

Address by Ms Lillian Lui Lai-hung, *Honorary Fellow*

Council Chairman Mr Pang Yiu-kai, President Professor Stephen Cheung, Members of the Council, professors and lecturers, students, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Honorary Fellowship recipients – Dr Alman Chan Siu-cheuk, Mr Alfred Chan Wing-kin, Mr Chung Po-yang, Mr Ma Siu-leung, Mr Andrew Tse Chung-yee and myself – I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for such an honour being bestowed upon us by The Hong Kong Institute of Education. We are also grateful for the very warm reception extended to us as well as our families, friends and students, with whom we are happy to share our joy.

I feel honoured and flattered, and at the same time humbled, by being asked to give this Thank You Address on behalf of the other five Honorary Fellows, who are all distinguished veteran educators and prominent figures in the community. In contrast, I am merely a principal in early childhood education.

Nevertheless, my experience in restoring a kindergarten since 2009 has helped me realise another side of our society. I have come to understand more deeply the joy and struggle of students from grassroots backgrounds, and have chosen to stand by them. Furthermore, my interaction with parents and members of different sectors of the community has steeled my commitment to and aspiration in education.

In Hong Kong, education has never been an easy path to follow. As educators, our responsibilities are onerous, requiring us to not just teach with words but more importantly to continuously lead by example. The community indeed has high hopes for and expectations of teachers – the practitioners of education.

How difficult is it to achieve excellence in education? Some people have nicknamed me “wonder woman”. This creates an impression that to be a successful and outstanding educator one must achieve miracles, be highly versatile and multitalented, and perform wondrous feats like a fictional superhero.

In reality, excellence in education hinges on excellent teachers. Many people say that it is incredible that one chooses to be a teacher, so often “overworked but underpaid”. In a modern society where cost-effectiveness and immediate returns are keenly sought, the teaching profession seems completely out of place. Nevertheless, what people perhaps do not understand is that teachers devote themselves to education because they are motivated by their passion and sense of mission. The teaching profession is truly sacred – educating by

example and thus influencing the lives of many.

My work at the kindergarten aside, I have often been invited to discuss my experiences with young people in secondary schools and universities. Whenever I go into the details of the work I did to restore my kindergarten, there is always a look of shock and disbelief on the young people's faces. Indeed, the difficulties I encountered were hundreds and thousands of times more complex than portrayed in the film *Little Big Master*. This is also the crux of the matter that I wish to raise. Why am I willing to be the lowest paid principal? Why is there someone working on a mission seemingly impossible? Does it all depend on the individual? What is the essence of education?

With its mission to nurture "competent and caring professionals", the Institute – the cradle of educators – has given me and many aspiring young people the chance to learn with joy, reinforcing our commitment to the cause of education. I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words from the bottom of my heart. I am blessed to have studied at the Institute, soon to be renamed The Education University of Hong Kong. Since inception, it has assumed responsibility for nurturing outstanding teachers, thus making tremendous contributions.

Before closing, on behalf of the six of us, I would once again like to express our heartfelt gratitude towards the Institute. Although the path of education is full of challenges, I firmly believe that in face of setbacks and difficulties, all fellow teachers and our friends in the education sector will remain true to their cause, neither allowing the fire within themselves to be extinguished nor easily giving up on their convictions. It is my sincere wish that with tireless commitment, we will serve others through education, making Hong Kong a better and warmer place.