



2-4 DECEMBER 2003

## **CLOSING SPEECH**

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Assalamualaikum w.b.t. dan Salam Sejahtera

The Honorable Dato' Haji Kusaini bin Haji Hasbullah, Deputy Director-General of Education, Schools Department,

Haji Razali bin Ismail, Director of Teacher Education

Dr Rabiah Ghani, Director, English Language Teaching Centre

Directors and Officers from the Ministry of Education,

State Education Directors,

Directors from Teacher Training Colleges

Principals and Headmasters,

Lecturers and Teachers

Our friends from the Media,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.



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1. A very good morning to you. As we bring to a close the first ELTC ETeMS conference, I would like to thank ELTC and the Teacher Education Division for their exemplary work that draws together a broad range of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English program.

2. Of all the efforts that bring our practitioners together, none perhaps fosters greater bonding than the community of scholarship and learning transcending the different disciplines and stakeholders. This conference is one such effort at bringing together specialists and practitioners from the three major disciplines, science, mathematics and English. We hope the interaction here the past two and a half days has given you fresh insights and understanding into how best the change might be managed and implemented at the different levels – from the classroom to the administration.

3. Undoubtedly, the implementation of ETeMS raised many issues and challenges. Some were excited by the prospects of improving English. Some felt threatened. Some were indifferent and so on. All these reactions are perfectly normal in times of change. Change in whatever form is never truly received with open arms. But for any system to improve, there must be change. Change shakes us and makes us think about the relevance of familiar ways. The creative tension that comes about will lead to new ways of doing things.

4. This reminds me of how the Japanese ensured that the fish they caught remained fresh despite the long distances and time taken to bring the

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fish in from the sea. They used to have freezers on their boats but frozen fish fetched a lower price. Then they decided to keep the fish in tanks but they stuffed the tanks so much that the fish could hardly breathe. The Japanese consumer is very selective when it comes to fish. They want the fresh taste of lively fish. So the fishermen came up with a great idea. To ensure that the fish they caught remain alive and active, they put in fewer fish into the tanks and in addition, a small shark. The shark would eat some of the fish but the rest of the fish would be active and fresh. So change can be exciting and refreshing. It depends on how we look at it and how we handle the change.

5. Using the same analogy, the use of English for teaching Science and Mathematics is like putting in a shark in the two disciplines. It should not be so overpowering that the lesson becomes an English lesson. But it has to be used efficiently to deliver the content with precision and effectiveness. Since we aim to be a producer of technology and not simply a consumer, we will have to be at the cutting edge of knowledge in areas like science, technology and mathematics. Globalization, k-economy, e-education, e-textbooks, virtual university, virtual library are all inextricably linked to information technology. The key to getting our foot in the door of this fast changing world is through information. And the fact is most of the information out there is in the English language. We will be losing valuable time, and losing ground when we could have taken much faster if only we had immediate linguistic access to the texts.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

6. Malaysia today has emerged as a respected nation in the international arena, and has been seen by many as a potential leader in international affairs

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both in trade and in politics. The next generation of leaders will have to sustain and continue to develop this profile. We will need an international language to communicate with the wider world in order to play an effective role in world affairs. While Mandarin supersedes English in terms of the number of speakers, English remains as the language for science and technology. Thus to develop a nation that is literate in science and technology we will need to enhance our language competence in English, the lingua franca of the global world.

7. The Ministry of Education is committed to the development of a pool of well-educated, highly skilled and committed professionals. Global developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have led us to only one compelling conclusion: that we need to develop the intellectual capacity to meet the demands of a knowledge-based society. The year 2020 is not far away. We must have a sense of urgency to fulfill our vision of developing a world-class education system. We cannot wait.

8. The ministry has deployed all its Divisions and its administrative system to ensure that teachers and students are supported through both conventional print modes and technological upgrades. Fourteen committees have been set up to oversee the implementation of this policy.

