



Never give up on students

Recipient of the Certificate of Merit

Ms LAM Ka-wai

(Years of teaching: 25 years)

School

Kau Yan College

Teaching Levels

Secondary 1 - 5

(English Language)

Teaching Beliefs

“Every student can make improvement. If you do not give up on them, they will not give up on themselves.”

Interview with the Teacher

25 years of teaching has not dampened her enthusiasm in teaching English; Ms LAM Ka-wai is still dedicated to helping her students overcome the obstacles in learning English.

For Ms LAM, teaching English is not just teaching vocabulary, grammar, listening and reading, writing and speaking, but teaching students how to learn English.

“If we only teach the meaning of a word, students will just learn that word,” Ms LAM says. “Learning to learn vocabulary is to teach students how to use a dictionary and how the meaning of a word can be retained in our long-term memory.” Ms LAM has designed a series of learner training activities to help students learn English.

Overcoming students’ obstacles in learning English

But how does Ms LAM get students to take the initiative in “learning to learn” English? First, she will find out whether the students have some affective obstacles or misconceptions deterring them from learning English.

After she has addressed their reasons for rejecting English, Ms LAM will then ask the students to reflect on their reasons for learning English.

“If they learn English just to pass examinations, they will not enjoy the learning process. We must show them that English is an international language and it is ‘a window to the world’. If they really want to know more about foreign countries and make friends with westerners, they must master the language.”

The third step is to evaluate individual students’ English proficiency. Ms LAM will ask students to set priority on what they should learn. Then she will draw up an agreement with each student on how to improve his/her English and work out a practical plan with him/her.

The last step is to modify the plan when necessary. When implementing the plan, things may go wrong and the plan must be fine-tuned. For example, if the student cannot handle the workload, Ms LAM will revise the plan with the student and make the goals achievable and manageable.

“The whole process is about encouragement,” Ms LAM explains. “You must try to build up a relationship with students. Some students are very passive. I will play games with them and give them little presents. After that, they are usually more attentive in class.”

Never give up on students

Ms LAM has conducted learner training activities whenever necessary but she emphasises that her belief of never giving up on students is more important than any of the activities.

“Some students may want to test you and see how you handle them. They just sit there not paying attention. After a few lessons when they find that you have not given up on them, they show some interest and start learning.”

Ms LAM has seen students improving a lot afterwards. Their improvement is one of the factors that motivates her to try getting through to the students.

Ms LAM gets satisfaction every day from her harmonious relationship with the students. She says, “Seeing students graduate and coming back to school to visit me gives me great strength to carry on. If we have a good relationship with the students, time passes very quickly.”



Students are enjoying themselves during the English Activity Day.



Get a fish or catch a fish? – Developing Learner Autonomy

Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.

– An Ancient Confucius Proverb

Learning English in Hong Kong can be very difficult since over 95% of the population is Chinese. Besides, affective demotivating factors like shyness, self-awareness, peer pressure among learners, especially those aged between 13 and 15, also hinder language learning. Therefore, learning English through acquisition is inefficient and rarely produces highly successful English users. To be successful language learners, learner training is necessary.

Learner training helps students to be more efficient and skillful in language learning

In Hong Kong, there are lots of easily accessible authentic English resources which provide good language learning opportunities, e.g., newspapers, journals, multimedia learning CD-ROMs and the Internet. However, the key to success lies very much on whether students expose themselves to these resources actively and know how to retain knowledge systematically. Thus, training students how to maximise these exposures and what strategies to use is essential.

Learner training helps students to overcome affective obstacles in language learning

A learner's affective stances like personal belief, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, inhibition, tolerance for ambiguity, etc. determine the success or failure in language learning. Misconceptions that attribute success or failure in language learning to factors other than the learner himself/herself may hinder the development of a responsible and active attitude towards learning.

Children aged between 13 and 15 are usually shy and self-conscious about making mistakes; thus they are less willing to use English. However, to be good language learners, students must overcome their affective obstacles.

To help students to be independent learners of English, I have introduced learner training activities into the S1 and S2 curricula.



Students are learning actively in groups.

Learner training activities

- **Learner training topics:** What is a good language learner, analysing my language needs, writing my own learning plan, what to do when you don't know a word, basic language learning strategies such as vocabulary building, etc.

- **When to introduce learner training:** As a structured course or interest class to be conducted after school, or an integral component of the English curriculum, or activities in the lessons during the orientation cycle.

- **Role of the teacher:** The teacher must clear students' misconceptions about language learning and help them understand that success in language learning is attributed to internal factors such as hard work and skillful use of learning strategies. Whenever necessary and possible, besides being a traditional English teacher, play the role of a counsellor, a facilitator or an informant. For example, I have tried to lower students' affective filter, teach them how to make vocabulary building more effective and show them where they can find useful materials and how they can use them, etc.

Students' feedback about the learner training course is very positive. For many of them learning English has become less threatening, more efficient and more self-directed.



Displays of students' work including journals, reflective writings on literary texts, chapter stories, etc.

Assessment

Summary

Articulated a coherent philosophy of teaching based on her passion for teaching, care for her students and beliefs in learner autonomy and learning English through language arts.

Ms LAM is a supportive and charismatic teacher. She enjoys teaching and her joy and passion for teaching are shown in her cheerful countenance and warm rapport with students.

Learner autonomy is paramount in Ms LAM's language learning and teaching philosophy. To help students to become independent learners, she developed a programme on language learning strategies and a self-study phonetics package for the junior forms. She also used a variety of games and activities to motivate students and help them learn English in the classroom and beyond.

To enrich students' language learning experiences, Ms LAM introduced Language Arts to Secondary 1 to 3. Students enjoyed the stories, learnt to appreciate literary texts and applied their knowledge and skills in projects related to the themes of the stories. Some of the students were inspired to write their own books with chapter development.

Ms LAM is especially effective in motivating low-achievers. With the belief that every student could make progress or be assisted to improve, Ms LAM adapted learning materials and experiences according to students' language needs. She used journal writing to help low-achievers to develop writing skills and Reader's Theatre to coach them to read aloud with confidence and perform in front of an audience.

Ms LAM has fostered the development of a learning community in the school, with other schools and among parents. She initiated an Intranet platform for teachers to share learning and teaching materials. She encouraged the school to join the Education Bureau's STELLAR Project so that colleagues could share their experiences of teaching Language Arts with teachers of other schools. Ms LAM has extended the learning community to the parents. As the chairperson of the Home-school Cooperation Committee, she has organised activities to help parents build a language-rich environment at home and be more skillful in dealing with parent-child problems. Ms LAM's dedication to teaching, her loving care for her students and strong commitment to professional pursuance are highly appreciated.



Ms LAM is teaching students to read a drama script.

Way of Access to Information of the above Teaching Practice

Website: www.kyc.edu.hk

Preferred Way of Dissemination

Sharing seminars

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