

# **Toward the Learning City of Beijing Policy and Strategy**

## **1. The City of Beijing at glance**

Beijing is located in the north part of the North China plain. It covers an area of 16,410.54 square kilometers. Within the recorded history of 3,000 years as a city, Beijing has served for 800 years as a capital. By the end of 2011 the resident population was 20.186 million people, including 12.779 million permanent population, and 7.422 million external population living here more than six months.

Beijing is divided into 16 districts and 2 counties for administration. There are 4 function zones: the capital core zone, an urban function expanding zone, a new urban developing zone and the ecological conservation zone.

In 2011, the GDP of Beijing had reached 1600 billion yuan, increased by 8.1%. The average GDP created by one citizen in the resident population was 80394 yuan (\$12447).

In order to achieve new development goals, Beijing has determined to exploit strategic resources like science, education and other intellectual ones, accelerating the modernization and internationalization process of the capital. With this background, the government put forward the goal of construction of a learning city, which is an important choice in realizing the medium and long-term development strategy of Beijing.

## **2. The basic situation of the educational development in Beijing:**

The construction of a learning city in Beijing has been prepared for some time and major development has taken place in all kinds of educational undertakings. Beijing took the lead in implementing compulsory education objectives, and reduction of the rate of illiteracy which was almost reduced to zero by 1993. Moreover, Beijing generalized senior high school education in 1999 and stepped into the stage of generalization of higher education in 2003.

The educational system in Beijing, as elsewhere in China, consists of six years of universal primary education and six years of secondary education. In addition, both the government and a number of private groups operate nurseries and kindergartens for younger children to make it easier for their mothers to work. The early years of primary education emphasize reading, writing, and arithmetic, with history, geography, and science added in the later years. There are three types of secondary schools: general middle schools, which offer college-preparatory courses; normal schools, which prepare students to attend teacher training colleges; and vocational and

technical schools.

As home to both Beijing University and Tsinghua University, Beijing is an important center for higher education in China. The northwestern edge of the city, home to both Beijing University and Tsinghua University, has become a major educational and research district that is also home to the People's University of China, the Central Institute of Nationalities, the Beijing Normal University, the Beijing Medical College, and the Central Conservatory of Music, as well as institutes specializing in aeronautics, petroleum production, forestry, agriculture, and other fields.

### **3. Learning City Policy in Beijing**

In December 2000, 5 government departments, including the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, jointly issued “Proposals on the deepening comprehensive reforms in enterprises, establishing a modern enterprise system, and building learning enterprises”, so as to constantly promote the deepening of the construction of the learning city in Beijing. Since then, Beijing municipality and its relevant departments have issued over 20 documents. By means of policy-making, the foundation work of learning communities and learning organizations has been impelled extensively.

In April 2007, Beijing Municipal Party Committee and the city government held a working conference on learning city construction. After the conference, “A proposal on developing comprehensively the construction of learning capital city” was issued, clarifying the important meanings, guidelines, basic requirements, stage goals and concrete goals, creative ideas and specific measures, thus progressing the learning city construction of Beijing into a more comprehensive, and more in-depth development stage.

With the popularity of preschool education and higher education, the balanced development of compulsory education and the coordination between vocational education and general secondary education, a national education system focusing on schooling has been consolidated, setting the stage for the lifelong education system construction. Up to the present, the average education age of all citizens is 10 years, while the average education age of employees is 11 years. As the pioneer in the whole country, Beijing has realized the target of 9 years compulsory education and secondary education, eliminated illiteracy among people between twenty and fifty years of age, and also taken the lead in the popularity of higher education. At the end of 2007, the gross kindergarten attendance rate was over 98%, and the gross higher education attendance rate was 57%.

An education network and learning platform has been established initially for the citizens in Beijing. The learning network is much more broadly socialized: every main downtown area in the whole city has established a community education network base, led by community colleges and adult education centers, and 80% of streets have established community education centers or learning centers. In the majority of districts and counties, school teachers were asked to go into communities, participating in the development of the communities. More than 1000 full-time and part-time teachers have joined in, assisting the communities in developing community education work.

