

Waking up to the World

Good morning principal, vice principals, teachers and fellow schoolmates,

Today, I'm going to talk about the need for HK students to wake up to what's happening in the world i.e. globalization

In HK, globalization is a really hot topic. The government and the academia are talking about it all the time. They are all trying to figure out what Hong Kong should do in the face of this overwhelming trend of globalization. The government uses its propaganda machine to boost HK as a world city, and tries to get as many international forums and conferences as possible to take place in HK. And the academia is also working hard on how to attract more foreign students to study in Hong Kong. But now, I'm telling you that if no one notices and does something for the students in HK, all their efforts will be in vain.

There are many problems facing HK students. But today, I'll just talk about two of them.

First of all, most HK students do not have any interests in international affairs. They don't even have any common sense about our world. Once, when we were talking about which country we would want to visit, a F.4 student asked me whether New York was in England. I was so shocked that I could not give him an answer immediately because I was afraid that I had mistaken his question. I'm quite sure that there is a significant percentage of HK students who don't even know who is the president of US, Japan or even our country China, which should actually be considered as common knowledge to everyone. It sounds ridiculous but it's the truth. Most HK students don't know about the enmity between Israel and the Middle East. They don't know about the independence-leaning Taiwan. They don't know about the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. They just don't care about all of these. Under the cloud of globalization, these ignorant young people can contribute little to our society.

The other problem is that the English standard of HK students is declining. When you go to internet forums for employers, you will find that most of the posts are complaints made by employers about the poor English standard of HK's young people. In addition, many people online say that you can't usually judge a person's English standard by his age. In other words, it doesn't matter how many years you have studied English in HK, progress within the HK education system is very slow. Take myself as an example. After studying English for 13 years, I cannot entirely understand the English news broadcasting and the English movies without subtitles. I cannot write English without worrying about fundamental mistakes in grammar, I cannot read English newspaper articles without failing to understand basic vocabulary and I cannot express myself in English without a pre-written script in hand. It's sad but true. I believe there must be some problems in our education system but I'm not going to talk about these because they are too controversial.

Education is fundamental to the success of a society. If we cannot educate our young people well, the number of international conferences held in HK or the number of foreign experts attracted to HK become meaningless.

Compared with students from mainland China, we, the students of HK, are losing our advantages. I've talked to a middle school student in mainland before. At that time, Israel was invading Lebanon and we talked about that. I remember very clearly that when I said that the Israelis would not dare to hurt any Westerners, the guy just told me a certain number of Canadians had been killed. I asked how he knew that. He said he had just been listening to the BBC World News and browsing the instant news on the ABC websites. I had no answer for him. I was amazed at his quest for knowledge. Such a hunger for news is rarely seen among HK students. Honestly, maybe education on the mainland lacks our resources, but, unlike in HK, many mainland students really care about what's happening in our world. That's just what we should learn.

In the face of globalization, we need to compete with people from everywhere; no matter whether you are in HK, India or America; no matter whether you are a reporter, a doctor or a programmer. There is a book called 'The World Is Flat'. It's really true. Our world is being leveled due to the convenience of the exchanges of information and the widespread availability of knowledge. If we don't catch up, we lose the game. This is the reality.

Thank you.