08/07/2002

Teaching with technology's help

Chandra Devi

ENGLISH, considered the lingua franca of the world, has been a hot topic in this country of late. It took centrestage when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad commented on the decline of the usage of the language and the proficiency of its users. Some have proposed that the reintroduction of the English-medium schools into the education system will help address the problem.

   Recently, Dr Mahathir also suggested the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance the teaching of the language and aid in better comprehension of the language among students.

   Teachers should take the cue from here. If the conventional methods of teaching have not been fruitful, why not try something that has proven to improve learning. The use of multimedia technology, CD-ROMs, word processors, presentation applications and the Internet can create creative presentations of lessons, add excitement to and enhance students' learning, and retain better students' attention.

   One teacher who uses technology to deliver her lessons had this to say: "The use of technology has exposed my students to heads-on, hands-on and hearts-on learning. There's more understanding of subject matters now and less memorising. Thoughtful learning or heads-on learning takes place as they access information from the Internet and educational CD-ROMs and evaluate and rearrange the information as required. Hands-on learning develops as they are required to create lesson plans and convert information to projects. Hearts-on learning, on the other hand, is brought about by student-centred learning."

   She says the heads-on, hands-on and hearts-on learning brought about by the use of technology has made her students more committed and confident. This motivates them to seek more knowledge and learn, she adds.

   That wholesome learning experience is what all our teachers in schools should strive for. And, if technology enables it, why not adopt it? However, we have to acknowledge that most of our teachers are clueless about how to put technology to use effectively in the classroom.

   This, perhaps, stems from the technology training approach for teachers. The system today pushes for teachers to be computer literate, not so much about applying that knowledge to deliver lessons.

   The Education Ministry's teacher training division should stress on this more. Its current efforts should be spruced up to instil this know-how to all pre-service and in-service teachers. Besides training, continuous support for teachers in this area is also necessary. Perhaps, the teacher training division or the technology education division can emulate the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), which is the British government's lead agency on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education. The agency provides a comprehensive service for teachers to adopt ICT in education. Its Web site http://www.becta. org.uk/ is a rich source of information for teachers from case studies and examples of good practice, to practical guidance on using ICT in the curriculum and for administration.

   With such a helpline for our teachers, the issue of slow uptake of ICT