

Increasing the Effectiveness of the Pusat Kegiatan Guru (PKG) in the ETeMS Programme

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| <p>Hing Jee Teck is senior primary school teacher with 23 years of teaching experience at SMJKC Semambu, Pahang. He received his teacher training from Maktab Perguruan Kota Bahru (1978-1979).</p> <p>His first posting was at SJKC Yoke Hwa, Kuala Pahang, Pekan, Pahang (1980 – 1985). Later he was transferred to teach at SJKC Kong Min, Beserah, (1986).</p> | <p>ABSTRACT</p> <p><i>This paper looks at the existence and success of teacher centres in other countries. It then considers the purpose of setting up PKGs in Malaysia and how they can be more effectively used to support the ETeMS programme. The proposal is to set up a special unit within the PKG comprising dedicated teachers who are prepared to work fulltime. Their task would be solely to do with things pertaining to the ETeMS programme and not administrative work. They are to help support the teachers in the smaller towns and rural areas who did not receive their education in the English medium and who are now finding it difficult to cope with the changes in the curriculum. This core support group should strive to make the centre more attractive to the teachers. The infrastructure is already there and much of the groundwork has been laid. If such centres are effective in certain countries, there is no reason to doubt that they can work in this country.</i></p> |
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Introduction

From my reading, historically, Teachers' Centres came into being basically in one of two ways. In some cases, teachers struggled and lobbied to have a place to meet, to share resources and ideas, to develop curriculum materials, to engage in the social aspects of associating and working with fellow teachers. It was often difficult for these teachers to get the ideological and financial support to develop a facility. In other cases and as a later development, school administrating bodies decided that Teachers' Centres were beneficial, practical, economical and worthy of creation. Hence some administrative bodies decided to set-up Teachers' Centres as support facilities for teachers. There was and is no one model of a Teachers' Centre. The basic purpose was and is the same; but how that purpose was/is manifested in services offered, physical facilities and governance of those facilities is as varied as the number of Teachers' Centre.

The drive for Teachers' Centres was most prominent in the seventies and eighties. In some places it was started more as a result of teachers' efforts to create their own facility. As time went on, the original developers of the Centre felt the management of the Centre was best accomplished through teacher involvement and participation. So, over the years since its creation, the Teachers' Centres have evolved from a teacher's initiative more into a service provided to teachers by the district education office.

The Role of Support groups in other countries.

It was in the 1960s when the Nuffield Foundation had been persuaded to fund some curriculum projects for primary schools, following the success of Nuffield Science in the secondary schools. Local education authorities (LEAs) had seen the prestige associated with being a 'pilot area' and there were more volunteers than were needed. It was then that one of the project directors - in a flash of insight - decreed that each pilot LEA would be required to set up a teachers' centre. This was initially to provide a venue for the schools involved to get together on a local basis and offer feedback to the project teams. The value of the centres quickly became evident: Teachers meeting together to discuss their practice was a highly motivating enterprise and LEA advisers and inspectors wanted to get teachers involved in a similar way in other areas of the curriculum. By the mid-1970s, teachers' centres had become "one of Britain's major visible exports". Their presence was noted in India, Iran and Israel (Kahn, 1982) and in 1973, there were 100 or so functioning in the USA.

The Commonwealth Secretariat organised a conference in Auckland, New Zealand in May 1982 (described in Vol. 9, see Kahn, 1982). Amongst the products of this conference was a handbook on Teachers' Resource Centres (Kahn, 1984). This offered guidance in the establishment of these centres and, once again, reflected the British model. "The British Teachers' Centre concept would seem to have caused more interest, excitement and sponsorship in countries copying the British prototype than in the country of origin" (Williams, 1981, p. 112).

Mayo Education Centre is another such Teachers' Centre that has been successful. Previously called Castlebar Teachers' Centre, it was first established in 1991, with a brief to provide a meeting place for Primary and Post-Primary Teachers, to discuss issues related to their work, to act as resource centres and to provide in-service courses. Mayo Education



Centre achieved full-time status in 1997 as one of a network of twenty-one full-time and nine part-time Education Centres throughout the country

The Management Committee of the Centre consists of Primary and Post-Primary teachers. Funding for the Centre is currently provided through the In-Career Development Unit, Department of Education and Science in association with the National Development Plan. The Mayo Education Centre has proven to be very well placed to respond to local needs, and to provide decentralised, school-focused programmes, which are conducive to high levels of teacher participation, and inclusion of the wider school community in all aspects of the process. This has resulted in the formulation of the Education Act 1998, which, among others, declared that the Education Support Centres would be regarded as an essential element of educational infrastructure in the delivery of in-service training and support to teachers and the wider school community.