#### **4. A Different Learning Organization**

Spending no less than 2.5% of employees' total wages on education and training, 10 million yuan has been invested by Beijing Municipal government annually since 2003, rewarding the advanced collectives and individuals in building learning organizations. In February 2007, "Beijing Learning City Research Center" was established, and an expert group was set up.

In recent years, Beijing has aimed at meeting its citizens' needs and establishing the lifelong education system, with a focus on the following four aspects in the schedule:

**First**, provide community education to satisfy the various learning needs of community residents;

**Second**, develop vocational training to enhance the professional skills of employees comprehensively;

**Third** promote continuing education to train a large number of professionals;

**Fourth**, strengthen rural education, to impel the new countryside development project.

In order to ensure the implementation of the plan successfully, Beijing has strengthened the fundamental work of the following aspects.

#### **5. The organizational structure has been established and the leadership of the construction of the learning city has been strengthened.**

*The organizational structure has been established and the leadership of the construction of the learning city has been strengthened.* In accordance with the requirement for the vigorous promotion of the learning city and "To set up a leadership working group, which is responsible for organizing and instructing the

learning city construction of the whole city", the Beijing Municipal Leadership Group for Constructing the Learning City Project and its office were set up. The Leadership Group is in charge of implementing the policies and measures in promoting the learning city construction issued by the municipal government and committee of the Chinese Communist Party, organizing and constituting working objectives, implementing plans and policy documents, studying and solving important issues in learning city construction, and assessing progress. The Leadership Group has held three meetings to study and assign the work for the learning city construction. Beijing has acted on overall planning, implementation, and coordination in the construction of learning city.

*Publications have been strengthened and information channels have been expanded.* In order to strengthen the promotion of the learning city construction, inform the progress of the work and exchange work experience, the Leadership Group office has established an information reporting system. Subordinates report to the office on the progress of the learning city construction, then the office compiles and prints the reports into work information about the learning city construction in Beijing, and finally feeds back the summarized information to the related departments. To let more people understand and become familiar with the significance of the learning city construction; every level of Beijing municipal government, schools and training institutions, districts, communities and other departments promote the construction of the learning capital in various ways. All news media and internet media exert their role in disseminating, and publicizing the benefits of the learning city construction and its significance, making universally known lifelong learning theory, and informing the progress, typical experience and achievements of the learning city construction, so as to create a good atmosphere for the learning city construction.

*Various learning organizations have been set up actively by counties and departments.* Beijing Municipal Commission of Education has issued a proposal on developing comprehensively community education and promoting the establishment of the learning community in the capital. Notices have been issued on rewarding excellent counties in community education, promoting the learning community construction, establishing standards for model community education centers in Beijing, and a series of policy documents to propel the creation of learning organizations. Beijing municipality has formed an expert group on the learning city construction to conduct the evaluation work on the pioneers of learning organizations that drive the learning city construction effectively. At present, the city has selected Beijing Construction Engineering Group Co., Ltd. and 53 other enterprises, Desheng Street of Xicheng District and 16 other streets, Caiyu town of DaXing district and 6

other towns as the advanced units in the creation of learning organizations. Dongcheng and 10 other districts and counties were chosen as "advanced districts or counties of developing community education and promoting the construction of learning organizations". Three districts, Xicheng, Haidian and Chaoyang, which had set good examples for the project, were honoured with the title of Model District in Community Education by the Ministry of Education.

*Theoretical studies have been emphasized on and the organization of the working team has been strengthened.* For the sake of strengthening theoretical studies and organizing an efficient working team, Beijing Academy of Educational Science has set up the "Beijing Research Center on the Learning City", organized an advisory group of learning city construction, involving full-time and part-time experts of the research center as a team. Over the past few years, the departments concerned have published over 10 kinds of books on how to build the learning city and issued more than 50,000 sets. The office has organized experts to compile and published the "Guide Book for Learning City Construction in the Capital" and the "Handbook for the Establishment of Learning Organizations in Beijing", the first edition printed has reached 12,000 copies, and have been distributed to all districts, counties and advanced units in creating learning organizations, for free. These books were very popular in the whole of society.