9. Our first concern is teachers. Investing in the continuing professional development of teachers is key to educational change. Teachers play a key role in the translation of any curricular change in practice. Some of the issues discussed in this conference have shown that teachers have real concerns about the curricular change. This is expected. Good teachers care about what

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they do. They want to be error free in front of their students. They want to be right all the time. It is necessary that teachers be trained to upgrade their language proficiency and pedagogical skills to deliver the new curriculum.

10. All stakeholders involved in an educational change must understand the change and their roles within that change. For this reason, the Ministry went on a road show around the country to explain the change. We encourage teachers and the wider public to ask questions so that they are clear about why we introduce the change. People need to ask questions to clarify their roles and expectations.

11. In our monitoring rounds we found that some teachers did not need any assistance. They were fluent and they taught well. Some taught hesitantly in English. Some used two languages, Bahasa and English. Some teachers adapted the scripted lessons to suit the needs of their own classroom. Some needed the lesson scripts and followed them to the letter. It was encouraging to see them teaching in English. What is important is the fact that they tried and will continue trying until they are fluent. However, several issues kept coming up such as teacher training and the use of the mother tongue.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

12. While we know that continuing professional development training is crucial, we are faced with the dilemma of taking teachers out of the classroom. We are caught between the need for teacher improvement and the need to



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teach. If teachers are not provided the training they cannot teach. And if we provide the training, they will have to leave the classroom for some time.

13. We know administrators are pragmatic people. They want results. While I appreciate their cooperation and understanding in many other aspects, there have been cases where administrators did not allow teachers to go for training or conduct training. They find it difficult to accept the fact that teachers are leaving their classes unattended. The issue is whether we have a choice here. How can our teachers be prepared for the curricular change without leaving the classes? What other alternative ways we have to train our teachers? What are the logistics like? Is our technological network in place to allow teachers to be trained online anytime and anywhere? What provisions have we in place at the school for teachers to work with teachers?

14. As it is teachers involved as trainers are doing a wonderful job and should be appreciated for their contributions and not penalized. Administrators must understand that ETeMS is a national agenda. The performance of their students is dependent on their teachers getting trained. The support and understanding of an administrator is crucial to the morale of the teachers, and can make a world of difference in whether the program succeeds or fails.

15. If teachers leaving the classroom for extended periods continue to remain an issue then we need to seek alternative models and strategies for training teachers. Otherwise we will need to reconsider the original model of training that requires less time away from the classroom. But it will mean that State Education Departments and District Education Offices need to put some

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thought into the logistics of implementation. Given that now we have the trainers and the modules, training can be done throughout the year. There is no necessity to wait till the end of the year to start the training. This would cut down on the number of teachers having to leave the same school at the same time.

16. An alternative or complementary strategy is to train teachers on-site with the support of a critical friend as in the buddy system. This form of training may have far reaching impact on the school culture. It is common knowledge that teachers often work alone. They seldom have the benefit of the support of a mentor, though research has found that teachers learn best from each other. For this reason, there is every need to ensure that the buddy system is implemented so that teachers in need can benefit from the support of a colleague. It is the responsibility of school heads to ensure that time for professional development is structured into the school timetable to ensure that teachers can meet to discuss and to share. If the buddy system works, it might cut down the need for centralized training. Then teachers do not need to leave the school for long periods.

17. The other issue is the concern that the change in medium of instruction would disadvantage children in vernacular schools who are already performing well in their mother tongue. However, while some argued that mother tongue instruction helps in cognitive development, recent research has found that multilingual children consistently did better at school. In Malaysia, there seemed little evidence that the former argument is true. We have used Bahasa as the medium of instruction for over twenty years. But there is no

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evidence that Malay children did any better than our non-Malay students. Research indicated however, that what seemed important is the attitude of the school towards the use and support of the mother tongue. Children seemed to learn better in a multilingual environment because they are able to apply their first language learning skills to the target language. And the support and appreciation given to the home language will promote their self-esteem. This makes them happy learners. Therefore the school environment and teacher support of student learning is more important than deliberating on which should be the language of instruction.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