The Mission Statement for Mayo Education Centre is as follows:

"Mayo Education Centre aims to empower the local School Community and influence positively its quality of life in and for a changing world. It will achieve this aim by providing Support, Resources, Training and Opportunities for Personal and Professional Development, for all concerned."

We may not be able to take wholesale all that is being done in these centres. We have to adopt and adapt their ideas to our own peculiarities and constraints. What is important is that we can make use of the success of the Mayo Education Centre as a model to work on.

The History of Our Own Teachers' Centre

The history of the Pusat Kegiatan Guru (PKG) began in 1978 with the establishment of local resource centres in 302 schools. The Education Ministry felt that the PKG could help to strengthen the country's education system through its various training and services programme. Since its inception, the name had been changed twice before it officially came to be known as PKG in 1990. With the help of the World Bank, 200 buildings, solely for the purpose of running the PKG, were built. In addition to that, 150 more centres were created from existing schools buildings in order to extend the benefits of PKG to a wider area.

PKG comes under the jurisdiction of the Pusat Sumber Pendidikan Negeri (PSPN) beginning from 1996. One of its main functions was to equip and to increase the knowledge and skills of both the primary and secondary school teachers in the area of information

technology. To this end, many courses and activities were carried out at local and state levels throughout the country.

Teachers do make use of the facilities available at the PKG from time to time. On other occasions teachers from different schools are called to meet at the centre to exchange ideas, experiences and input or to discuss things related to their teaching profession. This has certainly brought about awareness among teachers that the PKG can help them achieve greater heights in their teaching profession.

The Present Setting

Much has been said about the noble goals of the PKG. Today the PKG continues to function in its present setting. The question which most of us would like to ask is, “Can something be done to make it more effective?”

On a visit to a particular PKG in the district of Kuantan, I found that the centre is well equipped with the necessary infrastructure for its day-to-day function. There are some reading materials available on the racks. Many interesting modules, lesson plans and teaching aids are also on display to encourage the teachers to utilize them to the fullest. On top of that, teachers could borrow some of the facilities to be used in the classroom.

There is only person who is the coordinator and a temporary clerk. The people who formed the committee are the various headmasters around that locality. According to the coordinator most, if not all of his colleagues in other PKGs, have to shoulder every task that is required. He said that it is becoming increasingly difficult in this present situation to make the centre effective and relevant to the schools.

Many teachers do not make use of the centre on their own initiative unless they are called to hold meetings like formulating questions for a particular examination or to discuss some upcoming events like story telling or elocution competitions. According to him, those who do come are there to do research for their own PJJ (Long Distant Learning). In view of this, I foresee that if little were done to arrest the declining interest among teachers as to the benefits of having the PKG around, its long-term prospect would not look bright. Something can and ought to be done at this stage to restore the noble cause of this institution.

Latest Development in the Curriculum

In 2002, the government proposed that the English Language be used in the teaching of Mathematics and Science beginning with pupils and students from Year 1, Form1 and Lower Six. The programme was implemented at the beginning of 2003. Many teachers from these respective groups were called to attend the ETeMS training programme throughout the country. In the process, quite a number of course participants were found wanting in their command of the English Language. Even the stringing of simple sentences became a chore to many. The fear of using the language verbally was quite evident when it came to micro teaching. The weaker ones would shy away from performing the task rather than making a concerted effort to try.

Proposal

In view of this latest development, I would like to propose that the PKG sets up a special unit called the ETeMS Support Team comprising of senior and experienced Mathematics and Science and English Language teachers. This special group of teachers are expected to play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the ETeMS programme.

