NTU honours US don, S’pore philanthropist

Honorary doctorates for woman behind NIE roadmap and business leader Lee Seng Gee

BY LEOW SI WAN

FOR the past two years, United States Professor Linda Darling-Hammond has been closely involved in Singapore education.

Part of an international team of advisers appointed two years ago by the National Institute of Education (NIE), she has since helped shape the training of teachers here.

Prof Darling-Hammond, who previously headed US President Barack Obama’s education transition team, emphasised the importance of teachers engaging in research in the classrooms. Such research is instrumental in developing a culture of inquiry and reflection in schools, she felt.

Her recommendations have helped shape NIE’s “3x3 Roadmap”, which outlines its key strategic directions over a five-year period.

Yesterday, she became the first person to be conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Education by Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The award, presented at NTU’s convocation ceremony, is given to those who show “pre-eminence” in their professions, or who have made significant contributions to the “country, society or in international relations”, said the university.

The professor, who holds the Charles E. Ducommun chair at Stanford University, was a public school teacher before becoming one of the most notable figures in US education.

Also a prolific researcher and author, she has served on several advisory boards for teaching and education in the US, and has strongly influenced both policy and practice there. Reforms sparked by her recommendations have helped ensure access to high-quality teaching for all US children.

Also given an honorary degree yesterday was Dr Lee Seng Gee, chairman of the Lee Foundation. He was conferred a Doctor of Letters for his achievements as a business leader, his contributions as a philanthropist and his support for education in Singapore.

Over the years, the foundation has donated tens of millions to education and related causes, including a $60 million gift to the National Library Board and $50 million to the Singapore Management University.

Yesterday’s event — attended by President S R Nathan, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen and others — marked the start of graduation ceremonies for NTU’s largest-ever cohort.

To be held over six days, the 16 ceremonies will involve 7,983 students — including pioneer cohorts from the schools of Art, Design and Media; Humanities and Social Sciences; and Physical and Mathematical Sciences.

Addressing graduates yesterday, NTU president Su Guanling said: “This is a tough year to be graduating. But when the going gets tough, the tough get going. NTU graduates have what it takes to tackle the difficult economic conditions they are faced with.”

Speaking to reporters after the ceremony, Prof Darling-Hammond praised Singapore for its tremendous investment in the quality of its teaching force. The Republic has ensured that all students can expect to go to a good school and have a real chance to develop strong skills, she noted. The US could learn from Singapore in this area, she said. Though America has some of the world’s best schools, institutions there vary widely in quality and resources are not always distributed equitably, making for a very uneven system.

siwan@sph.com.sg