18. While we are all concerned about teachers' capacity at managing the change, we must not lose sight of the fundamentals of good teaching and of our students. Good teaching not only demands teachers with the knowledge, the skills and the right attitude towards teaching and learning but also teachers' capacity for nurturing the hearts and the minds of the students. Student learning is the core of good teaching. Good teaching makes learning a joy. Students will want to come to school. Teaching is not about shouting and raving about perceived inconsistencies in educational change. Teaching is about whispering into a student's ear and making learning the journey of a lifetime.

19. During the last few days, some interesting and valid points have been brought forward in this conference. One of these was about the anxieties and fears of beginning teachers (or newly-qualified teachers). They were worried

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that they have to jump into the deep end of the swimming pool as most of them studied in the national medium before the change.

20. Teachers themselves must be determined to acquire the skills in proficiency that they will need to successfully deliver content in English. In addition to this, they must teach in a way, which helps learners to learn both the subject matter as well as the second language. The quality and amount of knowledge of Science and Mathematics must not be compromised by its delivery in English.

21. Teachers must also keep in mind the language proficiency of their class. It is futile if you teach a wonderful Science lesson in English and your class has not understood a word of what you were saying. Teachers should adapt to their situations and exercise their skills in pedagogy to maximize opportunities and troubleshoot any problems that may arise. They must use specific methods of teaching, which will optimize learning and the use of English. Pictures, cartoons, demonstrations and other visual and non-linear methods may help in learning both the content and the language.

22. As has been discussed within the conference, one good way of supporting this innovation is to nurture the reading habit among schoolchildren, especially in English. Class reader programmes can help in this area. We must look at teaching as not subject specific but as teaching across the curriculum. Reading is a receptive skill, which is basic to the learning of almost all subjects, and the more practice, students get, the better their language acquisition becomes.

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23. Teachers should also be on the lookout for opportunities to incorporate the inculcation of moral values and positive attitudes into the teaching of content and language. After all, the national philosophy of education states that we as a nation aim at developing a holistic individual, well-balanced in terms of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. This is a very important aim, and one it is easy for teachers to overlook in the course of grappling with the change.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

24. Over and above the various efforts aimed at facilitating the transition into English, the Ministry of Education has also given Science, Mathematics and English teachers a monetary incentive as a token of appreciation for the extra effort they would have to expend in light of the language shift over and above the computers, books and courseware provided. Last year, RM46 million was spent in acquiring these. And a further RM2 billion in the next 5 years will be spent on capacity building.

25. What plans then do we have for the next few years of implementation? For the next four years, teachers will be continually inducted into the new curriculum, coursewares and pedagogy. Training in language proficiency will continue as long as teachers need it. Monitoring will be on-going. However, all these will not come to anything if teachers continue to teach in old ways, and do not maximize the full potential of the technology or allow time for personal improvement.



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26. In-service training is important as teachers' continuing professional development is the key to improving learning. Continuous development in skills and knowledge is imperative for all those involved in the field of education, as it is in every other professional field. It should be the professional culture to make changes where change is necessary. Schools as learning organizations are expected to promote and encourage teacher learning on an on-going basis.

27. This conference has been a conference with a difference. It has run parallel to the innovation that is being addressed; it has been organized on a massive scale to allow for maximum participation of all the government agencies involved in the implementation; and it has given teachers the opportunity to voice their concerns and to share their challenges and success stories. So teachers, the future and success of this innovation are in your hands. I trust you will rise to the occasion as always and make the nation proud.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

28. Once again, I would like to commend ELTC and the Teacher Education Division for their untiring efforts at supporting ETeMS. And I understand that the next ETeMS conference will be in 2005. I wish you every success here because I know I would not be around by then! Congratulations for putting up a conference of this stature. To the participants, I hope this conference has been an enriching experience for you. And with this, I declare the conference close. Thank you.