Defining the Role of ETeMS Support Team

From time to time, courses are conducted by the various bodies under the Ministry of Education. These courses should be treated as an opportunity to enhance the teachers' professionalism. The members of the Support Team will definitely be required to attend these courses. Headmasters and Principals will find this arrangement to their liking. No longer will schools be required to "loan" their key personnel during teaching hours which otherwise would have affected their school timetable. Having acquired the knowledge, this core group will then impart the knowledge to the schools. Teachers will be selected to attend these courses at their respective locality, which preferably should be done over a shorter duration over the weekend. Where necessary, outside help from professional groups or qualified personnel, can also be enlisted to conduct courses that are related to the ETeMS programme.

Another area, which the PKG could do, is to produce learning resources for students who can then get on with learning even when their teachers are absent. This may be suitable for those in the secondary schools. Once the courses have completed, the centre must not forget to monitor the various schools to see if skills and activities learnt on courses are translated into action.

No man is an island – so goes the saying. Social interaction is necessary if things are to progress. With an ever-ready infrastructure at hand, namely the resource centre building, many activities (which must be published) can be organized during the weekends. These activities can be both recreational or academic in nature where teachers from the various schools can congregate, interact and to share information with one another. The benefits derived from such social intercourse can indirectly help the teachers planned and mobilized their strategies to make teaching a little more effective.

In Montreal, Canada, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Camerine Gray, who headed the Quebec Geography Teachers' Association (QGTA), had organized trips to restaurants of different cultures where they have the opportunity to sample foods from all over the world. Following the meal there is often a guest speaker who gives a lecture on that country that they have just sampled food from. They also often go on day trips to places like visiting a Sikh Temple and a black church, sampled a meal from Barbados, listened to a lecture and watched a video about that country.

He believes that such social activities are good for morale and spirit. Teachers are given the opportunity to socialize and chat and at the same time attend an informative educational and enjoyable event. Gray has often stated that these types of outings and get-togethers are excellent stress relievers where the everyday hustle and bustle and frustrations of the classroom can be forgotten for a little while and can be replaced by laughter and excitement. For him personally these social events have helped him to network, and have also been a wonderful way for him to meet many friends in the teaching community.

The core group must also ensure that the centre is a place worth coming to. This, perhaps, is one of the toughest parts to do. What will be the areas of focus? One will have to look at its locality if the building has not materialized yet. If that is not feasible because the structure had already been built, then there will other mitigating factors that should be considered. Always ensure that the environment of the place is conducive for teachers to meet. Simple things like proper furniture, good ventilation and lightings and a friendly environment can make a difference. There must also be enough of interesting reading resources to entice the teachers to do their research. Enough funds must be allocated to the centre to allow the sourcing of these resources. Another way is to provide an Internet ready access (a very minimum fee can be imposed) for those want to use the facility but do not have such in their own schools or home.

In this era of information technology, the role of the newsletter cannot be ignored. In fact, it has become an integral part of any organization that seeks to inform its members or workers on issues relating to the organization itself. The Support Group in the centre must also have the same perception. Teachers need to be informed and updated on issues relating to the ETeMS programme. At the same time, the committee can also disseminate the latest technology and methodology, which the teachers can explore and use in their teaching. Newsletters that are churned out regularly will definitely imply that the PKG is alive and functioning.

Teachers should also be given an avenue in the newsletter to voice their concern about issues pertaining to ETeMS. Matters that are raised should be acted upon within the shortest possible rather than to leave it alone. When things like this is acknowledged, teachers will not hesitate to contribute views and ideas for the betterment of the teaching profession as a whole.

Networking with other PKG groups and schools is also of paramount important. We have at our disposal, the Internet, which has a powerful medium of information storage and exchange of fascinating potential. Every effort should be geared towards creating dynamic local support networks of ICT among teachers through the Education Centres. When there is good planning and co-ordination of technical support to other PKGs in general and schools in particular, advice and the dissemination of information can easily be shared around.

The PKG must be involved in the production and procuring of teaching materials, activity sheets and modules in line with Curriculum Specification. Here, the centre can invite teachers to offer help during their spare moments. The ETeMS programme, under Phase 1 and 2 have given the teachers a greater degree of confidence in the using ICT to enhance lessons. Teachers can now experiment using a large variety of software associated with the new curriculum. This will indirectly help the teachers to expand the boundaries of their creativity, and at the same time, turning the power of computer technology into teaching tools that will captivate, motivate and ultimately move students towards greater learning.

