



Lion Rock Institute's submission on
Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools

15th January 2009

And you want us to have children?

As a 31-year-old male born and raised in Hong Kong, I am at a stage in life and mind where one could say I am seeking to "settle down." Be a family man. Embrace the future with a vote in confidence by securing a partner, who shares my desire to have children.

This yearning, I am sure, is shared by many in my demographic. Yet, great apprehension overrides and hesitation grips. No doubt, there will be some who blame such apprehension on the fickleness of our generation. We grew up in relative prosperity and never seem to want the challenges of great responsibilities, especially one as great as raising a family. As a member of the aforementioned generation, I'm the first to admit that it is indeed because of fickleness that we remain apprehensive.

If the root cause was only as simple as fickleness by nature, I have no grounds for anger. But the fickleness unfortunately stems from forces not in our hands.

All parents when holding their child, though, always dream of greatness, hope at the very least their children will become productive members of society. Hope they would be able to take care of themselves and not burden others.

Knowing this, individuals of our generation, especially when courtship begins, are nevertheless without hope.

This is due to a perpetual cloud hanging at the back of our mind, that education, especially the individual-child- ignoring, tortuous education system we have, is not a system which we want to subject any children, let alone our own.

We know that unless there are sufficient economic resources to guarantee a choice for our children to escape wholesale the entire universal education system, we will choose not to have children. Yet, we are a generation who experienced throughout our working life, one financial crisis after another. And from this experience, we know we cannot guarantee such economic resources for choice over the decades-long span of a child's education.

On Thursday, the Legislative Council's panel of education heard the wider community's response to the so-called fine tuning of mother-tongue education.

We have seen the results of government experimenting on our children, and we don't like it. This time, it's a change that took a decade to correct the poor decision made earlier by the government, but what other whim and crude actions will our children be subjected to next? We at the Lion Rock Institute have only these demands.

First, free the supply. Return the decision of how each and every child will be educated to the frontline educators. All Hong Kong schools' freedom in operations should be raised to the level of international schools so that parents who cannot foresee decade-long economic stability can still be confident of bringing life to this world.

This freedom is especially important in regards of economic incentives for frontline educators. Wages must be responsive to the performance of teachers and be freed from the tyranny of who-sits-there-longest-shall-earn-most system. School management's decisions on firing should also be respected and most importantly, hiring of teachers should be freed from tedious and totally pointless testing.

Schools should be allowed to hire teachers from all corners of the globe. There is nothing wrong with a former Brazilian investment banker who was brilliant in selling investment concepts to impatient investors now selling physics concepts to impatient students. The millions of parents with school aged children will be pleased with this most visible of change in their children's education institution.

Then free the demand. The funding of education should solely be based upon the

choice of parents. If a school and a child becomes a pair, let not artificial geographic boundaries, government social engineering, teacher union-vested interest or so-called education-expert opinions get in the way.

Taking these actions will end the anger not only caused by the lack of hope but also by the hypocrisy of education in Hong Kong. How can the politicians and bureaucrats that decide our children's fate say with a straight face that what they designed is the "best" when they speak with their actions by sending their children to international schools or abroad, therefore unwilling to subject their own offspring to the monstrosity of their own creation?

Please, all we want is to have children, with confidence.

Andrew Shuen, research director,

The Lion Rock Institute