

**MRS SELINA CHOW** (in Cantonese): Madam President, I move that Ms Audrey EU's motion be amended, as printed on the Agenda.

Insofar as today's debate is concerned, I believe there is a consensus among the three of us, namely Ms Audrey EU, the mover of the original motion, myself, and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, the mover of an amendment to mine, that small class teaching will definitely help improve students' learning. Moreover, teachers can have more time on average to communicate with each and every student to understand their needs so as to enable teachers to tailor their teaching to students' varied abilities and achieve the goal of quality education, as stated in the original motion. Given our consensus that small class teaching is good, why is it still necessary for us to argue this issue today? Why is it still necessary for me to amend the original motion? Although I believe there is a consensus among us and despite our approval of the general spirit of small class teaching, there is still a divergence of opinion among Members on certain specific details such as what conditions should be met before small class teaching can be implemented, how small class teaching can be implemented in concrete terms, and how to ensure the progress of other education reform initiatives will not be affected to avoid losing sight of other aspects of the education front. These several points are missing in the original motion. I find it essential for us to clarify these issues before we can ensure small class teaching, once implemented, can really achieve effectiveness. I have therefore proposed an amendment in this connection.

I would like to draw an analogy here. Small class teaching is like a utopia, or the Peach Blossom Garden, that we yearn for, but how can we reach there? This question warrants discussion in great detail. I originally planned to explain the key points of my amendment one after another. However, today I have just received the findings of a public opinion poll conducted by the Liberal Party. It is found that more than 54% of the parents interviewed shared the view that upgrading the teaching quality of teachers should be the paramount consideration in implementing small class teaching. This percentage is far higher than that of funding, the second consideration. This shows that the greatest concern to parents remains to be whether the quality of teachers can complement small class teaching. As such, I have decided to say a few words on teacher training.

Perhaps some people may say that should the size of each class be reduced, the teachers will then not be required to teach so many students, and their

workload will naturally be reduced. Right, if our goal is limited to reducing the size of each class rather than upgrading the quality of teaching by this means, the teachers will certainly be less busy than they are now. However, if our goal to implement small class teaching is to enhance the interests and abilities of students in learning as well as upgrading the quality of teaching, the existing teaching mode, teaching methods, and even the whole notion of education have to be adjusted and changed accordingly to complement small class teaching with the reduction in class sizes. Otherwise, small class teaching will merely be reduced to an unattainable ideal that cannot help at all to improve the learning abilities and achievements of students.

In other words, small class teaching will raise, rather than lower, our expectations for teachers, thus posing an enormous challenge that will tax their abilities. As such, strengthening teacher training and small class teaching must be complementary, just like we have to walk on two legs. Should the quality of teachers fall behind, it will be like a person moving his right leg forward with his left leg dragging behind. Can he really take strides forward?

I have heard many people from the education sector and school principals indicating in this Chamber their affirmation of small class teaching. Besides, I have been fortunate to come into direct contact, meet and discuss with several primary school principals to discuss their views on the teaching problems in connection with small class teaching. They have shown me a concrete proposal on ways to implement small class teaching in their district. The proposal largely deals with ways to upgrade the quality of teachers through workshops, seminars and systematic training programmes in order to cope with the requirements of small class teaching. They have even emphasized to me that, as the objective of small class teaching is to upgrade the quality of education, the teaching effectiveness of teachers will certainly be constantly upgraded, so as to enable the students to learn in a more enjoyable and effective manner under the environment of small class teaching. These enthusiastic people in the education sector have, as if by tacit agreement, taken great pains to explore new teaching methods to equip themselves in the hope of teaching their students properly. I must extend my heartfelt respects to them for their enthusiasm and efforts.

They have even told me that the reform was launched by their staff on their own initiatives, totally different from some of the previous top-down reforms in which the top and the bottom is detached. Its chances of success will also be higher than that of other reforms. I do understand and agree with this.

Their devotion has made me believe there is every chance that small class teaching, being spontaneously promoted, will succeed. However, from a macroscopic angle, in order to achieve the desired result, the crucial prerequisite must be met. This would mean that our teachers must be capable of rising up to this challenge. In addition, their complementary training must be strengthened as a whole to guarantee that their preparatory work is properly done. However, in order to achieve this goal, we cannot rely merely on the enthusiasm of teachers or principals. Instead, the Government must formulate a set of comprehensive strategies in a holistic manner. Without these complementary measures, small class teaching will get only half the results with double the effort.

According to some people, the constant decline in the number of school-age students in Hong Kong, coupled with the worsening problems with redundant teachers and a contraction in the number of classes as well as a growing number of vacant classrooms, has provided a golden opportunity for small class teaching. I would not deny that an opportunity has thus been provided in terms of hardware. However, all the parents and I share the same hope that, in launching any education reform, including small class teaching, the interest of students should be made the prime goal. Using small class teaching as a means to resolve the abovementioned problems with the contraction in the number of classes and redundant teachers will deviate from our paramount goal.

Having spent so much time on such issues as teacher training, I have to say a few words on another practical issue: Where does the money come from? Doubtless many people in the community consider small class teaching a pressing cause. However, there are some who consider it necessary for the Government to put its resources into reforms in other areas first. Even the implementation of full-time schooling has to be put aside. Upgrading the linguistic abilities of the students and their mastery of information technology, for instance, is considered the most important. Yesterday, I read from the newspaper that Prof K M CHENG, an authority in the education sector, was worried that the Government might compromise due to political pressure by wasting its resources on making it compulsory for small class teaching to be implemented across the territory. In his opinion, reducing the number of teaching sessions for teachers and strengthening teacher training will be more effective than reducing the class size.

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Of course, it will be ideal for all reforms to be implemented simultaneously, and everyone will be pleased. After all, there can be infinite ideals. However, we live in a realistic world where resources are finite. It is simply impossible for us to make choices without priorities, unless every citizen approves of tax increases. That will be another matter. I believe Members will understand that resources are required for the implementation of every reform. It is impossible to put into immediate force whatever proposals that come to mind. On the education front, a substantial amount of resources is required in a number of areas. The expenditure on education has been increased from \$37.9 billion in 1996 to nearly \$60 billion this year, and a number of major reforms are still pending. For instance, the "3+3+4" proposal and its complementary curriculum reforms incur enormous expenses. As numerous reforms have to be launched simultaneously, do we have sufficient resources? How should the expenses be borne? I must remind Members that, in launching small class teaching, the authorities concerned must prudently assess the additional resources required for implementing small class teaching, weigh the commitments of both the Government and parents to avoid seeing the minute details but not the major issue, thus neglecting the needs of education reform.

Regarding Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's amendment to mine, I would like to ask Mr Tommy CHEUNG to speak on my behalf.

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