



Using Effective Teaching Strategies to nurture life-long learners

Teacher
presented
with the Award



Mr LI Siu-tak, Bruno

(Years of teaching : 24 years)

School

St. Clare's Girls' School

Subject taught

Liberal Studies (S4-6)

Teaching Philosophy

"I believe that Liberal Studies is designed to broaden students' perspectives, to improve their critical thinking and to help them cultivate learning-to-learn abilities. Most of all, it helps students develop positive thinking and learn how to respect others."



Interview with the Teacher

Mr LI Siu-tak conducts his Liberal Studies lessons at the Interactive Learning Centre of St. Clare's Girls' School, where students' remarkable assignments and sophisticated mind maps are displayed.

Leave the comfort zone and accept challenges

In 2007, St. Clare's Girls' School introduced AS Level Liberal Studies into its curriculum. Mr LI was appointed as the Panel Head, which happened to be one of the most exciting challenges in his career. "When I became a Liberal Studies teacher, part of my duties was to teach my students to write essays in English. It was a strenuous task at the beginning given my teaching background in Biology," Mr LI explains. As for the NSS Liberal Studies, the curriculum covers many different areas. Mr LI could only master the topics on public health and energy technology at that time. To prepare himself for teaching all modules in Liberal Studies, he attended numerous training courses after office hours and enrolled in sharing programmes with other Panel teachers to broaden his professional knowledge.

"Many teachers believe that Science teachers may have difficulties in teaching Liberal Studies. As educators, we should not limit ourselves. We shall leave our comfort zone to explore new frontiers and refresh our teaching practices. Even with a rough road ahead, we can still achieve our goals by accumulating related experience." After taking the full role as a Liberal Studies teacher, Mr LI recalls his long odyssey with a grin. "Back then, I was rather



▲ Students participate actively in learning activities.

quiet. However, teaching Liberal Studies turned me into an articulate person. Now I feel at ease sharing my thoughts with students. I have built a close relationship with them." Over the years, Mr LI has developed successful teaching practices in Liberal Studies. It is expected that his exemplary practices can be disseminated to the teaching community.

Understanding of the Motherland

In general, Mr LI agrees that most of his students manage to attain a certain level of language proficiency and acquire critical thinking skills. Yet, he also comments, "Some of my students have limited exposure to society and they do not have a keen interest in current affairs." Mr LI says that Liberal Studies involves a number of major issues. Students easily overlook topics they consider irrelevant, such as social development and politics in China. To foster a better understanding of modern China, the school organises exchange tours on a regular basis, including visits to Whampoa Military Academy and rural areas in China. The school also encourages students to participate in "Mainland Exchange Programme for Senior Secondary School Students" organised by the Education Bureau. Mr LI says that these activities are quite effective in enhancing students' understanding of the development of modern China. These can also ignite their curiosity to learn more.

Arouse interest in news and current affairs

To encourage students to read the newspaper and develop an interest in current affairs, Mr LI believes that they must develop a habit of reading starting from their early childhood. In this regard, the school runs regular activities such as "Lunch Time News Forum", debating, quiz and teacher-student debating competitions. Mr LI also encourages

students to attend "City Forum", a public forum organised by RTHK, where hot issues are debated in depth. Mr LI says, "All these activities arouse students' interest in current affairs, and help them form a habit of reading the newspaper."

Train independent thinking and develop positive values

The school advocates developing students' positive values and attitudes towards life. Liberal Studies shares similar goals. Mr LI says, "One of my missions in teaching Liberal Studies is to strengthen the common values students acquired during the weekly Ethics and Religious Studies lessons, such as justice, respect and love." Mr LI appreciates the school's support in allowing discussions on controversial topics in Liberal Studies lessons. However, he clarifies, "As Liberal Studies teachers, we should help our students give due considerations for different views and make sensible judgements before formulating their own personal viewpoint and values. Students' interpretation and judgment of issues are susceptible to the pervasive influence of the media. Therefore, it is important for teachers to help students examine all viewpoints and values of different parties. We should also guide our students to analyse issues from the perspectives of different stakeholders." In his words, "While examination results are crucial to students' future, the development of positive values will be far-reaching in their life."