The idea of having an item bank at District and State level is a good thing. However these two places may not be suitable in view of the nature of their work, which is mainly administrative. Perhaps it is time to shift the task to the PKG. Without the use of good test

items; teachers have been unable to identify the areas in which their pupils are encountering difficulties, so as to provide remedial work for them. There is a general tendency among Malaysian teachers to pick up the items from a revision book or from the previous test papers without knowing the statistical characteristic of the items. Then, there are also teachers who spend time writing new items but do not bother to store it or bank them properly. Thus, most of the items tend to be lost and they must be re-constructed repeatedly each time a new test is required. If item analysis is not carried out after each test, teachers will lose most of the information provided by the test and items are stored without their statistical characteristics. Here, in PKG, a computerized item bank would help to overcome the problem. This type of item bank could produce instant feedback to the teacher and pupils after the test.

While it is the job of the core group to make the ETeMS programme a success, it can also indirectly identify potential candidates who can come in and bring their own contribution to the education system. When the time comes, the qualified candidates can be recommended to the higher authorities for recruitment. These selected ones can be channelled to other PKG centres depending upon the needs. This on-going assignment will enable the PKG to have a constant pool of manpower.

The Criteria of the Support Group

They must come from the Mathematics, Science and English teachers. To serve in the core group, one must be a senior member of the teaching profession, preferably 40 years and above. This is the stage where teachers would have acquired a vast amount of knowledge and experience through their many years of teaching.

There are others who feel that the PKG should be stuffed with teachers who are 50 years old and above or near retiring age. Taking such a step might not allow candidates to meet the other requirements that will be mentioned shortly. On top of that we have to consider the aspect of health and mobility. People at that age tend to look forward to their days of retirement rather than to push their aging bodies around.

A real commitment to the vision of PKG must strongly be imbedded in the minds of the core group. The Book of Proverbs in the Bible has this to say, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18). A person with a sense of vision has a proactive mind. In this case he will be inclined to place the primary emphasis on student learning as opposed to merely teaching. He believes that, in order to effect maximum learner readiness, the

teacher must first come to know the individual learner. Only by knowing the learners, their learning styles, motivation, goals, interests, challenges and weaknesses can the teacher prepare and present lessons and activities, which maximize student learning potential.

It is also imperative for members not only to be computer literate, but also computer savvy as much of the work to be done in the centre will involve the use of this technology. Production of materials must be attractive and informative so as to draw the interest of today's students. The Government has committed itself to integrating information technology throughout the school system. The aim is a laudable and pragmatic one, and much effort has been devoted to achieving this aim.

Team spirit is important in any given organization. No one must think of himself or herself as independent of the other. Here, individual members can play a vital role in motivating one another. An enthusiastic person can bring a positive effect on the whole team. A word of praise or an acknowledgment of one's achievement can go a long way in boosting a person's confidence and commitment. People do better when they feel better, not when they feel worse. Positivism is a more constructive teacher than negativism. Positive messages elevate, encourage, and foster growth.

One salesgirl in a candy store always had customers lined up waiting while other salesgirls stood around. The owner of the store noted her popularity and asked for her secret. "It's easy," she said. "The other girls scoop up more than a pound of candy and then start subtracting some. I always scoop up less than a pound and then add to it." People are like magnets. They are drawn to the positive and are repelled by the negative. This is an important principle to understand when working with others. People who are effective in influencing other people phrase their communications in positive terms.

In fostering team spirit, one must not forget to recognize the value of everyone's contribution to the team. Favouritism must be avoided at all cost. Unnecessary bickering and contention will have serious repercussion on the team as a whole. Every effort should be made to encourage collaboration.

Members should be encouraged to practice a culture of honest and open communication, in which team members can express their views freely while at the same time listening to differing views of others. All constructive criticism should be view positively without anyone

having to misinterpret the intention of the contributor. At the end of the day, they must arrive at some sort of consensus. Thereafter, all members of the team must fully support the decision made. In areas where disagreement still persists, it would be wise to defer making a decision.

