

Development Issues on Abacus And Mental Arithmetic Education in Taiwan

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The popularity of computers and electron calculators has rendered rapid reduction of abacus and mental arithmetic course in business school, yet the number of learners has climbed gradually for a decade with the efforts of private organizations and continuation educators. It was estimated that there were 150 thousand learners. However, the number of learners has declined obviously since the beginning of this year because low birthrate reduced new-coming children rapidly, and because parents cut down the budget on their children's arts education with recent depressive economy in Taiwan. While the above factors are determined by impersonal forces, we will focus on the policy mistakes and other man-made factors in the remainder of this paper, and principle out that incorrect instruments will produce negative effects on abacus and mental arithmetic education.

Firstly, according to nine-year compulsory education plan, pupils in public elementary school, especially those in grade 1 or grade 2, can use calculators in mathematic exam. Since this policy will not be implemented until September, we will observe and look forward to further information. In our eyes, we do not hope this wrong policy will go into effect, as it is just only armchair paper. Recently we read a good article named "Keep computer out of classroom" in the journal of Reader Digest in December 1998. The author was Mr. David Gelernter, a computer professor in Yale University in the United States. In the paper, he principled out, "the gap between educational theory and common knowledge damages one generation of American children, and America is ashamed of it; there are many serious problems especially in computer education; suppose you provide an omnipotent computer, it will bring children nothing but harms. Therefore, let's expel it out of our classrooms." His opinion is full of meaning. If we allow pupils in low-level grade to use calculators, their ability to calculate would degenerate, saying nothing of negatively affected abacus and mental arithmetic education.

Secondly, some writers in October 2001 assaulted abacus and mental arithmetic education in Freedom Times and China Times in Taiwan, said that abacus and mental arithmetic education was useless for children and even suggested them to learn piano. The authors with pseudonym laid claim to be mathematic professor in university. In our opinion, these so-called mathematicians do not have any idea of abacus and mental arithmetic, which is part of Chinese traditional culture. Of Course, as regards morals, some abacus and mental arithmetic associations in Taiwan should be responsible for the criticism, because they had renewed name for "Mathematic Association on Abacus and Mental Arithmetic" since 2000 so as to increase new mathematic games. Without any approval of mathematicians, these associations blow their own trumpets and do not care whether their activities are scientific or not. Ironically, some organizers award a champion cup for group to faculty advisers up-to 60 participants in mathematic game or in abacus and mental arithmetic game. As for prize for individuals, the champion accounts for 2 percent of total participants in his or her group, the runner-up 13 percent, the bronze medallist 35 percent, and the remaining 50 percentages are prepared for the fourth winner. The basic design of such games is not to benefit the society, but to collect tuitions. Probably because huger sweetens beans, some related employees are on their own accounts and forget about their own responsibilities. No wonder mathematicians have a low opinion of abacus and mental arithmetic education. It is a pity for us who devote ourselves to abacus and mental arithmetic education on

children. Thus, serious problems within abacus and mental arithmetic education hinder its development.

As a Chinese colloquialism mentions, “Lao Wang selling melons praises his own good”. In order to show abacus and mental arithmetic is beneficial to intelligence development for children, we must have enough proofs. Otherwise, great boast, small roast. And parents only regard the advisor on abacus and mental arithmetic as eloquent “Laowang”. Therefore, it is urgent to investigate achievements of those who once had remarkable records on abacus and mental arithmetic games. According to my own investigation, all of ten superexcellent learners are now studying in famous university or in notable high school. And their stories were publicized on the board beside the classroom last year, and the effects were evident in term of recruiting students. Facts speak louder than words. Only by providing successful cases on abacus and mental arithmetic can we persuade parents to allow their children to study and make them enjoy its beauty. After all, parents in Taiwan pay much attention to their children’s education. If the benefit of abacus and mental arithmetic education on children is greater than its cost, it will get away from current difficulties and face a bright future.

In addition, how to determine proper age for learners and how to propagate related policies are still not emphasized. So far, many organizers did not care about the issue of age. In fact, the results rely largely on it. The analysis is as follows. If the child is 5 years old, he or she has no conception about symbol and figure, and will make much progress in abacus and mental arithmetic with no disturbance, which in turn lifts up their parents; heads and even changes the minds of their neighbors. Secondly, suppose the child is 10 years old, he or she knows how to calculate without abacus in primary school. If the child is required to learn from a pithy formula and driving bead, he or she then cannot understand the whys and wherefores. Things become worse for those active students. Without any interest and sense of success, 10-year-old children come to stop learning which wastes their time and the money of their parents. No wonder the society has a low opinion of abacus and mental arithmetic. Recently, oculist in Taiwan warned that it would be better for children younger than 8 to keep away from computer, otherwise it will do harm to their eyesight. Compared with using computer, abacus and mental arithmetic education on pupils is obviously good to protect their eyesight. Meanwhile, it is impossible for children to do so when they are over 9 years old, since their parents would require them to learn English under current circumstances. Based on the above analyses, we can make a conclusion that proper age for children to learn abacus and mental arithmetic is between 5 and 8. We explain to parents sincerely, and we are confident that abacus and mental arithmetic will gain the belief of the society and have a brighter future if we can make remarkable achievements.

Courtesy:

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