

Shanghai's Practice and Exploration in the Building of Learning City

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Since 1999 when Shanghai took the lead in launching the program of building learning city in China, we have been making active efforts to search for the way to build a learning city that meets the needs of the socioeconomic development, so that the citizens may fully enjoy the fruits of the modern educational and cultural achievements. Today, I am very delighted to share with you the experience and reflections on building a learning city. My speech will focus on the causes, practice and exploration, and further consideration of building a learning city in Shanghai.

1. Causes of building Shanghai towards a learning city

Shanghai is achieving rapid socioeconomic development. During the process of changing Shanghai to an international economic, financial, trade, and shipping center and a modern international metropolis, the building of learning city has become a fundamental task in the economic development of Shanghai, and has substantial realistic significance.

(1) As an international metropolis, Shanghai has the duty to provide learning chances to all citizens

As a typical city of immigrants and an international metropolis, Shanghai has attracted thousands and thousands of people from abroad or other areas of China. According to statistics, the people having their origins elsewhere account for over one third of the 18 million permanent residents in Shanghai. Many people with a domicile in Shanghai are new Shanghainese. People crowd into Shanghai, with a strong urge to attain further development. Development depends on a background of learning, which only occurs where extensive and sufficient chances are available. Shanghai has the duty to provide such chances to its citizens. Meanwhile, building a learning city and promoting comprehensive development of individuals, especially providing equal chances for individual development, are key elements of building a harmonious society. A learning city will provide equal learning chances for all its citizens, putting them on an equal standing for development and fair competition, which is the theme of the building of learning city in Shanghai.

(2) Shanghai feels the urge to improve the abilities of the labor force as required by the industrial structure upgrading

Shanghai is at an economic transition stage of industrial restructuring. With the development of modern tertiary industry and advanced manufacturing,

a large proportion of the labor force will shift from the low-end industries to high-end industries. To adapt to this change, Shanghai has to improve the abilities and qualifications of its labor force. It is estimated that the demand for technical workers will increase by over 5% every year by 2010. Among the technical workers of Shanghai, the percentage of senior technical workers will increase from the current 15% to 25%. Technical workers and senior technical workers will reach 5%, and senior professionals below the age of 45 will amount to 80%. As a city lacking natural resources but with a high level of economic, scientific, technological and cultural development, Shanghai has to propel its building of learning city and the upgrading of the educational and technological competence of the labor force.

(3) Citizens desire to improve their living standards and have diversified learning needs

The advancement of a city is reflected not only by the material aspects but also by its spirit. Building of a learning city, integration of learning into life and cultivation of the habit of reading will enable our citizens to live a better life in the spiritual respect and will contribute to further improvement of their living standards. In fact, after more than 10 consecutive years of economic growth at a two-digit rate, the average per capita income in Shanghai has increased considerably. With living standards improved substantially, the citizens show ever increasing cultural and educational demand. Over the most recent decade, the per capital consumption structure of households in Shanghai has changed considerably, and the Engel's Coefficient has dropped remarkably. According to statistics, food consumption of residents in Shanghai has dropped year by year from 56.5% in 1990 to 30% at present, and the consumption on education, cultural and entertainment services has risen year by year from 11.9% to 20%. Meanwhile, more than 80% of the citizens are willing to pay more for cultural and education services. It is evident that people care more about improving the quality of their spiritual life and that they wish to improve their abilities and competence through learning to fit in with the changing world.

It is due to the above-mentioned changes and needs brought about by Shanghai's socioeconomic development that Shanghai timely sets a development goal of building a learning city. According to the plan, Shanghai will have established a basic framework of a learning city featuring "everyone learns at any place at any time". The framework has four dimensions: (1) A social consensus of lifelong learning. Most citizens adopt the philosophy of lifelong learning and treat learning a lifestyle; (2) A full range of lifelong education system that provides good learning resources and relatively sufficient learning chances for the citizens; (3) A development mode diversified and extensive learning organization; (4) Joint force of individuals, community and government for the building of a learning city.

2. Practice and Exploration of Building a Learning City in Shanghai

In view of the reality of city development of Shanghai, the building of a learning city will be implemented in several steps. First of all, we will make use of the administrative advantage of the government to set up a government-directed lifelong education system. Then, we will combine and coordinate the efforts of all works of life to build a lifelong learning system for Shanghai's citizens. Centering round this concept, Shanghai has made endeavors in various aspects of the building of a learning city.

