

# Single school system for national unity?



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What Malaysians may need in order to truly unite the nation is to have a single school system, said UCSI chancellor Abdul Rahman Arshad.

This, he said, was because the existing multi-stream system, which was a compromise between the intention of the Razak Report to forge unity and the wishes of those favouring vernacular education, has failed to unite Malaysians.

"Have we achieved unity? I don't think so, because the question is still being asked," Abdul Rahman argued before participants at the 5th National Conference on Integrity, which was held in Kuala Lumpur today.

He was speaking at one of the discussion groups at the conference, on the topic of education as a framework for national unity.

As such, he said, one proposal for Malaysians to consider would be to absorb vernacular schools into one single system, like what was done in Singapore.



However, Abdul Rahman added, this did not mean the diversity of Malaysians would be suppressed. Rather, the move should be to bring all that is good about vernacular schools and the various cultures into the new, single curriculum.

"Let's use diversity to unite, rather than divide us," he said.

## 'Create integration among the streams'

However, journalism lecturer and civil activist Wong Chin Huat, who also spoke at the same forum, felt Abdul Rahman's hopes could not take place.

"I know it may be heretical for me to say this, but I believe that what we need is not more unity but fragmentation," contended Wong.

His argument is that the idea should not be about integrating the streams into one but creating integration among the streams.

He believes streamlining everything into a single language or stream will be more akin to indoctrination than education.

Mono-lingualism should not be how we achieve unity but the real challenge would be how to achieve unity, despite being multilingual and multicultural, said Wong (right).

"Diversity is the ultimate goal of education, with diversity and division being the natural consequences of education."

Indeed, he stressed, not only must there be multiple school systems but also education streams, so that students will have the freedom to choose what they want to learn, instead of the usual subjects of science, commerce and arts.



Wong cited as an example the teacher in the movie 'Dead Poets Society' and his unorthodox teaching methods as the alternative to the rote-and-force-fed learning that he believes we now have.

The real problem, he felt, was not differences in language, perspective and culture but the rigidity and inability to change.

As such, students must be encouraged to experience diversity in order to have flexible and understanding minds that would allow them to integrate with one another, despite their differences.

The argument as to whether to have a single school system or multiple streams has been the bone of contention for those who want to use a singular education system to forge unity and those who are adamant that education should be made available to students in their native tongues, so as to preserve their cultural heritage.