For discussion
on 20.3.00

LEGCO PANEL ON EDUCATION

Language Teaching in Schools

Purpose

To review the local language education situation and set out a framework of strategies to improve the language proficiency of our students.

Language Environment

2. The Education Commission Report No. 6 has given a thorough treatment on the uniqueness and complexity of the local language environment. However, the hurdles for our children in acquiring biliterate and trilingual proficiency are seldom fully recognized by practitioners, parents and the general public.

3. Children's language development is impeded by the extensive daily use of Cantonese that differs both in form and function from standard written Chinese and the lack of incentive in using Putonghua and English. Outside the window of four to five hours of lesson time per week in learning Putonghua or English, children rarely use the languages. Very often,

misguided assistance by parents or home-tutors repeating school work becomes a disincentive for reading and writing.

4. Without social-linguistic environmental support and failing to see the purpose of learning languages, many children miss the opportunity to build a solid foundation before they are at the threshold of tertiary education or employment.

5. In the past, many secondary schools failed to adopt the appropriate medium of instruction, and many students were subject to mixed-code teaching. The situation has improved considerably since the implementation of the medium of instruction policy.

Challenges

6. In schools, many language teachers are non-subject trained and overloaded with administrative work. Also, there is a lack of curriculum and instructional leadership particularly in primary schools. Despite the richness embodied in the existing curriculum, many teachers dogmatically adhering to traditional methods of delivery, and misconceptions about the use of composition, dictation and rote-learning prevail. Lessons are seen to be teacher-centred, material driven, and not flexible enough to cater for learner differences.

7. Exacerbating the situation is the intense examination pressure especially at senior primary and secondary levels.   Thus, teachers have little room for trying out innovative teaching strategies which are comparatively more time-consuming though more effective in the long run.   Many teachers

resort to teacher-centred and text-book bound pedagogy, resulting in a loss of interest for learning the languages and desire to continue learning.

8.   Over the years a wide range of initiatives have been introduced in order to improve language proficiency of students. The curriculum at various levels have been continually revised to take account of the changing needs of society.   Resources and exemplars have been provided to teachers to enable them to improve teaching and learning.   Continuous teacher training and development programmes have been provided to improve the pedagogy of language teachers.   The provision of additional teachers in primary schools and NETs in secondary schools help in improving the teaching and learning of the languages.   To take advantage of technology, IT based support materials have been produced to enhance language learning.   There are also a number of initiatives directly supporting students in order to improve the proficiency of the languages.

Evidence for Action

9.   In formulating strategies to meet our future needs, we are cognizant of the body of research indicating that early intervention is essential. Evidence also shows that good quality early education results in better language development, better ability to cope with intellectually demanding contents and more positive attitudes towards learning.   Another important research finding in language acquisition is that the best programmes are those that are rich in oral language, engaging children in speaking and story telling.   Also, extensive reading and writing also contribute significantly in language acquisition.

10.	Building on the premise that developing an affinity to languages is crucial to life-long proficiencies and the evidence of a strong correlation between the first and the second language proficiency, we believe it is possible to help ordinary school graduates reach reasonable standards in biliteracy and trilingualism.

11.	Based on empirical evidence and anchored on EC's findings in recent consultation exercises, ED intends to pursue the following strategies :

> *S1.	Developing positive attitudes, good reading skills and habits for life-long learning;*
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> *S2.	Encouraging wider participation of parents and the community;*
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> *S3.	Enhancing the language learning environment;*
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> *S4.	Improving the pedagogy of teachers through strengthening continuous professional development;*
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> *S5.	Strengthening curriculum and instructional leadership in language education amongst school heads and key personnel in schools; and*
>
> *S6.	Enhancing the teacher support network through setting up District Education Offices and the use of information technology in language teaching.*

S1.	To develop good reading habits against the seductive culture of video games and comic books, we intend to introduce into schools well tried out approaches such as "Big Books" and whole language learning to initiate children in the life-long habit of reading and writing. We are organizing extension activities in public libraries to develop children's interest in reading. In collaboration with RTHK, we are developing radio programmes to engage parents in shared reading and story-telling

with their children.   We will continue to trawl from the Language Fund or QEF projects those successful learning experiences loved by children. Parents, as children's first teachers, will be invited to make a pledge to bring back excitement into learning the languages.

