

SED's speech at Knowledge Fair 2009 (English translated version)

The following is the speech entitled “Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools ---- Holistic Support for Teachers” by the Secretary for Education, Mr Michael Suen, at the “Knowledge Fair 2009” workshop today (November 28):

Dear Principals, Teachers and Co-workers of Education,

The “Knowledge Fair 2009 ---- English Language and Subject Learning” of today marks the launching of sharing sessions to be held at half-yearly intervals to support the implementation of fine-tuning the medium of instruction for secondary schools. Schools will share in these sessions their experiences in pedagogical practices under the fine-tuned arrangements for the medium of instruction. We are glad to have invited Mr John Polias to deliver the keynote speech. I believe that Mr Polias is no stranger to you. He has been giving support to many schools in using English to teach non-language subjects under the programme, DOLACEE (Development of Language Across the Curriculum for English-medium Education). Thanks to his efforts, classroom teaching has become more interactive with enhanced learning effectiveness. Over the past few years, more than 2,000 teachers have participated in the relevant programme. With the rich experience of Mr Polias, I trust that you will get a lot of inspiration in the coming thematic sharing and discussions.

Not long ago, we vetted the “School-based Medium of Instruction Plan for Junior Secondary Levels” submitted by schools. I am pleased to learn that most schools have devised their MOI arrangements professionally according to the fine-tuned MOI framework. Among them, some carry on with their usual MOI practices, using the mother tongue or English medium, but most of the others can make good use of the room provided by the fine-tuned MOI framework to devise their diversified arrangements, having regard to students’ needs and schools’ circumstances. These arrangements include teaching different classes, groups or subjects in Chinese or English, or introducing different modes of extended learning activities in English under the CMI teaching. It is even more encouraging to know that some schools can realize the essence and spirit of the fine-tuned arrangement in its best practice by adopting a progressive mode of MOI arrangements so as to cater for the learning diversity

of their students, especially the Secondary 1 entrants who cannot adapt to English learning immediately. These schools choose to wait until the students are promoted to Secondary 2 or Secondary 3 then they bring in gradual increases in English teaching in the non-language subjects, according to the needs of the curriculum. This is indeed a good example worthy of consideration by other schools.

As for the practice of allocating the time of English extended learning activities to teaching non-language subjects in English, which might have attracted your concern, many schools have, in fact, chosen to use English to teach only one non-language subject, or only some students at a certain grade level.

In general, with the implementation of the fine-tuning, we can expect that the schools will adopt diversified teaching modes in tandem for further enhancing the teaching effectiveness. Under the fine-tuned arrangement, the bifurcation of schools into the Chinese-medium (CMI) and English-medium (EMI) will no longer exist. In this connection, I am very pleased that the relevant school councils and school head associations have reached a consensus with us earlier to appeal to schools not to emphasize the names of "CMI School" or "EMI School" any more. Moreover, to ensure that parents can obtain accurate information for selecting schools for their children who will be enrolled in Secondary 1 in the 2010/11 school year, the relevant school councils, school head associations and the Education Bureau have reiterated that schools must present detailed information of their school-based MOI arrangements to the stakeholders in a professional manner, which means, while ensuring that the information is transparent and not unduly misleading, schools must not employ merely some rough figures to explain their MOI arrangements to stakeholders.

As in the past, parents can get information about schools from the Secondary School Profiles, which is due to be released soon. Although schools have clearly spelt out their MOI arrangements for junior secondary classes by level and by subject, as well as their whole school language policy in the Secondary School Profiles, owing to the limited space of the Profiles, they still have the responsibility to explain to parents when enquired on details of the teaching modes of their MOI arrangements. These include the subjects and MOI arrangements adopted for these subjects by class or by group, as well as the concrete arrangements of assigning students to these classes and groups, etc. The detailed requirements have been set out in our circular to schools in May

this year. The most important thing is that schools should post details of their arrangements on their web pages for parents' reference.

Starting from 4 December 2009, we will organize a series of district briefing sessions for parents to introduce the procedures of the Secondary School Places Allocation. Experts on parenting and school principals will be invited to share their experiences so as to facilitate parents to grasp the changes taking place at schools and enable them to make school choices for their children that are conducive to their "whole-person development".

With the implementation of the diversified arrangements of the medium of instruction, teachers may need to adjust their teaching strategies, including the skills of teaching in English, the curriculum arrangements, the selection of learning materials, and even the adaption of the terms used in classroom communication with students. In order to support teachers, we are planning various professional development programmes for teachers, including training courses for non-language subject teachers using English as the MOI and school-based support programmes on whole-school language policy. The purpose is to help teachers cater for their students' various needs by equipping them with the knowledge and skills in the effective use of classroom language, appropriate design and adaptation of curriculum, teaching strategies and methods. These programmes and courses are expected to be kicked off progressively around March and April next year. We will also provide supply teachers to release regular teachers to attend these training courses.

Moreover, we will conduct a large-scale longitudinal study to collect data and analyse the modes and effectiveness of the various MOI arrangements. We will also work with the research institutions to find out how to develop effective teaching resources for teachers.

Besides, we are now actively considering, through some existing projects, like 'the English Enhancement Scheme', creating more room for schools and teachers to prepare their school-based MOI measures for enhancing students' English proficiency. Schools will be able to achieve more with less in the implementation of their MOI arrangements if they can make reference to professional views and practical experiences.

Apart from the keynote speech by Mr Polias right after this session, in the Knowledge Fair today, there are also 14 parallel sharing sessions by schools

on good practices focusing on seven themes, which cover effective enhancement in the learning and teaching of English Language, enrichment of an English language environment, practices in using English to teach non-language subjects, and formulation and implementation of the whole-school language policy at school level, etc. It will be very fruitful when you exchange your views and experience with other schools in the light of the developmental stages and needs of your school.

Finally, I would like to share with you a maxim by Gotthold Lessing, a German poet and thinker of the eighteenth century. The original is in German and I am sorry that I do not know how to read it in German. An English translated version I have is like this, “It is not the truth that a man possesses, or believes that he possesses, but the earnest effort which he puts forward to reach the truth, which constitutes the worth of a man.” *The Analects* says likewise, “Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous.” The road to knowledge and truth is winding and long. One needs to persevere to succeed. It is also true when it comes to learning English. To motivate students to learn English, we need to let them understand clearly the purpose of learning it. We should first help students not to be afraid of English and give them every possible opportunity to be exposed to and to use English in non-language subjects. Only in this way will they stand a good chance to succeed in their studies.

I hope that while developing the biliterate and trilingual abilities of their students, our fellow education co-workers will bear in mind the importance of guiding them to understand the true meaning of learning.

Thank you.

Ends

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