly to develop various avenues of collaboration and cooperation, including the setting up of science corners in preprimary schools and a “Kids Exploration Corner” at the Centre to encourage preschools to visit and get involved in hands-on science experiences.

Obviously, now that Government has approved an extension of the Centre in the form of a Satellite Centre in Reduit, I will expect the RGSC to further its mission as a center of excellence in the promotion of Science and Technology in the region.

Let me then commend the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre for playing an important role in science popularization efforts, and also congratulate the Early Childhood Care Education Authority for motivating its preschools teachers to hold this “Kiddy Science Fair”—a place where fun, exploration and learning are guaranteed for every child—and hopefully, every adult visitor!

With these words, it is now my immense pleasure to declare the “Kiddy Science Fair 2016” Exhibition open.

Thank you for your attention.