S2.   In addition to the participation of parents in shared reading and story-telling, guidelines and learning materials in the form of publications, homepages and radio broadcasts will be provided to empower parents as the first teacher of their children.   Not only will this promote language learning at home, the opportunity avails itself for more parent-child interaction so lacking in many families.   We have also started a Business-School Partnership programme providing secondary students with the awareness of the importance of English in the workplace and exposure to authentic language environments.   To further these aims, we have been in touch or working with, among others, the Business Coalition on Education, Putonghua Yanxishe Ltd., the English Schools Foundation (ESF), the AFS Cultural Exchanges, newspapers, radio stations and the public libraries.

S3.   In collaboration with some of these strategic partners we are creating a much richer language environment outside schools.   The English immersion camp organized in conjunction with the AFS during Chinese New Year was a huge success.   More Putonghua and English immersion camps are now planned for the summer.   Extension activities like story telling in public libraries and over the radio by native Cantonese, Putonghua or English speakers will add extra trilingual environment for our children.   Separately, we are exploring about the possibility of mutually beneficial forms of exchange between children of

local schools and their ESF counterparts or overseas institutions so as to provide an authentic environment for language learning.

S4.   The professional development for language teachers is part of the current comprehensive review on continuous development of teachers.   Among the range of initiatives under planning/consideration, we are actively pursuing redress about the situation of non-subject trained teachers.   We are examining the NET Scheme with a view to capitalizing on the more innovative and effective teaching methods for sharing with local English teachers.   Subject to funding, we are introducing a similar NET Scheme for primary schools and a pilot scheme to teach Chinese using Putonghua as a medium of instruction. Besides, to ensure that all our language teachers possess the required language standards, we will require all primary and secondary school teachers teaching Chinese, English and Putonghua to attain the relevant language benchmarks within five years.

S5.   We are building into principals' training and teacher development courses essential elements to strengthen curriculum and instructional leadership.   Based on successful experience in school-based curriculum adaptation, we will extend the experience to other schools in need.   We intend to encourage schools to refocus on the primacy of languages in life-long pursuit in a knowledge-based society and language education as a perennial theme for staff development.

S6.   A district teacher network to promote best practices is under construction.   The district education offices will soon be reorganized to provide whole school support to schools.   Language learning and teaching form a pivotal object in these initiatives.   We will continue to

build up resources to enrich teaching and learning. The recent advances in Information Communication Technology create possibilities for efficient dissemination of quality material. We intend to develop an education specific intranet through which teachers could share the state-of-the-art teaching resources.

Measures under the six major strategies (S1 –S6) are listed in the Appendix.

12.　　　To complement these measures, we will work with the teacher education institutions to strengthen initial teacher training programmes, and to train and develop teachers up to the language benchmarks.

13.　　　The QEF projects have produced many successful examples in language learning. We intend to examine the empirical findings from the array of projects with a view to propagating such experience to other schools.

Way Forward

14.　　　As we move toward the knowledge-based society and with increasing globalisation, the primacy of languages is well recognised by the Administration. Critical to the success of our strategies is the need to make full use of existing resources, redeploying as necessary to achieve optimum benefits. We will continue to monitor the progress of implementation of the above initiatives, review results and modify our strategy to meet the needs of our children and the community at large.

Education Department
March 2000

Measures under the major strategies

Strategies	Measures
S1-Developing positive attitudes, good reading skills and habits	Improving English Language teaching and learning (Big Book project) Extensive Reading Scheme Radio Story Reading and Telling Story telling sessions in public libraries
S2-Encouraging wider participation of parents and the community	Business & School Partnership Programme of the Workplace English Campaign Reading Pledge
S3 – Enhancing the language learning environment	Putonghua and English Residential Camps Radio Story Reading and Telling Story telling sessions in public libraries
S4-Improving pedagogy of teachers through strengthening continuous professional development	Review continuous teacher development programme NETs for secondary schools Primary School English Development Programme (2000 to 2002) Study on the effective use of NETs and sharing of good practices Project on promoting the effective learning of Chinese

Strategies	Measures
S5-Strengthening curriculum and instructional leadership in language education	Principals' training and teacher development courses in support of implementation of the curriculum including the use of IT for language learning Production and sharing of curriculum resources "Curriculum Tryout & Collaborative Learning Material Development Scheme" on the new Secondary Chinese Language curriculum and Teacher Empowerment associated with Language Curriculum development Trend as stipulated in the Holistic Curriculum Review Piloting of alternative models for language education as stipulated by the Holistic Review
S6-Enhancing teacher support networks through District Education offices and IT	Sharing of good practices through District Education Offices Provide district based support to schools Building an intranet based support system to enable sharing of good practices, pedagogy, curriculum resources