Learn from professional sharing with others

In these two years, Mr LI has been working as a seconded teacher in the Education Bureau under the Professional Development Schools (PDS) Scheme in supporting the professional development of Liberal Studies teachers. Mr LI has shared his experiences in many schools. One of the schools he visited has a large cohort of South Asian students. Mr LI delivered a Liberal Studies lesson on environmental conservation that impressed the students deeply. "Although the students come from a very different cultural context, they were very attentive and participated actively in the lesson. It was indeed a very memorable experience." Mr LI remarks.



▲ Debating competition increases students' awareness of current issues and builds up their confidence.



▲ Interactive Learning Centre facilitates group discussion in Liberal Studies.

▲ Clarifying students' doubts



Teacher's Sharing

Through Liberal Studies, students can strengthen their learning-to-learn skills. They can also learn to respect different cultures and views, and develop positive values and attitudes towards life. They can eventually become independent life-long learners to meet the challenges of this ever-changing world.

To achieve the aforementioned learning aims, my teaching focusses on the acquisition of knowledge through transmission and co-construction. My lessons also target at developing students' independent thinking and generic skills and cultivating in them a set of core moral values of our society.

My Lesson

Engagement, Development and Exhibit

My lessons provide a multitude of learning experiences with a variety of resources including textual, visual and audio materials, and ample opportunities for engaging my students to actively involve themselves in the learning process. Before



▲ Students actively participating in learning process

a lesson, they are made aware of my expectation of their learning outcomes. During the lesson, through the use of effective questioning skills together with the help of graphic organisers, students are given sufficient support in grasping the ideas from given sources and transform them into fundamental concepts which are essential to the construction of their knowledge.

At the end of a lesson, I provide opportunities for students to exhibit their learning outcomes through oral or written presentations followed by a well-planned debriefing. By doing this, students are provided with more opportunities to consolidate as well as to reflect upon their learning so that they can modify the pace in their learning path.

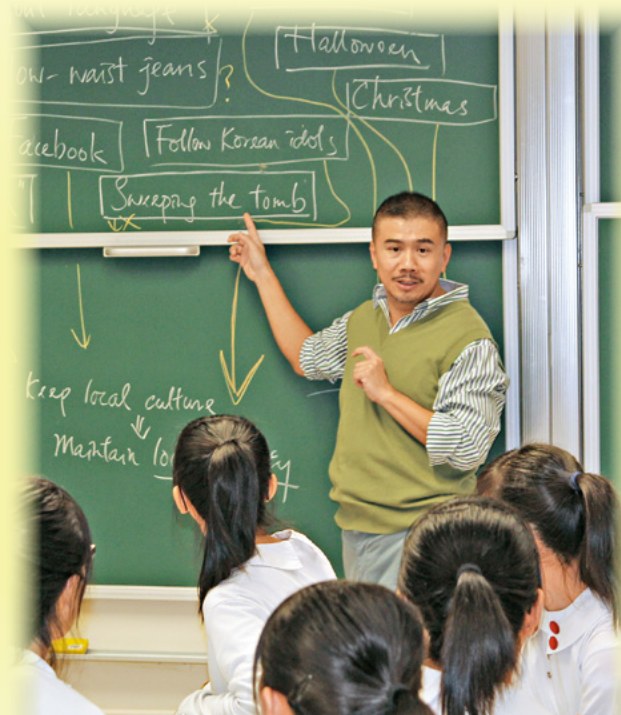
Values education

It is meaningful to help students develop positive values and attitudes towards life by letting them understand the values of different people towards an issue. I also help students identify and conceptualise views and opinions into concrete values. Afterwards, I make use of a reflective discussion of how values affect people's decisions and actions to help students appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society as well as develop their own values.