Last, but not least, members of the Support Group must be prepared to work hard. At times, one may have to forgo leisure because of the long hours of work, which cannot be completed within a short period of time. One such example can be in the area of research. When it comes to monitoring, it will entail quite a fair bit of travelling.

The Structure and Management Of The Core Group

For the smooth running of the ETeMS programme, someone among the Support Group must be appointed as a head. Here, the PSPN can do so. Whoever is elected must be firm and fair and should preferably be someone who can command the respect of the group. His role will be heavier than the others. Not only will he be required to organize the team into a coherent unit, he will also be expected to play the role of a motivator and a moderator in any meeting.

From time to time, he must call for a review of all projects undertaken in order to identify areas of strength and weaknesses and to make the necessary changes. In the final analysis, he must bear the bulk of responsibility for any decision made whether they are popular or not. He is answerable to PSPN. The latter should insist for periodical reports to keep tabs of the PKG's development.

What is the ideal number for the composition of the Support Group? For a start, we should not be too ambitious. It is better to evolve slowly and see some positive results than to accelerate and end up with disaster. I would suggest that only a few selected PKGs throughout the country come under this pilot programme. Two teachers each for Mathematics, Science and English be then identified and recruited from both the Primary and Secondary schools to form the various core groups. This is to make the group manageable.

Once the team is formed, it would be necessary to discuss the team's purpose and the job description of individual members. On top of that there should be clear guidelines in terms of operations like how a project should be tackled, how meetings are to be run and decisions made.

Drawing in experienced and committed teachers into such a circle might be another daunting task. The expectation, though challenging, is high. Like any organization that wants to recruit the best, the government must dangle the carrot. Any form of financial reward, in recognition of the effort done, will be welcomed. It can be in the form of promotion (to be assessed by the officers from PSPN) but must be within the job. This is to prevent the draining of important human resources and expertise. The other area of reward can be in the form of giving critical allowances to those serving in the centres. These allowances will be withdrawn once they leave the group.

It will be good to have a rotation system in the Support Team. If the head finds that certain people are not up to their mark, he or she can request that such a person be replaced. This method is easier to carry out. What about those who performed exceptionally well? They are committed and it is a joy working with them. The rotation system, if implemented in this case, would have dealt a severe blow to the group.

If there are no takers for the posts, the rotation system will not be implemented for that particular period. If there are, then a solution must be found because it is impossible to have the best of both worlds. I would like to suggest that teachers serve for a period of two years. After that two members each from the Primary and Secondary can return to schools and two new ones be recruited. The remaining members will act as advisors to the new ones so that there is continuity in the ETeMS programme. Then for the following year, two from the remaining four will be discharged. This process repeats itself.

It is also possible that some members might want to leave anytime during the year. They should be allowed to do so but a replacement should be found as soon as possible.

The Selection

Before the various core groups are formed, PSPN will need to do the following: -

- Organize meetings in all districts for ETeMS and English Language teachers 40 years and above.
- Presentation of paper and proposal.
- Elicit feedback from audience.
- Identify potential candidates.
- Interviewing and selection of candidates by officers from PSPN.



- Record names of unsuccessful, but potential candidates to be kept for future reference.

Conclusion

If this proposal is accepted and implemented, its success would depend very much upon the commitment of the people concerned and the support given by the relevant authorities. In some countries the existence of the Teachers' Centre was threatened in the past and, although things are relatively stable over here at the moment and the PKG has the administrative support, there is no guarantee that its existence will continue forever.

PKG cannot and must not remain static. In this rapid age of ever changing environment, where new developments of today become almost obsolete the next moment, the PKG need to respond to the new needs and changing demands accordingly. Technology strengthens teaching and learning and promotes critical thinking, problem solving and team learning. Teachers must provide inputs as to what they want the Centre to be, what they want it to provide and how they want to see it develop in the future

At times, each of us thinks we have encountered what seems to be an impossible task to accomplish or a goal to achieve. But, when we apply ourselves to the fullest, when we develop a solid plan of action, when we raise our intensity and become focused on achieving, when we raise our level of determination and perseverance, when we become convinced that we can achieve the goal we desire ...IT HAPPENS!!! We find that the old saying is true - "mind over matter" counts. Achievement is all about planning, practicing, never giving up or giving in, being determined and persevering.



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