

## Inclusion: A child's right to education

**Date:** 8 Mar 2014 (Saturday)

**Time:** 08:00 – 17:30 hrs.

**Venue:** University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC), Semenyih

Themed '*Inclusion: A child's right to education*', the conference announced as its focus the importance of inclusive education (IE), particularly the current initiatives and innovations in policy, curriculum and pedagogy in Malaysia. The objective of the conference was to provide an avenue for teachers, parents and students with an opportunity to raise awareness and gain knowledge and insights about inclusion in education.

The brief opening ceremony was officiated by YB Datuk Mary Yap, Deputy Minister of Education, accompanied by Mr. Bong Muk Shin, Director of Special Education, MOE.

**Keynote Address:** Dr. Min Bista, Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL), UNESCO Bangkok.

### *Promoting Equity and Inclusion in Education*

The challenge of inclusion is the greatest education policy challenge of our times. The 2013/14 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) concludes that by 2015 many countries will still not have reached the Education for All (EFA) goals that were set in 2000. Universal primary education will be missed by a wide margin. Progress towards other EFA goals is also disappointing. Lack of inclusion and fairness in education often manifests in non-enrollment, low participation, dropout, poor learning or educational failures. There is a global learning crisis that is hitting the poor, disabled, disadvantaged and marginalized groups the hardest. Education systems are systematically excluding children and the social, economic and political costs of exclusion in education can be very high. The situation will not change unless governments, schools, communities and teachers commit to the development of an inclusive education system that embraces and respects diversity and responds to the needs of learners. The presentation covered the challenges of achieving inclusion in education and proposed some actions for addressing these challenges. The presentation also highlighted UNESCO Bangkok's work on inclusive education.

**Plenary Session 1:** Dr Lucy Bailey, Dr Tida Tubpun & Dr. Alefiya M. Nomanbhoy – School of Education, UNMC.

### *Inclusive Education: Analysis of LINUS teachers' perceptions*

The Malaysian Literacy and Numeracy Strategy has trained teachers in early intervention to support students who are considered at-risk of developing literacy and numeracy difficulties. These teachers are instrumental in supporting continued inclusion of at-risk children in mainstream education. Whilst these teachers have been re-skilled to help them develop practical strategies for working with these students, less attention has been paid to the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

This session reported on University of Nottingham research into the LINUS teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. The research identified teachers' main reservations concerning inclusion, as well as their views on the benefits of educating all children together. Based on a discussion of the key concepts underpinning the LINUS project, the discussion considered ways to overcome both practical and attitudinal difficulties.

## **Plenary Session 2:** Prof. Dato' Dr Zalizan M. Jelas, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

### *Policy and practice in inclusive education: The Malaysian perspective*

Inclusive education was introduced in the Education Act (1996) as part of the continuum of services available for children with special needs. The presentation discussed the interpretation of policy pertaining to inclusion, its contradictions and its translation into practice within the Malaysian context; and shared experiences on how the national context explain and constrain inclusive practices. It reviewed the extent to which it brought benefits to children with special needs and their families; and examined the practical problems associated with the implementation of inclusive practices at community and school levels. Given the inconsistencies in policy and practice, the discussion recommended strategies for the way forward.

## **Plenary Session 3:** Assoc. Prof. Lee Lay Wah, School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

### *Closing the gap on inclusive education: Critical issues during the transitional period*

Inclusive education means the provision of equal educational and social opportunities to all children in schools. Child-specific inclusive practices currently exist. However, inclusive education is now a national agenda under the National Education Blueprint. Even though philosophical ideals converge amongst stakeholders, there are concerns about the ability of schools to be adequately prepared and to adapt towards inclusive education. Critical issues that support and impede implementation during this transitional period were explored. Models and strategies previously applied to close the policy-implementation gap were examined for their suitability to our local context. The existing special education networks in regular schools could be capitalized on. Other existing factors that could be significantly upgraded include collaboration between general and special education teachers. Other issues addressed included the tension between equitable education and accountability of academic performance. Implementation of inclusive education is complex and requires appropriate disposition, significant commitment and efforts from all stakeholders.

## **Concurrent Workshops**

### **Workshop 1:** Assoc. Prof. Ng Swee Fong, NIE, Nanyang Technological University

- *Mathematics Instruction*

### **Workshop 2:** Dr Lucy Bailey and Dr Tida Tubpun, School of Education, UNMC.

- *Engaging all learners: Strategies for teachers and parents to enhance children's literacy skills*

### **Workshop 3:** Dr. Alefiya M. Nomanbhoy, School of Education, UNMC.

- *Using an Intervention Continuum to Manage Behaviours in the Classroom*

## **Poster competition topics:**

1. Perception of inclusion amongst international school primary teachers.
2. Perceptions on autistic students by fellow students: a case study in private university in Malaysia.
3. The effects of tablet computers on the quality of life of children with autism and their families.

4. Are functional behavioural assessments and behavioural intervention plans effective ways of increasing compliance in an adolescent with mild learning difficulties?
5. Effectiveness of FBA (functional behavioural assessment) and BIPs (behavioural intervention plans) to reduce “off-task” behavior of a young adult with special needs in a work-training centre.
6. The psychosocial climate of primary schools: perceptions of teachers and administrators in Kuala Lumpur.
7. The challenges of including a special needs child in an inclusive environment.
8. Approaching students’ problem behaviours: the use of FBA and BIPs.
9. A study of pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education: a case study in a private university..
10. Perception of dyslexia among preschool trainee teachers in Malaysia.

### **Panel Session:** *Leading Inclusion Through Partnerships*

**Chairperson:** Dr. Ganakumaran Subramaniam (UNMC)

**Panelists:** Dr. Min Bista (UNESCO)

Assoc. Prof. Lee Lay Wah (USM)

Dr. Kannamah Mottan (UPSI)

Dr. Ashley Ng Yoon Mooi (UNMC)

### **Reflective summary:**

This is a much-welcomed initiative by academia (in this case, a well known British university) to address IE issues in the country. It brought together various stakeholders such as disability related NGOs, policy makers, teachers (from private, international and government schools), parents, and of course, academic researchers and students.

The conference certainly achieved its objective of raising awareness, and helped participants gain better insights about inclusion in education. But more than that, it was heartening to note the research community moving beyond academic issues to researching genuine issues on the ground. For example, in Plenary Session 2, UNMC staff conducted research on the LINUS programme to identify teachers’ reservations concerning inclusion, and considered ways to help teachers overcome practical and attitudinal difficulties. Similarly, research by the student community, as reflected in the Poster Competition topics, reflects a similar trend. This will have the positive effect of fostering meaningful dialogue amongst the various stakeholders concerning genuine issues on the ground, and hopefully lead to much needed changes in our education system.

CEO and Provost of UNMC Prof Christine Ennew in her welcome address referred to this event as an ‘inaugural launch’, alluding to similar events in the future. If this current research trend (of looking at real issues involving real people on the ground) continues, then we have good reason to look forward to future collaboration with UNMC to be a catalyst for change.

Respectfully submitted to NECI Council Members,  
Lim Boon Hock.