

Idiom by Lon Yan

拔苗助長

ba2 miao2 zhu4 zhang3

The Education Bureau is considering to amend its guidelines for pre-primary education to discourage forcing young children to write with a pen or pencil.

Another idea being floated is to avoid rote learning and dictation at the early stage of the children's development so as not to snuff out their interest in language learning.

Such thinking is, of course, a welcoming step in the right direction, especially as many parents are obsessed with the idea of "winning at the starting line."

Putting children through training that is not age-appropriate can be described by the idiom "拔苗助長" (*ba2 miao2 zhu4 zhang3*).

"拔" (*ba2*) is "to lift," "to raise," "to pull out," "to uproot," "苗" (*miao2*) "seedling," "a young plant," "助" (*zhu4*) "to help," "to assist" and "長" (*zhang3*) "to grow." Literally, "拔苗助長" (*ba2 miao2 zhu4 zhang3*) is "to pull up the

seedlings in order to help them grow faster."

The farmer who pull up seedlings would see his crop grow taller overnight. But the plants' roots would be damaged, and they probably won't survive. So "拔苗助長" (*ba2 miao2 zhu4 zhang3*) means, figuratively, "to do harm to a thing by being over-enthusiastic about it."

Another version of the idiom is "揠苗助長" (*ya4 miao2 zhu4 zhang3*). "揠" (*ya4*) means "to pull up," "to tug upward."

To make their children "win," parents would force them to learn more, faster and earlier. As a result, education is turned into one big exercise of "拔苗助長" (*ba2 miao2 zhu4 zhang3*).

Terms containing the character "助" (*zhu4*) include:

幫助 (*bang1 zhu4*) – to help; to assist

助人 (*zhu4 ren2*) – help others

自助 (*zi4 zhu4*) – self-service; help oneself

自助餐 (*zi4 zhu4 can1*) – a buffet dinner