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Nobel laureates share experiences with Singapore students

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SINGAPORE: Big money has been poured into turning Singapore into a centre of scientific research and innovation.

But one Nobel laureate feels that time is what is needed to develop a home-grown pool of world-class scientists.

Professor Kurt Wuthrich, winner of 2002 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, said: "It is a relatively quick process to establish an environment of apparatus, of buildings, to run top-notch science.

"It is a very different aspect to educate young generations of scientists to make good use of the environments. That isn't done in two or three years. That typically takes two to three generations."

And a lot depends on how science is taught in schools.

Drawing from his experience in the United States, another Nobel laureate says students often miss out on the excitement of discovery and invention.

Professor Douglas Osheroff, winner of 1996 Nobel Prize in Physics, said: "It was not learning that I obtained in school, it was learning that I obtained from playing around in my basement.

"And sadly, I think students don't do that anymore. If they're going to play around with something, they're probably going to play around with computers."

The two scientists were in town to speak at a forum jointly organised by Hwa Chong Institution and the Nanyang Technological University.

Called the International Science Youth Forum, the event brings together well-known science researchers, teachers and students from all over Asia.

Hwa Chong Institution student Lim Lianjie said: "There was a lot of exchange of ideas, and it was really a platform to discuss with all the other international students as well. We actually learnt a lot during the whole dialogue session, and it was really interesting."

The forum was held in conjunction with Hwa Chong's 90th anniversary celebrations.