

For Information
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**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Learning, Teaching and Use of Sign Language in the Education for Students with Hearing Impairment by the Education Bureau and Promotion of the Use of Sign Language in Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the learning, teaching and use of sign language in the education for students with hearing impairment (HI) by the Education Bureau (EDB), and the promotion of the use of sign language in schools.

Background

2. The application of language is the prerequisite to knowledge acquisition. Language skills and thinking skills are also interrelated. To communicate with people, develop literacy or acquire knowledge, students (including those with special educational needs (SEN)) have to use language to establish their understanding towards the subjects, and to develop their abilities to interpret, analyze, generalize and infer. These skills are vital to the enhancement and maintenance of their learning motivation, and development of higher order thinking in the course of learning. Hence, a good foundation in language proficiency is important to students' communication, literacy and learning abilities. Moreover, language is an important communication tool. Good language skills enable students to develop social competency, self-confidence and proper value judgment. Therefore, language is an essential tool to learning, communication and social interaction.

3. Owing to the impairment in hearing, the ability to perceive sound by children with HI is affected in different degrees. As a result, children with HI would develop

language and communication skills through different modes, including oral, sign, sign bilingual, sign-support oral, finger spelling, total communication, voice output communication aids, pictures/photos, text, written communication, etc.

4. The UNCRPD was in force in the People's Republic of China (including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) on 31 August 2008. The UNCRPD aims at promoting, protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. A number of provisions of the UNCRPD specify that States Parties have the obligation to take appropriate measures to promote sign language, including the learning of sign language.

Current Policy

5. The Government is adopting a "dual-track" approach in special education. For students with HI, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and parents' consent, children with severe or profound hearing loss or those who cannot construct knowledge because of inadequate speech ability, that is those who may need to use sign language in communication and learning, are referred to special schools for children with HI to receive intensive support services. Other children with HI who can benefit from mainstream education would attend ordinary schools.

Learning of Students with HI

6. The EDB has all along been encouraging teachers to adopt the most appropriate mode to teach and to communicate with students with HI having regard to the students' abilities and needs. Taking into account students' abilities, as well as their learning and communication needs, special schools (including special schools for children with HI) would adopt the most appropriate modes (including oral, sign and total communication) for teaching HI students. Special school teachers would also train students with HI to use their residual hearing for listening oral language in order to help them master the skills in communicating with other HI or hearing people. For students with HI attending ordinary schools, with the use of amplification devices, they are able to learn and communicate with people orally. Having regard to students' abilities and needs, teachers will use oral language with the support of visual strategies, contextual cues, body language, written text and gestures when teaching and communicating with

students with HI.

7. There are various international researches investigating the effectiveness of different teaching / support modes (such as oral, signing, bilingual and bicultural, bilingual and co-enrolment, etc.) for students with HI. In general, results indicated that a conglomerate of factors, rather than solely the support mode, contributes to encouraging development of students with HI¹. These factors include the intensity of school-based support, language input, parents' involvement, school culture and home-school collaboration, etc. It is also worth noting that each support mode is culture, context, school and student specific, and would have different outcomes arising from the different situations of schools and students. In fact, most developed countries provide children with HI with different teaching / support modes in their respective education system, instead of supporting children with HI with one particular teaching / support mode².

Use of Sign Language

In Special School (Lutheran School for the Deaf)

8. The school has employed both hearing and deaf teachers and deaf teaching assistants. Hearing teachers use both oral language and sign language in daily teaching, supplemented with other visual strategies (including written text, pictures, real objects and body language, etc.) to enhance the comprehension and learning effectiveness of students. When necessary, the deaf teaching assistants would use sign language during lessons to convey the teaching content to those students who are unable to benefit from oral communication, whereas deaf teachers would conduct lessons through sign language. Besides, the school will arrange sign interpretation for those in need in morning assemblies, seminars, teachers' meetings, extra-curricular activities, parent or teacher training activities where necessary. To promote the use of sign language in the school, it also organizes training for students, parents and staff on a regular basis.

¹ Deaf education scholars Professor Marc Marschark and Professor Patricia Spencer (2009) have conducted a thorough review regarding international researches in educating children with HI. Results indicated that while the teaching and communication modes for deaf children / children with HI have been explored for nearly 200 years, there have not been conclusive results indicating that one particular teaching / communication mode is more effective than the others.

² Deaf education scholars, Professor Harry Knoors and Professor Marc Marschark (2012) pointed out that there is no "one-size-fits-all" communication / support mode for children with HI. Countries should provide different communication / support modes according to the needs of their children with HI.

