

For discussion
on 14 February 2012

**Legislative Council Panel on Education and
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting
“Education on Media Literacy and
Free Newspapers Containing Indecent Content”**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on how the Education Bureau (EDB) fosters the media literacy of youngsters and reports to Members the concern of the education sector and parent groups on free newspapers containing indecent content.

Education on media literacy

2. It is of fundamental importance to enhance students' rational and critical thinking skills as well as discernment in media literacy as a form of preventive education to enable them to understand the adverse effects of unhealthy social values and pornographic information and to discern pornographic messages.

3. The school curricula of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong are designed in accordance with the growth of students and their developmental needs. At different Key Stages, students learn to face and cope with changes and challenges positively, thereby developing a healthy lifestyle. For example, at Key Stage 1 (Primary 1 to 3), the aim is to cultivate students' habit of rejecting pornographic information. At Key Stage 4 (Secondary 4 to 6), the emphasis is on using critical thinking skills and acting with prudence to discern and judge social issues and information related to sex.

4. All along, the EDB has been encouraging schools to provide holistic learning experiences to develop students' critical thinking skills together with rational and responsible attitude. This will help students understand the adverse effects of unhealthy social values related to sex and pornographic information, and foster their positive attitudes, habits and values in cultivating a healthy lifestyle. Topics related to sex education and media literacy are incorporated into the current primary and secondary school curricula (e.g. "General Studies" at primary level, "Science, Life and Society" at junior secondary level, "Liberal Studies" and "Health Management and Social Care" at senior secondary level, as well as Moral and Civic Education at both primary and secondary levels, etc.). Due emphases have been put on equipping students with relevant life skills (including decision-making and refusal skills, etc.), developing their ability to make right and responsible decisions in various contexts (e.g. when facing the impact of pornographic media) and empowering them to live up to the attitude of "protecting oneself" and "respecting others" with courage.

5. In addition, schools arrange various activities, such as class teacher periods, assemblies, seminars, forums, debates and visits to enhance the students' media literacy by helping them face the challenges of puberty and the impact of pornographic media and combat against pornography and immoral messages. Schools also join on-site support programmes, such as Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programme (P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood), so as to instill in students a strong will to reject pornographic information.

6. Apart from encouraging schools to foster students' whole-person development through providing holistic learning experiences, the EDB collaborates with various non-governmental organisations and government departments to offer professional development programmes for teachers (e.g. seminars on helping students enhance their power of rational analysis on media information related to sex, sex education courses commissioned to the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong on rejecting unhealthy media information, etc.), with a view to enhancing teachers' relevant knowledge and teaching strategies. Moreover, the

EDB has been developing learning and teaching resources (e.g. teaching materials, web-based resources, etc.) on discerning and rejecting unhealthy information in society, and on cultivation of a positive and healthy attitude towards life.

Education sector's concern on free newspapers containing indecent content

7. The education sector has much concern on the exaggeration of pornography in free newspapers. To keep youngsters away from the adverse effect of pornographic and indecent messages, the education sector has taken actions to prohibit the distribution of free newspapers containing indecent content in schools. The education sector, including schools, school councils, education organisations and school sponsoring bodies, unanimously condemns free newspapers containing indecent content. It is known that not only is the distribution of free newspapers containing indecent content in schools banned, but students are also forbidden to read or circulate such newspapers on campus.

8. Other than expressing the concern on pornography in free newspapers, the education sector has a joint declaration with the parent groups and a number of organisations from the social work sector to urge free newspapers to remove indecent content and to stop distributing them in the vicinity of schools. Large estates are appealed to stop the distribution of free newspapers containing indecent content within their estate boundaries and the public are advocated to refuse receiving free newspapers. Parents are advised to check whether youngsters at home have read such free newspapers and to give them proper guidance and advice so as to prevent them from being affected by undesirable attitudes towards sex. The joint declaration urges the education sector, social work sector, parent groups and concern groups of youth growth to jointly condemn free newspapers containing indecent content and large enterprises to stop placing advertisement on such newspapers.

Parent groups' concern on free newspapers containing indecent content

9. The Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC), an advisory committee of the EDB, considers that it is important for parents to have diversified and effective communication with children and to serve as role models in the implementation of moral education at home. This will foster students' positive attitudes towards sex and help them combat against the adverse effects of pornographic messages. To encourage parents to be the role models of their children, the CHSC has organised activities to help them make use of everyday examples to instill in children positive attitudes and values towards sex. The Chairman of the CHSC appeals to parents through media to educate their children to discern right from wrong. Parents are advised not to take and read free newspapers containing indecent content so as to set a good example for their children.

10. Furthermore, parent groups, including Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations, are very concerned about the issue on pornographic messages in free newspapers. In addition to participation in the joint declaration mentioned above, they have taken actions, such as street signing petition, writing articles and conducting survey, etc., to express their discontent on the dissemination of pornographic messages in free newspapers. Parent groups urge parents and the education sector to boycott the newspapers and to join hands to combat against the negative impact of pornographic media so as to prevent youngsters from accessing indecent publications.

11. A parent group opines that during the era of information explosion, it is necessary to adopt effective measures to prevent youngsters from accessing indecent publications. It is proposed that the Legislative Council should consider amending legislations to revoke publication license for repeated breaches of the Publication Ordinance and even to impose jail sentence as penalty.

Way forward

12. Other than educating students through the school curriculum, the EDB will remind schools, through various school councils, to remain vigilant on the adverse impact of the indecent publications on youngsters. Besides, the EDB will closely liaise with the CHSC and parent representatives so that parents can join hands with the education sector to enhance youngsters' discerning power on the adverse effects of pornographic information. This will surely help youngsters disregard pornographic messages and develop positive and healthy attitudes towards life.

13. In short, the policy instruments available to the EDB and the education sector for countering the negative impact of indecent publications have been fully deployed. Since free newspapers are distributed in many places, the EDB and the education sector can hardly bar youngsters from obtaining free newspapers containing indecent content. Therefore, the EDB is of the view that the problem of inclusion of indecent and obscene content in free newspapers and their distribution arrangement could only be resolved effectively through the consideration of different policy perspectives and the concerted effort and collaboration of various stakeholders of the community. Hence, to tackle the issue, it should not be confined to the education policy nor the work within schools and the school curricula.

14. Members are invited to take note of the contents of this document and views are welcome.

Education Bureau
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