(1) Promote lifelong education, diversify education network and improve lifelong education system

At present, the education network of lifelong education in Shanghai is composed of adult schools established and managed by the government, education and training institutions established and managed by guilds or firms, and education and training institutions established and managed by social groups and individuals. According to statistics, in Shanghai, there are 56 independent secondary and tertiary adult education institutions that offer diploma education, more than 2,100 non-diploma education or training institutions sponsored by the private sector, and 121 township technical schools for adults. Almost all neighborhoods and townships have community schools and schools for senior citizens, and almost every trade and large enterprise has its training center. In the meantime, Shanghai has basically built a three-level education system with community colleges as its principal part and neighborhood and township community schools as its backbone. With regard to the TV University which is scattered in 19 districts and counties, from 2000 on, the enrollment has been ascending at over 25% every year. A multi-level and multifunction lifelong education network is taking shape.

Based on these foundations, we are taking various measures to improve Shanghai's lifelong education system. Firstly, we are working on a resources integration plan based on the continuous and adult education resources of higher education institutions as well as TV University and spare-time universities. Step by step, we are developing a system whereby different levels and categories of education may link with and supplement each other. By means of the system of recognizing and transferring academic achievements, we are offering citizens accessible, alternative and diversified forms and chances of learning. Secondly, we are taking full advantage of the instructions offered by Shanghai Office of Building a Learning City to community colleges, and trying to develop community colleges into an important carrier of secondary and tertiary adult education in the area concerned, an integrated platform of vocational skills training, a major venue of community education and an instruction center of lifelong Learning for citizens. In the mean time, we are boosting the standardization of community schools and township schools for adults. Thirdly, we are striving to foster a training system focusing on

different people to meet their learning demands. For example, in order to enhance Elder Education, we are establishing Elder Education Research Center, and Teacher Training center for Elder Education. Bearing in mind the needs posed by the industrial restructuring of Shanghai, we are developing a long-term system to train and transfer the agricultural labor force. This system, which is led by the district or county and implemented by townships, involves educational resources of the whole society, and will improve the quality of training and the employment rate.

(2) Set a basic information platform for lifelong education

So far, Shanghai has constructed one city-level central station and 19 district/county-level sub-centers of the satellite network platform for lifelong education. Satellite receiving terminals have been set up in 208 neighborhoods (townships). In addition, a pool of large quantities of quality lifelong education resources has been fashioned. In such a pool, 30% is on healthcare, 13% on etiquette and 21% on home education. The information platform provides 8 hours of live educational programs per day, and delivers more than 100 episodes of quality teaching videos to neighborhoods and communities. The convenience and accessibility of the information platform have largely stimulated the enthusiasm of the citizens about learning.

While actively employing the Internet and the satellite system to enable community colleges of districts and counties, community schools of neighborhoods, adult schools of townships, training programs of the residents' or villagers' committee to access and share educational resources, Shanghai is questing for a related management system to achieve further improvement and development of the modern information platform of lifelong education.

(3) Build learning organizations and carry on learning organization activities

According to the provisional assessment standards of Shanghai on building learning organizations, the education department of Shanghai, in coordination with related function departments, made a pilot assessment of some of the government agencies, communities, townships, public institutions and enterprises in their activities of building a learning organization. Based on this pilot assessment, the Assessment Standards of Shanghai on Building Learning Organizations has been formally promulgated. Besides, the related government departments have coordinated to formulate the corresponding administrative rules, define their respective duties and reinforce cooperation. Meanwhile, different organizations exchange their experience on building a learning organization, make joint efforts to find solutions, and clone the success.

Now, there are 10 state-level pilot zones of community education in Shanghai, four of which have been listed by the Ministry of Education among the nationwide exemplary zones of community education. There are also 54 city-level pilot community education streets and townships. The campaign of learning family is going on in thousands of households. Since 2000, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has carried on the program of developing modern corporate education systems in 28 large and medium-sized enterprises and 32 guild or corporate training centers. Building learning enterprise has become an important goal of corporate development. The program of building learning organization has been initiated in more than 70 trade unions and more than 10,000 enterprises and public institutions. Moreover, the programs of building learning government agency, learning downtown, learning work unit and learning building are in full swing throughout the city.

(4) Organize learning activities of citizens and create brands of learning activities

Based on the concept of “integrate learning with everyday life”, we have planned and launched a series of learning activities for the public. Among them, there are influential well-known brands such as “Oriental Rostrum” and “Shanghai Book Exhibition” as well as popular and unique activities such as “All Citizens Learning Week”, “Reading Extensively for the Development of China”, “Household Internet Craze”, and “Etiquette Classroom”. These activities have become the labels of building a learning city of Shanghai. In addition, plenty of overseas training programs have been introduced into Shanghai, such as Chartered Financial Analyst, International Software Engineer, and Project Manager, which satisfy various learning needs. Through these learning programs and activities, the citizens are fascinated by knowledge, which in turn arouses their enthusiasm for learning and creates an ideal learning climate. These programs and activities play a very important role in improving qualifications and abilities and are hailed by the citizens of Shanghai.

