

小事化大

xiao3 shi4 hua4 da4

The Territory-wide System Assessment saga continues, with education officials directing schools not to train students for the tests or face warnings. While officials are reviewing the system, schools and parents are up in arms – some want the TSA gone, others want to make sure it stays.

Some of those who support the system have accused those who object of “小事化大” (*xiao3 shi4 hua4 da4*). “小” (*xiao3*) is “small,” “事” (*shi4*) is “matter,” “affair,” “incident,” “trouble,” “化” (*hua4*) is “to change,” “to transform,” “to make into,” and “大” (*da4*) is “big,” “huge.” Literally, “小事化大” (*xiao3 shi4 hua4 da4*) is “small matter make into big.”

The idiom has the same meaning as the English expression “making a mountain out of a molehill.” A molehill is not even a hill. It is a barely raised tunnel made by moles. Portraying a molehill as a mountain is to exaggerate on a grand scale.

Idiom by Lon Yan

So the idiom means “to make a major issue out of a minor one.”

When someone “小事化大,” it means he or she is overreacting, greatly exaggerating the severity of an adverse situation.

Wise people will not make trouble worse than it already is. They will do the opposite, which is “大事化小，小事化了” (*da4 shi4 hua4 xiao3, xiao3 shi4 hua4 le5*) – reduce big trouble to a small one, and small trouble into nothing.

But can we really say parents and teachers who are concerned about overworking young students are “小事化大” (*xiao3 shi4 hua4 da4*)?

Terms containing the character “化” (*hua4*) include:

化解 (*hua4 jie3*) – to resolve

化驗 (*hua4 yan4*) – to make a laboratory test

化妝 (*hua4 zhuang1*) – to put on makeup

化學 (*hua4 xue2*) – chemistry