

Chapter 3:


Education Reform – The Next Step

Education reform is a worldwide trend in face of the challenges posed by an increasingly globalised economy. In many countries, reforms of the education system, curriculum and teaching pedagogy have been carried out in response to the changing needs and aspirations of the community. As education reform is by nature a complex improvement process, it is only natural that there are challenges in its implementation. The situation in Hong Kong is no exception but the challenges are not insurmountable.

In September 2004, the EC held a retreat with members of various major education advisory bodies to take stock of the progress of the Education Reform over the past four years, and to reflect on the present situation before moving on with the Education Reform.

The Education Reform, which is student-focused, aims “to enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large”. Experience over the past four years re-affirms that we are moving on the right track.

A number of surveys assessing impact of the Education Reform have revealed encouraging developments. First, students' learning activities have become more diversified with the implementation of the curriculum reform. Over 90% of our primary and secondary schools have been actively promoting the four key learning tasks, viz. moral and civic education, reading to learn, project learning and the use of information technology for interactive learning. Over 70% of the primary school heads and 50% of the secondary school principals consider



that their students have made marked improvement in communication, independent thinking, learning motivation, innovation and commitment. The achievement is most evident in promoting self-confidence as well as the interest and readiness of primary students in reading.

Besides, by enhancing flexibility in the education system, more space has been created for students to learn. Students are found to have participated more actively in extra-curricular activities at school. Nearly 60% of our students spend an average of one or two hours every week on extra-curricular activities, 20% spend three to four hours and 10% even spend five hours or more. Changes are also found in the school internal assessment system in which a more diversified and broadened mode of assessment is adopted. Before the Education Reform, only 40% of school principals expressed that they would include project learning in the school internal assessment. The percentage has risen to 70% after the implementation of the Education Reform.


On increasing learning opportunities and providing diversified choices, we have expanded the post-secondary education and other pathways for continuing education. In the 2004/05 school year, there are a total of 16 groups of schools adopting the "through-train" mode of operation and 55 primary and secondary schools joining the Direct Subsidy Scheme (in which 11 are senior secondary schools). Project Yi Jin and various associate degree programmes have also provided students with more channels to pursue further studies. At present, subsidized Secondary 4 places and vocational training places are provided for all Secondary 3 schools leavers who have the ability and wish to continue their studies. The overall percentage of school age students receiving post-secondary education has increased from about 30% in 2000 to 53% in the 2004/05 school year.

With the enhancement of the academic standard and pre-service as well as continuous professional training for educational workers, the professional and management levels of school principals have been upgraded. The percentages of primary and secondary teachers with degree qualifications have increased from 21% and 79% respectively in 1996/97 to 59% and 89% in 2003/04.

The percentages of kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers receiving training in 2003/04 are 88%, 92% and 91% respectively. On-site professional support is provided and professional experience sharing activities are organized to encourage sharing of successful teaching experiences with a view to cultivating a collaborative culture in the education sector.

To take forward the Education Reform, the EC has identified several key tasks. They include:

- To enhance professional capability of the education professionals through continuous professional development. We believe that the Education Reform should be professional-driven and the culture of self-improvement should be fostered. While it takes time to bring about a paradigm shift in the learning and teaching culture, appropriate support should be provided for schools during the process of change from highly centralized system in the past to a school-based model. We hope that the support for schools would be strengthened to enable them to achieve better results.
- To improve the co-ordination of policies and their implementation so that policy objectives can be better achieved. Policy design and implementation are equally important. By gauging feedback from frontline workers on the practical problems that they encounter, policy-makers will have a better understanding of the issues and be more certain to find solutions to the problems.
- To enhance communication internally and externally to build up mutual trust and support. An effective communication channel conveying bottom-up opinions is essential for a comprehensive review of the policy impact. Messages released by the education advisory bodies and the implementation organizations should be clear and consistent so as to avoid confusion.



The community holds high expectation of the Education Reform and expects results. We all should make joint efforts to overcome difficulties and challenges. We note that the situation is complicated by the decline in student population and teachers' heavy workload. The review of the senior secondary academic structure and that of the SSPA/MOI for secondary schools have attracted much public attention. As a major Government advisory body, the EC will continue to monitor the progress and co-ordinate the various reform initiatives. We will also strive to strengthen the communication with various sectors of our community so that all stakeholders would play their individual roles in a coherent manner towards the goal of the Education Reform.