(5) Improve the related mechanisms and update the lifelong education system

Shanghai is making full use of modern information technology and developing various mechanisms to promote lifelong education. For example, we have devised a “lifelong learning record”, which has such functions as learning account management, academic record as well as consumption and bonus of learning activities, and may help us gather statistics of the learning behaviors of citizens. Meanwhile, we are making great efforts in the study on mutual credit recognition among different educational institutions, and are working on a “credit bank” system which records, recognizes, stores,

accumulates and transfers credits. In fact, we have encouraged certain colleges and universities to recognize credits on a tentative basis. Furthermore, Shanghai is improving and strengthening its legislation to expand the extent to which social educational resources are open and shared so as to provide more educational venues and facilities and to motivate various full-time schools to provide more education services to the citizens.

Because of our hard work, remarkable achievements have been made in the building of a learning city. According to statistics, Shanghai has 17 district/county community colleges, more than 200 community schools and nearly 5,000 school branch campuses and teaching sites, covering 19 districts and counties, more than 200 neighborhoods and townships, and offering more than 600 courses in eight fields including social science, language, and natural science and technology. Now, the learning needs of various groups of people are basically met. An open, convenient and accessible lifelong education system is unfolding. The lifelong education and training resources have been basically integrated, the climate of lifelong education is taking shape, and the concept of lifelong education is being widely accepted.

3. Further Considerations on Building a Learning City

At present, building a learning city has been an inevitable trend of urban development. In order to exert the function of lifelong education in Shanghai's socioeconomic growth, and to achieve comprehensive, harmonious and sustainable development of the people, we will make further quests in the following fields:

(1) Continue the management system reform and improve laws and regulations concerning lifelong education

At present, Shanghai needs to develop good and scientific management systems, better its planning on the building of a learning city, integrate the educational resources of the entire society, and ensure the healthy development of its endeavors to build a learning city. For this end, we should make further research on the legislation concerning lifelong education, clarify the rights, obligations and duties of the government, enterprises, public institutions and individuals, and construct the legal system to regulate the activities of building a learning city.

(2) Develop a mutual credit recognition mechanism and establish lifelong education accounts for citizens.

Shanghai will break down the barriers to "mutual credit recognition", and improve the link and mutual recognition among different categories of continuous education so as to offer convenience to citizens in their learning. We will try to establish a "Lifelong learning record" system and a "Credit Bank" system in Shanghai, and give incentive for the citizens to take part in various

learning activities. We will also make research on the “No-barrier Entrance” and “Flexible Learning” systems, offering people the freedom to choose their own study hours, study forms, courses and examination dates that match their job and life.

(3) Develop a modern IT-based lifelong education service system

As the advantages of distance learning are getting more and more evident in the building of a learning city, we will find out how to build a learning city characterized by distance learning. We will further integrate the adult education resources of the city, districts, counties, and industries, fully utilize the modern information technology and our distance learning network to build a multifunctional, multi-level, accessible and open lifelong education service system that offers diploma education, vocational training, entertainment education and cultural education. We are to set up a city-district-neighborhood three-level learning support structure covering the whole city and facing the citizens, so as to deliver education services to every household.

(4) Diversify financing sources and create a fund assurance mechanism

The steady advancement of building a learning city is supported by a fund assurance mechanism with diversified financing resources. On the basis of the current investing mechanism, we will attach more importance to arousing the enthusiasm of varied organizations, citizens and enterprises to widen the financing sources of Lifelong Learning. While increasing its expenditure on education, the government should employ all sorts of policy levers, encourage and guide the enthusiasm from every side to form a joint financing mechanism in building a learning city, combining the funds from the government, enterprises, public institutions, social organizations and individuals.

Ladies and gentlemen, the building of a learning city is beneficial to the development of Shanghai, beneficial to the satisfaction of people’s learning needs, and beneficial to the upgrading of Shanghai’s spiritual civilization. In 2007, Shanghai’s per capita GDP reached USD 8,500, ranking among the moderately developed countries, which forms a solid foundation for our work to build a learning city. In the future, Shanghai will make further efforts, learn the valuable experience home and abroad, keep on making progress and innovations, keep on improving its education system, and provide all-round, multi-level, and diversified education services to every member of our society.

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