

ERAS Conference 2004
Presidential Welcome Address
By Associate Professor Tan Oon Seng

Our Guest of Honour, LG Lim Chuan Poh, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education, Professor Leo Tan, Director, NIE, our distinguished guests, delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

A Very Good Morning. On behalf of the Executive Committee of ERAS and the ERAS 2004 Conference Organizing Committee may I warmly welcome all of you to this 2004 ERAS conference.

The ERAS conference used to hold at the Plaza hotel at Beach Road – last year however we had to turn away last minute registration for participation. The ERAS executive committee decided immediately after the last conference that we need to find a hotel that can comfortably accommodate beyond 300. There were some initial apprehension that perhaps we might not hit the number again as previous conferences prior to the last usually has about 250... However having decided on the theme of enterprise we decided to be little more entrepreneurial. This morning we have here close to 360 people.

ERAS is a purely a professional association supported by the members who are interested in education and passionate about promoting educational research and disseminating good practices to improve education. The increase participation particularly from teachers in the school is most encouraging – not only as participants but as paper presenters. Educational research is not just the interest of teacher educators and researchers but also the practitioners.

We have also help promote education research not so much as the rigour of those who intend to move into academia or are pursuing post-graduate education degrees at NIE but more important research to improve practice. ERAS's goal is to facilitate in whatever ways we can through this conference. I think at the end of the day ERAS's goal is that of the teacher as researcher- practitioner, not so much about teachers doing research but the enhancement of teaching practices that can make a difference in the lives of students.

Sometime this year I had the opportunity to visit the Gutman Library when I was attending a management program at Harvard University. Since Harvard is the oldest university in USA I decided that one of the unique things I should do was look for the oldest books possible on education. I came across a book called "A First Book in Teacher Training". One of the things I remembered about reading this book was its exposition about three kinds of teachers in the world. I found the descriptions highly relevant even for us today.

The first kind of teachers was described as "teachers that need forgiveness". Students would perhaps be better off without passing through the hands of such

teachers. These are teachers who affected students' learning, interest and lives negatively. The students' interest in certain subjects and their self-esteem and confidence for learning certain fields of knowledge were destroyed because of such teachers.

The second kind of teachers was referred to as the "colorless teachers". Such teachers whether they existed or not did not matter to the students. For this second group of teachers, teaching was just a job to be done and they basically set the scope of learning for the students. Students forget about them once they move on to the next grade or leave the school.

The third category of teachers is called "the imperishable teachers". These "imperishables" are teachers who have left a mark in the lives of students. It may be the impartation of the meaning of life, development of a special love for the subject, firing up of curiosity and interest in something, impression of life changing value or perhaps an episode that shaped the career destiny of the student.

Knowledge in this new economy is increasingly characterized by the creative integration of information and learning from diverse disciplines. In recent years psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, scientists, entrepreneurs and researchers from various fields have shed considerable light on the nature of creativity, innovation and enterprise. The theme for this is ***Innovation and Enterprise: Education for the New Economy***. We have a gathering of not only teachers and education researchers but also invited panelists from business and industries as well as eminent professors from various fields.

Education need to address the challenge of preparing the young to function in changing the new environments. It is often too easy to get locked into paradigms and perspectives. Not too long ago I was on a humanitarian trip to Inner Mongolia. At one point, we were all traveling through some grasslands off Hohhot. One of the locals with the group passed around bananas for all for us. After I finished the banana I held on the skin because they did not provide us with any waste paper bags. The other Singaporeans with me also did the same. Then one of the Taiwanese wound down the window of the bus and threw his banana skin out of the window of the minibus. Immediately, one of the Singaporeans remarked how we, Singaporeans would not just throw things indiscriminately. A local who was with us encouraged us to throw the skin outside the window. He said that that was the right thing to do as the sheep will come and feed on the skin. He maintained that it is good for them. Only then did I realized how easily we are locked into certain ways of thinking even though we are in a different environment.

I think one of the most important thing about enterprise is the ability to gain different perspectives, develop multiple viewpoints, the awareness of different worldviews and paradigms and different ways of reasoning and thinking so that

we can be highly flexible in our thinking in the new environments. I am so glad to announce that in this conference we have over 140 papers and six keynoters to share insights of their thoughts on their findings.

Well I hope as you listen to the presentations, you will feel free to throw away banana skins during the discussion and question and answer sessions. We have no waste paper basket for ideas. But, we should be encouraged to recycle ideas in different forms and develop insights into things we are not aware of.

We have a long list of people to thank for making this conference possible: the organizing committee, the paper presenters, our sponsors and all our conference participants. Then, there is someone who in many ways has become a patron for ERAS. He is none other than Prof Leo Tan who gave his unwavering support to his NIE staff and ERAS; and of course, our Guest of Honour, LG (NS) Lim Chuan Poh, Permanent Secretary, MOE. We truly appreciate his welcome address and his presence with us.

May I wish you all a very fruitful meeting of minds in these three days. Thank you.