

29 March 2009 (Sunday)
Hong Kong Youth Summit 2009
organised by Hong Kong Outstanding Students' Association

Speech by Mr Raymond H C Wong, JP, Permanent Secretary for Education

Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools
“Equipping Yourself and Developing Your Potential”
(Translated from Chinese)

Dear Students,

Forward

Good afternoon. I am delighted to join the Youth Summit this afternoon to share with you Hong Kong's development in education. All of you are outstanding senior secondary students nominated by your schools and selected by the Association. You embody our hopes and are pillars of our future society. This year, the theme of the summit is “The Future Blueprint of Hong Kong”. It gives us opportunity to examine how the development of education will impact on our future.

2. Recently, there has been much discussion on the Government's proposal to fine-tune the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools. Today, I would like to brief you on the fine-tuning arrangements and invite you to give your views in the discussion session after this speech.

Objective of Fine-tuning

3. At present, our primary schools mainly adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI), whereas English is the medium of instruction (EMI) dominating senior secondary and post-secondary education. The current MOI policy for secondary schools has been implemented since 1998. Apart from the 100-odd secondary schools using EMI conditionally in teaching, some 300 other schools are using Chinese as their MOI at junior secondary levels. In its “Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation” (MOI & SSPA Report) published in 2005, the Education Commission (EC) reaffirmed the objective of the MOI

policy for secondary schools as “upholding mother-tongue teaching and enhancing proficiency in both Chinese and English”. In short, the effectiveness for students to learn in mother tongue is beyond any doubt. So, you will probably ask, “Why do we need to fine-tune the MOI arrangements for secondary schools then? Are we going to overturn mother-tongue teaching?”

4. Education is crucial to the future development of each student and the whole society. Our education system and initiatives must be developed in tandem with the changing needs of society. Hong Kong is Asia’s world city as well as a global financial centre. Besides possessing a good standard of Chinese, our younger generation should also be proficient in English so as to rise to the challenges of the 21st century brought about by societal changes. In fact, our society has earnest expectations on the English proficiency of our younger generations.

5. To develop a good command of English hinges on inner motivation and external language environment. After all, Hong Kong is a Chinese society where students have less opportunity to expose to English in their daily lives. As such, we hope to increase their chances of exposure to and use of English at junior secondary levels, and enhance their confidence and motivation in learning English so as to facilitate their smooth transition to senior secondary education and prepare them for future careers. This is exactly the basis of our rationale for fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools.

6. Our mother-tongue teaching policy has been implemented for 10 years with proven results in enhancing students’ learning. Schools have also mastered the knowledge of how to maximize the benefits of the appropriate MOI to facilitate the learning of content subjects. We consider that it is the right time for us, on the basis of mother-tongue teaching, to move forward so that developments of schools will no longer be confined to mode of bifurcating secondary schools into CMI and EMI schools. To this end, schools should be given room for development, enabling them to be more student-centred in their learning and teaching strategies. At the same time, we should enable our students to learn English well from the primary level to achieve a combined effect through the two-pronged approach.

Details of Fine-tuning

7. So, what is fine-tuning? First and foremost, we will adhere to the policy objective of “upholding mother-tongue teaching and enhancing proficiency in both Chinese and English”. We propose that the current policy be fine-tuned to allow schools professional discretion as far as possible. To cater for student diversity and ensure

learning effectiveness, we uphold the three basic criteria of “student ability”, “teacher capability” and “support measures” for schools adopting English as the MOI at junior secondary levels as recommended in the MOI & SSPA Report by the EC in 2005. As a matter of fact, schools meeting these three criteria could make professional judgements on their school-based MOI arrangements. Yet, any arrangement made must be in the best interest of students.

Diversified MOI Arrangements

8. According to the fine-tuning arrangements, all schools are allowed to teach primarily in mother tongue and conduct English-medium extended learning activities (ELA) up to 25%¹ of the total lesson time, such as teaching additional themes in English in relation to the curriculum contents.

9. Besides, with the prime concern of students’ learning effectiveness, schools may adopt EMI to teach some key learning areas or subjects up to the same 25%¹ of the total lesson time according to the readiness and capabilities of their teachers and other support measures. This is referred to as the “by subject” arrangement.

10. Apart from the basic options mentioned above, in accordance with the principle of catering for students’ needs and the student-centred approach to teaching, if schools have admitted a critical mass of students capable of learning in English, they will have more options in using mother tongue or English to teach non-language subjects.

11. To sum up, schools can have diversified MOI arrangements at the junior secondary levels. This will provide each and every junior secondary student with different degrees of English learning opportunities, facilitating their smooth transition to the English-medium teaching at senior secondary and post-secondary education and preparing them for career development in the future.

Equipping Yourself and Developing Your Potential

12. MOI is a teaching strategy in essence. Schools should decide on the suitable MOI arrangements in the best interest of students and make the necessary adjustments in the teaching contents according to their learning progress and cater for learner diversity, so that every student will have the opportunity to develop his ability and potential to the fullest. What the Government has laid down are the principles and basic criteria of the

¹ This refers to the percentage of time for ELA with reference to the total lesson time which excludes the lesson time for the English Language subject.

policy. Schools can provide diversified modes of MOI arrangements under the framework. In any case, what really matters is whether individual students have the motivation and interest to enhance their language abilities to achieve proficiency in both Chinese and English.

13. All of you here are senior students and therefore will not be directly affected by the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, which will start with Secondary 1 classes and progress each year to a higher grade level. Nevertheless, I still very much hope that I will be able to hear your valuable opinions on this issue because you have all gone through the stages of learning in the mother-tongue or in English at your junior secondary levels, and learning through English learning is actually part of your life

14. At this point, I must emphasise that English learning should not be confined in the school or classroom. Students should also make use of every opportunity to learn English such as by reading more English books, newspapers and magazines, watching more English films and TV programmes, and communicating more with foreigners.

15. As to English learning in schools, we hope that under the fine-tuning framework, students will have more opportunity to expose to English in content subjects other than in the subject of English Language. In your opinion, what MOI arrangements will benefit students of different abilities to benefit in learning English as well as in content subjects? What should schools and teachers pay attention to when making the arrangements? For example, if schools allocate not more than 25% of the total lesson time for ELA, what activities can stimulate the interest of the less capable students to learn English so as to effectually enhance their English proficiency? If schools adopt the “by subject” arrangement, which subjects should be taught in English so as to make the learning of English and other content subjects more effective for students?

16. From another perspective, **what should students do to make the best use of the fine-tuning opportunities to equip themselves and develop their potentials** so as to promote their language abilities to prepare for further studies or **career developments**? The fine-tuned arrangements are designed for students. Their active participation in the issue is very important. I hope that we will have an in-depth discussion on the above questions later in this Summit.

Conclusion

17. The fine-tuning creates more room for students to better equip themselves. The world has been struck by the financial tsunami and Hong Kong is no exception. All

sectors and strata are facing pressures, but only those who are persistent and proactive enough can overcome the adversity to embrace the opportunities that open up to them ahead.

18. Lastly, I wish all of you every success in your future endeavours.

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