9. The school recognizes the need to continue developing the use of sign language as a medium of teaching for the school. In February 2012, the school was supported by the Quality Education Fund to launch a 3-year project, “Development of New Vocabulary of Sign Language for Special Educational Needs on New Senior Secondary Curriculum”, to integrate and develop new sign vocabularies for the teachers, to cope with the curriculum requirements and to enhance teachers’ abilities to use sign language to assist teaching.

10. Under the project, the school has already set up a Sign Language Teaching Resources Centre, printed and distributed a booklet, “Sign-assisted Instruction: Theory and Practice”, to enhance the understanding of teachers and students of the school and other schools as well as the general public, the needs of students with HI and the importance of using sign language to assist teaching. At present, the project has already compiled approximately 5 000 signed vocabularies (including daily and subject-based vocabularies). The LSD Visual Sign Language Dictionary website is also established for students and teachers of the school, people of the field and the general public to browse at any time to enhance their understanding of sign language. The EDB would continue to work with the school in implementing the use of sign language in teaching.

In Ordinary Schools

11. As mentioned above, for students with HI attending ordinary schools, with the use of amplification devices, they can learn and communicate with people orally. Having regard to students’ abilities and needs, teachers will adopt the most appropriate mode to teach and to communicate with students with HI. In general, teachers in ordinary schools would use oral language to facilitate students with HI to use their residual hearing to learn subject knowledge and to communicate with people. Teachers would also use visual strategies and make use of contextual cues, body language, written text and gestures to enhance the students’ comprehension and effectiveness of learning.

12. To help ordinary schools cater for students with SEN (including students with HI), on top of regular subvention for ordinary schools, the EDB has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training. Schools should pool and deploy these school-based resources flexibly to cater for the specific needs of their SEN students (including those with HI). At the same time, EDB would refer students with HI in need of additional support to the Enhanced Support Service for HI Students Attending Ordinary Schools (ESS). Resource teachers of the ESS would use sign language to assist teaching and would share with the home school teachers on how

to use sign language to assist teaching. Regarding the details of services for students with HI, please refer to the Legislative Council Paper No. CB(4)777/12-13(01) “Services for Students with Hearing Impairment”.

13. The EDB understands that each support mode has its own unique cultural background, and would bring about different outcomes as a result of the different situations of school and students. We encourage schools to share with each other their experience in supporting students with SEN (including HI). We will also provide advice to schools with regard to the flexible utilization of various school-based resources to support the learning of the students with HI.

In Post-secondary Institutions

14. Overall speaking, post-secondary education institutions provide special arrangement and support services according to the needs of SEN students. As for students with HI, some institutions provide them with professional sign language interpretation service. Moreover, some institutions also provide other support measures to students with HI, including FM system, assistance in developing social networks and teaching accommodations and/or special examination arrangements, etc.

Teacher Training

15. The EDB encourages teacher training institutions to make “catering for students with SEN” a compulsory module in the pre-service training programmes. The institutions have included relevant topics as modules in their teacher training programmes to broaden prospective teachers’ knowledge and skills in catering for students with SEN (including HI).

16. In accordance with the teacher professional development framework on integrated education, the EDB has been conducting structured training courses pitched at three levels for serving teachers, including the basic, advanced and thematic courses (BAT Courses). Thematic courses of the BAT Courses are divided into the following three categories: (i) Cognition and Learning Needs; (ii) Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development Needs; and (iii) Sensory, Communication and Physical Needs. The content of the Thematic Courses on Sensory, Communication and Physical Needs includes the use of sign language to assist teaching. In addition, the content of the training course on “Education of Students with Severe or Multiple Disabilities”

organized by the EDB also includes the use of sign language to assist teaching.

17. The EDB also encourages schools, having regard to the needs of their HI students, to arrange teachers to attend sign language courses offered by the special school for children with HI or other organizations (such as the Hong Kong Society for the Deaf, Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, etc.).

Promotion of Sign Language in Schools

18. The EDB has been promoting sign language to tie in with the work of the Working Group on Promoting Sign Language under the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. At present, schools would organize sign language promotion activities according to the needs of the students, parents and staff so as to enhance their abilities in using sign language. Schools would also collaborate with the special school for children with HI and non-governmental organizations to conduct inclusive activities to enhance the understanding of hearing impairment and sign language among students, parents and staff.

19. The special school for children with HI has also been conducting a variety of activities, such as sign language workshops and talks, to enhance the understanding of sign language of the public (including ordinary schools). The school would also invite teachers and students of ordinary schools to join inclusive activities such as “The Inter-school Sign-a-Song Contest”, “Deaf Awareness Week”, “Deaf Culture Week”, mime performance, etc., so as to promote sign language and inclusive culture. The EDB would continue to work with the school to promote the use of sign language in schools.

Advice Sought

20. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Education Bureau
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