



## Let's transform education

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Article

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BARCELONA, Spain played host to several key events last week. The United Nations (UN) Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which was declared in 2005, has reached its mid-point. Though this has not created a flurry of concern in the Malaysian education scene, it has made an impact internationally. In Barcelona, where architect Antonio Gaudi's designs have almost a total presence, ESD made itself felt.

There was also the Public Symposium of the UN Inter-Agency Committee on ESD in the city to take stock of what has been done in the first five years at the local, regional and global levels. Monitoring and evaluation are deemed essential to close the gap and correct misperceptions in advancing ESD towards desired goals by 2014. The symposium, held in a heritage building which used to be a hospital, sent mixed signals.



*Children applying for the Cambodian Children's Fund education programme. There is a need to think and rethink education of the future*

On one hand, ESD is rather "sick" and the venue of a former hospital is appropriate. On the other, ESD is emerging anew in a reclaimed space, offering a notion of sustainability.

Fortunately, the latter prevailed over the former. There is a need to think and rethink education of the future but the fact remains that there are no roadmaps, there is no recipe yet we are pretending that we know all the answers. The so-called "new" knowledge is not being translated into new behaviours! Instead, there seems to be a breakdown, given the turmoil in almost all facets of life and at all levels.

So, is education about sustainability, if at all? Some countries have declared that it is, and are proceeding to demonstrate it. Many others are still in the "wait-and-see" mode.

In keeping with the concerns, the Ubuntu Committee of Peers Meeting -- also held in Barcelona -- elaborated on the achievements of the concept of the Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) on ESD.

This concept, first launched in 2005 with seven pioneering RCE -- of which Universiti Sains Malaysia is proud to be one -- has taken on a life of its own with more than 77 RCE worldwide, at the recommendations of the Ubuntu Committee and acknowledged by the United Nations University.

The centres are tasked with mainstreaming ESD at all levels while working on a transformative learning space where the community has a legitimate role and is therefore rightly engaged. Schools should no longer be asked to solve problems where communities have failed to do so!

This fits the adage it takes a village to educate a child, which was in vogue, years ago. Now the responsibility is passed entirely to schools, some with a myopic world view of exams, exams, exams!

Values and ethics go out the window unless they are sanctioned by Wall Street based on over-consumption and greed. Put together, we often celebrate successes for the wrong reasons.

The 5th International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education as a follow-up to the World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, 2009) sent a strong message that a transition to a sustainable future is a must.

There was a call for a transformation "from understanding to action" where education must review its educative purpose with all its ramifications to respond to an urgent global need.

Some of the following questions were raised. Can the worldwide academic community maintain the current higher education quality standards without transitioning to complex thinking in the creation and dissemination of knowledge? Do we want to spread the use of knowledge in society?

Knowledge tends to be compartmentalised and exists in silos but that is not the case in the real world. Unless we accept the reality of the situation, knowledge will be mere artifact of scholarship.

This begs the question as to whether we are prepared to re-examine the concept of knowledge itself in order to advance interdependence, complexity and uncertainty?

In addition to all these is the PEACE Programme 7th International Conference where there was a meeting of minds at different metaphysical levels.

However, "the transformation is huge and difficult to put into practice and there is no option to (stay) at the current stage" remains the underlying aspiration that Barcelona brings.

We welcome the new Higher Education Ministry secretary-general Abd Rahim Mohd Nor with great expectations that together we will quickly move way from what is current and tired, and create new inspirations, God willing.

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