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Ideas galore!

This year's Melta conference will explore issues related to various types of literacies.

THE 17th Melta International Conference that will be held at three different venues this year – Sabah, Penang and Selangor – promises to be an exciting and inspiring one for those involved in the teaching and learning of English.

The theme, "English Language and Multiple Literacies", touches on an essential aspect of education for an individual to succeed in life – the need to be literate in more ways than one.

Traditionally, literacy is defined as being able to read and write. Today, it has taken on a wider dimension as it also encompasses the ability to use technology to communicate successfully in an increasingly technologically sophisticated world.

To be "computer literate" is to equip oneself with computer skills so that one can use the computer to its fullest advantage.

Similarly, to be "language literate" means that one is able to make use of language skills to communicate ideas and messages effectively (through speaking and writing), as well as to receive information and acquire new knowledge (through reading and listening).

Learners today need to acquire multiple literacies.

It is with this in mind that the Melta conference will gather educators and researchers from all over the country and the world to look at issues related to multiple literacies.

Computer literacy is clearly a vital aspect of empowerment as it offers one access to the world via the Internet and opens up infinite opportunities for acquiring new skills and knowledge.

Teachers who want to learn more about how computers can enhance language teaching and develop other forms of literacy are invited to attend the conference, in particular, the sessions on multimedia literacy, online activities, Internet usage for language teaching and CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning).

Among the papers that will be presented are "Wikispaces: A Roundtable for Discussion in the

ESL Language Classroom" (in Selangor), "Writing Online Journals – A Case Study" (Sabah) and "Strategies for Teaching with Multimedia Courseware" (Penang).

Besides presentations on the teaching of vocabulary and grammar, and language assessment, researchers involved in policy making will also share research findings with participants at the conference.

Other forms of literacy to be highlighted are language literacy in science and mathematics, specific purpose applications, creative literacy, workplace literacy and soft skills development.

Participants can also attend workshops for hands-on training. A number of workshops have been lined up, including one on "Creating Ideas, Creating Stories" (Sabah and Penang) and another entitled "Incentives for learning: Language acquisition and music in ELT" (Selangor).

A presentation on an e-learning site for the teaching of primary and secondary school Science in English has also been slotted in for participants at all three venues.

The keynote speakers include Deputy Education Minister Datuk Razali Ismail (who will kick-start the conference in Selangor), Universiti Sains Malaysia vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dzulkifli Abdul Razak (who will speak in Penang) and Education Ministry deputy director-general (Schools) Datuk Noor Rezan Bapoo Hashim, who will be presenting the keynote address in Sabah.

Plenary speakers include Universiti Putra Malaysia's Assoc Prof Dr Edwin Vethamani, who will present a paper entitled "Resource-based Programmes in English Language Education: Concept, Implementation and Effectiveness" at all three venues.

Dr Lesley Harbon and Dr Ann Cheryl Armstrong from Australia and Dr Catherine Wallace from the University of London will be giving their plenary presentations in Sabah.

Melta has also invited various researchers involved in literacy and language teaching to share their ideas, including Prof Dr Hyacinth Gaudart, Prof Dr Kuldip Kaur, Assoc Prof Dr Lee Su Kim and Prof Aurelio P. Vilibar.

Although the conference is primarily for those involved in the education industry, parents of school-going children who are keen to find out more about literacy and how to improve their children's literacy levels are also invited to attend.

The conference will be held in Gurney Hotel, Penang (May 26 and 27), Palace of the Golden Horses at the Mines, Selangor (May 30 and 31), and Le Meridien, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (June 5 and 6). For details, visit www.melta.org.my/conference_2008, call 03-8944 1027 or e-mail melta@tm.net.my.

The Star is the media sponsor for the conference.