

**Speech of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun,
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research.
Launching of 2nd Mauritian Collection of
Ducere “African Children’s Stories”
Thursday 11 May 2017
MGI Auditorium**

Distinguished Guests

I am deeply honoured to address you on the occasion of the launching of the 2nd **Mauritian Collection of Ducere “African Children’s Stories”**, an event chiefly related to the promotion of a reading culture and the development of writing skills among our young students.

Last year, when the **1st collection of Mauritian Collection of Ducere “African Children’s Stories”** was being launched, we had the signal honour of having Hon. Julia Gillard, Chancellor of Ducere and former Prime Minister of Australia, Her Excellency Susan Coles and Mrs. Di Fleming in our midst.

This year, I would again like to extend a warm welcome both to Her Excellency, Susan Coles, High Commissioner of Australia to Mauritius and Mrs. Di Fleming, Executive Director of the Ducere Foundation who also happens to be the Honorary Consul for the Republic of Mauritius in Victoria (Melbourne).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe we are all familiar with the genesis of this **“African Children’s Stories project”**. This is an initiative of the Ducere Foundation that provides a platform for children aged 10-13 years

across Africa to write and share their stories, especially those their elders have told over generations. Our young learners are encouraged to engage in this creative writing process as well as sketch the relevant illustrations to enrich these. The whole process is undertaken under the guidance of teachers.

It is a pleasure for me to note that, in Mauritius, this laudable Project has moved from its initial and restricted pilot phase to widespread replication. Indeed, from its 2015 launch in four primary and two secondary schools, the Ducere African Children's Stories project has now found its way into all primary and secondary schools in 2016.

The game, for once, is worth the candle.

What I believe our young participants should be proud about is the fact that, thanks to the Ducere Foundation, their 12 stories that go into this 2nd collection of Mauritian Collection of Ducere "African Children's Stories" will be published and circulated in schools across Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am told that the 12 stories included in this collection are of different genres, ranging from stories with a moral tinge to adventure stories, folk tales to fantasy stories. Obviously, the stories, like all stories narrated across the generations, serve the primary functions of communication - to inform, entertain and persuade people to act in a certain way or to adopt a particular world view.

That this endeavour should come from young persons is in itself a real achievement.

This is a generation of students that is reputed for swearing by technology and that is often perceived as shunning reading and creative writing!!

I am glad that the situation is different here. Indeed, we cannot and

should not underestimate the importance of creative writing. We know that it helps our students to develop their own powers of expression, empathy—even compathy--critical reading and critical thinking. Creative writing is obviously also a means to help students improve their language learning and unleash their creative potential. As significantly, it helps our young learners to find meaning in their life experiences, thus providing what someone has called “*the mental templates for self-reflection*”.

And, to cap it all, the idea of developing the critical and creative thinking skills is directly in line with the universal aspiration of education systems across the world to foster the 21st century skills deemed critical in today’s world.

This, Ladies and gentlemen, is also central to the education reform agenda being implemented by my Ministry. I have said it in the past and I certainly don’t mind repeating it: our children have to be equipped to live in and adapt to a world that is constantly changing. They also have to be groomed to become potential trail blazers, whether as entrepreneurs or innovators. The significant thing is that they have to have the capacity to hold their own against the best in a world where barriers are fast coming down and where frontiers are being pushed further back.

Thank you, therefore, Madam Ambassador and Executive Director for making the Ducere “**African Children’s Stories**” project an ideal platform for our students to join the creative thinking bandwagon. This is a significant element of the Holistic development of children that we are pressing for, a development that directly awakens their latent socio-emotional, physical, creative or intuitive and aesthetic potential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My address today will be incomplete if I do not pay tribute to one of the principal aims of the Ducere foundation. This relates to the dissemination and sharing of the African cultural and literary heritage through stories seen with African eyes.

We all know that oral tradition, oral culture or oral lore had been a means for most African societies — indeed for all human societies-- to transmit history, literature, law and other forms of knowledge across generations when a writing system had not yet been invented. Now that the African Renaissance is becoming a reality, it is only proper that the traditional lore orally transmitted gets captured in a written form.

Our young writers can thus gain the most by hunting where the ducks are—ie, through the intergenerational exchange that this **“African Children’s Stories”** Project advocates.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me extend my warm congratulations to all the young writers for their contribution. I also wish to express my gratitude to all the schools, Heads of schools, Officials of my Ministry, Educators and parents for their unflinching support to this commendable project.

On a concluding note, I would like to reiterate my heartfelt gratitude to the Ducere Foundation and the Australian High Commission for this noble project.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for your kind attention.