The office makes experts play an important role in the work, and has implemented a series of training activities, such as training courses for counties' directors and directors of education departments in counties and districts, guidance training courses for the professionals on establishment of learning organizations and training courses for the directors of enterprises and community committees, which have trained more than 400 personnel totally.

*A website for learning city construction has been implemented and a distance learning environment has been created for citizens.* Beijing Radio and TV University, entrusted by the Beijing Commission of Education, has established website a for learning city construction, and has set up the service center which can provide life-long learning and distance education opportunities for Beijing citizens. The website has the characteristics of the capital and aims at serving the public, promoting learning, exchanging information and facilitating construction of the learning city. It also provides academic and non-academic education for cadres, enterprise workers, community residents, immigrants, retired elderly people and other groups, in order to promote Beijing's historical culture, spread the Olympic idea and advocate a healthy and civilized way of life. The website is not only an environment for all departments

and industries to study and discuss how to create learning organizations, but also a service platform providing rich resources of distance education for citizens. Meanwhile, Beijing Commission of Education has established distance education service platforms in Dongcheng Districts, Xicheng Districts and 10 other districts, which are connected to the website and which can provide a more convenient lifelong learning environment for citizens.

#### **6. Activities related to the learning city and 29th Olympic Games**

*The "Vocational Skills Competition in the Service Trades Related to the Olympic Games" was launched with the aim of providing better services for hosting the 29th Olympic Games.* To welcome the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and improve the vocational skills of employees in the service trades, the Bureau of Labor and Social Security and the Capital Civilization Office jointly organized the "Vocational Skills Competition in the Service Trades Related to the Olympic Games" to test the training effects and perfect staff's vocational skills. More than 330,000 people from 3,180 units in the 16 districts and counties participated in the competition, in which 40 types of trades were involved.

*The quality of employees in the capital has been improved greatly through initiating the "establishment and contest" project.* The Leadership Group of the "Establishment and Contest Project", cooperated actively with the activity: "Welcoming the Olympics, Stressing on Civilization, and Fostering New Practices", and provided popular education on civilization and etiquette knowledge among employees, launched mass English, basic etiquette and other new courses to enhance the quality of employees' civilized conduct. It has organized "Beijing May 1 TV Evening Show--- Laborer Carol Concert", established the first intellectual and ideological education base for model laborers to publicize the Olympic spirit, and created an Olympic atmosphere. At the same time, it launched colorful theme activities, implemented comprehensively the "Capital Staff's Olympic Action Plan", and offered basic education for migrant workers.

*The activity "Promoting Psychological Health for a Harmonious Society to Welcome the Olympic Games" was conducted and schemes on public psychological adjustment among citizens were carried out.* The Capital Civilization Office and Beijing Association for Science and Technology organized jointly the activity "Promoting Psychological Health for a Harmonious Society to Welcome the Olympic Games" with harmonious mental healthcare to solve mental confusion and improve the psychological resilience and self-adjustment of citizens, resolve social contradictions and disputes, promote harmony and stability, and cultivate a good

social psychological environment for Olympic Games. Nearly 200 psychology teachers and more than 300 volunteers took initiatives to set up psychology adjustment classes for community residents, and more than 10,000 residents have received psychological counseling (340,000 residents have benefited from these activities directly).

*The "Capital Citizens' Auditorium Activity" has been conducted through taking full advantage of learning resources in the capital.* The Propaganda Department of Municipal Party Committee, the Municipal Association of Social Science, the Municipal CPC's Education Committee, the Education Committee and the Working Committee of Affiliated Institutions have held more than 300 public lectures in various forms around the themes of "literature, art, science and technology" and "taking humans as foremost, inheriting civilization, building harmony, and welcoming the Olympics" and so on; thereby to upgrade the quality of citizens, improve the city's image and humanistic ideas have been spread, civilization has been carried forward, and scientific methods have been advocated through public lectures.

