

**SPEECH**

**HONOURABLE  
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MINISTER OF  
EDUCATION**

**CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE  
OPENING CEREMONIES**

**ALBERTA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF  
6240 – 113 STREET**

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2 - 3:00 P.M**

***(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)***

It is an honour and a privilege to be able to speak with you this afternoon.

Being here today is as much about honouring the past as it is acknowledging the present.

Though Confucius lived in classical China, over 2000 years ago, Confucian thought has greatly influenced the development of modern government and education in both China and the West.

As a Minister of the Crown, I see every day, the effect that Confucian thought has had on the West.

After all, the concept of a civil service based on merit rather than one's family background starts with Confucius.

Every civil servant in this province who receives a promotion based on his or her commitment and hard work owes a debt to Confucius.

Confucius also spoke of the importance of standardized academic depth and breadth, so we can see tinges of Confucian thought at work in our educational assessment practices: Provincial Achievement Tests, Diploma Exams and international testing.

To me though, one of the most important tenets of Confucian philosophy is the belief that education is critical in moulding engaged, enlightened and creative citizens who, through their learning, develop a passion for their vocation, demonstrate compassion for their fellow citizens, and contribute to society.

Given my vocation, it is not surprising that Confucius' thoughts on education are of particular interest to me.

One quote from "Master Kung" (*literal translation of Confucius' Chinese name*) that sums up our challenge as educators and legislators is this:

"If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed.

If in terms of ten years, plant trees.

If in terms of 100 years, teach the people."

As Minister of Education, it is my job to see beyond this particular moment in time and to think in terms of 100 years.

My challenge as Minister is to help create an educational system that will meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner.

Just as our ancestors laid the foundation for the excellent education system that helped build today's society, what we teach our children and what they learn from us will determine the quality and success of tomorrow's society.

It is therefore fitting, that the Confucius Institute has clear educational objectives:

- Promoting friendly relationships with other countries, and
- Enhancing the understanding of the Chinese language and culture

Both are admirable and important.

One of the things a student in Fushun, (foo – shen) China and a student in Edmonton, Alberta have in common is that they are both citizens of the world.

They are citizens of a world in which technology is bringing everyone closer and closer together—both physically and virtually.

We see evidence of globalization, and the internationalism of our lives all around us. An example of this is the petroleum engineer in Alberta who signs on to a web conference with petroleum engineers in China and Russia to discuss the best methods for oil extraction in South America.

My ministry is no exception when it comes to bringing people closer together—the fact that Alberta Education has a fully accredited high school in Macau and that Edmonton Public now has a Confucius Institute in Edmonton are just two illustrations of that new reality.

To meet the challenges of this brave new world, we are all going to have to work together to make this a better place to live, work and play.

Understanding the culture, language, values and worldview of the other people with whom we will be working is a key to success.

Confucian thought can also help us understand what it means to be an educated person.

Being truly educated is about a whole lot more than having a head full of information.

In pre-modern China, that meant being proficient in the Six Arts:

- music
- archery
- horsemanship
- arithmetic
- writing
- and knowledge of the rites and rituals of both public and private life.

We need to think very carefully about what the characteristics of an educated person ought to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In addition to basic knowledge, we will also need to engender in our children, critical thinking, teamwork and cooperation, as well as a commitment to good citizenship and a love of life-long learning.

To quote Confucius again: “He who learns but does not think, is lost! He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.”

We must nurture our students to ensure that they never become lost or in danger.

Creating a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education system that will provide 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners with the knowledge, skills and abilities they will need to take advantage of the global opportunities presented to them will not be an easy task.

But it is a task that excites me and I am eager to engage with it head on!

I am so pleased to be able to work with the phenomenal educators, administrators, elected trustees, parents, and department officials we have in Alberta to help every student find his or her passion; to realize his or her full potential; and to ensure that all Albertans can fully contribute to their province, nation, and the world at large.

A rapidly changing world means we will constantly have to rethink what we are doing and why we are doing it. Thus, the need for our students to think reflectively and act compassionately on a global scale is so important.

Here, we can again look to the Master for guidance.

Confucius has told us that “When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don’t adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.”

It is advice well worth heeding.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you to the Confucius Institute for choosing Edmonton as a site for one of its locations.

This is a cosmopolitan and welcoming city on its way to becoming a truly world-class and global mid-sized city. Edmonton has a legacy of commitment to learning and teaching, so selecting it as a host city for a Confucius Institute is truly a prescient act.

Thank you so much to all the people in Edmonton and Beijing who put in countless hours of work to make today a reality. Your vision and dedication have made a great contribution to our community.

When I return to work on Monday, I will keep a story about Confucius in mind as I tackle the challenges facing education in Alberta.

When a student told Confucius that he did not know how to describe him to a local governor, Confucius said,

“Why didn't you tell him that I'm a man driven by such passion for learning that in my enthusiasm, I often forget to eat, in my joy I forget to worry, and I don't even notice the approach of old age.”

I will do my best to be that kind of man and that kind of Minister.

Thank you.