



Dr McAfee (right) speaking at the NYT Global Forum Asia yesterday, with moderator Thomas Friedman beside him. Dr McAfee read from an ST report on how the Singapore Institute of Technology wished to turn its students into "thinking tinkerers", and said he believed Singapore may well succeed. ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

S'pore 'could be more tolerant of weirdness'

A SOUND education system, good infrastructure and a focus on innovation are among the things that Singapore gets right, which would help it thrive in an interconnected world.

But what could it do better?

For one, it could be more tolerant of "weirdness", said Dr Andrew McAfee, principal research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

He said this at the New York Times (NYT) Global Forum Asia yesterday, in response to a ques-

tion from the floor. He was one of several speakers at the day-long forum, moderated by NYT columnist Thomas Friedman.

Tolerating "weirdness", by which he meant a willingness to change the world in unconventional ways, is crucial to being competitive in the Information Age, he said.

That is because such weirdness creates the sort of risk-taking and tolerance of risk that deep-pocket investors are most willing to bank on, said Dr McAfee.

Holding up a copy of The Straits Times, he read from a front-page report on how the Singapore Institute of Technology, the country's fifth university, wanted to turn its students into "thinking tinkerers" who could "learn, unlearn and relearn".

"If it can pull this off, what an astonishing place Singapore would be," he said, adding that one thing he had learnt over the years was "not to bet against Singapore".

"It is already murdering the (de-

veloped world's literacy and numeracy) rankings."

The spirit so crucial to innovation, he added, stems from looking at the world as a really interesting place, a perspective which the Montessori method inculcates in its students.

In fact, he noted, Amazon.com's Jeff Bezos, Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales were "Montessori kids". He too was one, he added.

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