*Social organizations have functioned fully to create a good cultural environment for the Olympic Games.* Beijing Literary and Art Association and other social organizations played a unique role in the construction of the learning city. For example, The Writers Association created a lot of Olympic documentary reportages; The Musicians Association composed more than 10 songs for the Olympic Games; The Calligraphers Association wrote many Olympic calligraphies; The Ballad Singers Association created many forms of traditional Chinese folk songs focusing on the activities of "learning city construction"; The Dancers Association held Folk Dance Competitions to welcome the Olympic Games; The Artists Association and The Folk Artists Association conducted comic and ballad exhibitions on "Towards the Light of the Olympic Etiquette • Citizen Etiquette"; The Harmonious Sound Troupe attached to Beijing Literary and Art Association went to the Bird Nest/Olympic Stadium and other Olympic construction sites to offer more than 30 non-profit performances.

*Activity with the theme "Lifelong Learning Day of the Capital Citizens to Welcome the Olympic Games" was conducted to promote the construction of the learning city.* On November 10, 2007, activities with the theme "Lifelong Learning Day of the Capital Citizens to Welcome the Olympic Games" were conducted in 16 districts and counties and around the Yanshan area at the same time. Beijing Literary and Art Association and other departments organized artists to go into communities and rural areas in person. On the same day, some colleges and universities also offered community education services or gave public lectures. The industries, enterprises and

institutions concerned also gave meaningful learning activities in the light of local conditions.

With the further development of the learning city construction, Beijing will continue to strengthen the development of a lifelong learning public service system, learning organizations and necessary learning resources, establish model institutions and necessary policy mechanisms, organize various stakeholders to participate in the project "Building the Learning Capital ", and strive to turn Beijing into an All Citizens Learning and Life-Long Learning City.

### **7. Specific objectives of the learning city for Beijing**

The capital is to construct into an inter-communicated and transferable life-long education system. Citizens of the capital will gain further education, meeting the various demand of children from zero to 6 years old; people above 6 years old will receive 12 years of education on average; employees will achieve more than 12 years of education on average; and the new labor force will gain 15 years of education on average. More than 90% of the staff in the city will receive pre-service training; more than 50% of whom will gain continuous education to improve knowledge and enhance skills every year; and more than 30% of residents will receive social and cultural education. The quality of modern civilization and its innovative capacity will increase greatly, and the number of talented people will rise sharply as well.

To learn to make innovations will become an important rationale for development of the capital, and general public deeds for citizens.

Everyone should be able to study anywhere at any time, and the majority of residents will regard learning as a life style. Citizens will receive protection for their basic rights of learning and government will satisfy their requirements for life-long learning. Organizations of various types will carry out their learning and educational functions, which should be given priority in development. Innovation should become an internal demand from most organizations and citizens, with remarkable improvement in the scientific quality of the public. The capital will develop a strong culture of innovation and become an important innovation base nationwide.

Various activities motivated by learning organizations should cross the whole city, with its construction ratio reaching 80%. Thirty percent of the community (street, town), institutions and enterprises should become learning organizations in preliminary stages of development.



The construction of learning city will give priority to a harmonious culture, promoting and ensuring Beijing's position as the role model of the harmonious socialist society. The municipality will guide and organize the mass of leaders and citizens to advocate the spirit of Beijing: Patriotism, Innovation, Inclusiveness and Virtue.

### **For discussion**

1. What do you see as the main insights and lessons for other cities from the experience of Beijing in building a learning city?
2. What are the main strengths of the Beijing approach in building an innovative learning culture in the city?
3. What are the implications of the Beijing approach for schools and teachers, libraries and museums, and small businesses?
4. What do you see as the government role in building the Beijing learning city?
5. What do you see as the significant relationship between the Beijing learning city initiative and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing? Are there any lessons for the coming London Olympics in 2012?

### **Acknowledgements**

All the material in this paper is based on the Beijing learning city construction working reports. The author did some editing and translation work on the materials and wishes to thank all those who have contributed to these reports.

The author of this paper, Dr Yuan Dayong, is a research member in the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences (BAES) Institute of Vocational and Adult Education (IVAE). He is also the research fellow of Beijing Learning City Research Centre. His research field is vocational education, learning city/region development, and comparative education. He also provides consultation services and working support to the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education and National Government.