My Teaching Strategies

Backward Design Curriculum planning

My planning of the curriculum focuses on two questions: "What should they learn?" and "How should I help them learn?" After analysing students' abilities and learning habits, I set suitable



▲ Transferring skills learnt to other issues



▲ Clarifying students' understanding of the issues discussed

assessment objectives for them, identify the key elements for each learning module, and tailor various teaching activities which enable them to achieve their targets.

Also, it is important to align learning and teaching with internal assessment in the Liberal Studies curriculum. For each assessment activity, I inform students of how they are being assessed. With clear objectives in mind, students can construct their knowledge and develop their generic skills progressively with confidence.

Transferring skills learnt to other situations

When I design the teaching materials and assessment tasks, I aim at providing opportunities for students to apply concepts and skills previously acquired to new situations with adaptation, rather than asking for a regurgitation of memorised terms and phrases without the consideration of the different contexts in similar issues. For example, after discussing with students the ways the HKSAR Government combated AIDS, our next discussion is on the preventive measures on the outbreak of avian flu by making use of the framework they have learnt earlier.

Catering for Learner Diversity

The majority of my students are of above-average ability. Yet they have different levels of mastery of the English and Chinese languages as well as analytical skills. For some, their social awareness needs to be further strengthened. I tackle these diversities by "teaching rich" and build up a resource bank of graded teaching materials and



▲ Student speaks with confidence after on and on oral presentations in class.

assessment tasks. This helps our team to set tasks of different levels of difficulties to meet students' needs. To facilitate student learning, I provide them with scaffolding such as outlines, graphic organisers and recommended readings etc. This helps build up students' confidence in learning and therefore encourages them to learn independently according to their own pace.

In practice, I turn my Liberal Studies classroom into a student-centered, inviting and participative venue in which students are stimulated to think in a higher order and are strongly motivated to excel themselves.

Conclusion

Most students have shown noticeable improvements in logical reasoning and critical thinking as observed in their discussions and presentations. It is also reflected in various kinds of assessments. They also find the learning skills acquired in my lessons useful for mastering other subjects. For instance, they can now write longer, well-structured, argumentative essays in both English and Chinese. Students appreciate my efforts in helping them develop their positive values towards life. All these positive learning outcomes not only boost my confidence in teaching, but also motivate me to strive for excellence in the teaching of Liberal Studies.



Assessment Summary

Applying effective teaching strategies to nurture students to be proactive and life-long learners.

Mr LI has a clear understanding and good mastery of the curriculum objectives, philosophy and teaching strategies of Liberal Studies. He believes that an effective teaching practice broadens students' knowledge base, strengthens students' competence in independent thinking, fosters generic skills, nurtures students to be proactive, and eventually gears them up to be life-long learners.

Mr LI helps students understand the relevance of the curriculum to their everyday life experience by incorporating current social issues and students' prior knowledge when designing learning materials, as well as making connection of different concepts. He sets clear assessment objectives for each form and explains clearly the assessment objectives to the students at different stages of learning.

Mr LI takes into consideration the learning diversity of his students when adapting teaching and assessment strategies. He has provided ample opportunities for students to get actively involved in the learning process. He organises collaborative learning activities which invite students with different strengths to work together to make different contributions. He also provides scaffolding for students of average ability and designs more challenging tasks for the advanced which motivate them to be self-directed learners. All these support students to construct knowledge and develop generic skills progressively with confidence.

Mr LI demonstrated excellent classroom skills. The learning objectives were well-defined and were in line with the curriculum aims of Liberal Studies. He was capable of using a collaborative



◀ Supporting student's individual needs

learning approach to encourage students to discuss issues from multiple perspectives with supporting evidence. Mr LI also employed effective questioning skills to engage students in thinking. Furthermore, Mr LI was also able to help students transfer and apply different perspectives and concepts to the understanding of new issues. Students showed interest in learning and could complete the group task efficiently through collaboration.

Mr LI's students considered him a diligent teacher as he always prepared a lot of learning materials for them and also encouraged them to search more information on their own to enrich their studies. This helped them to extend their learning beyond the classroom. His collaborative and enquiry approach not only helped broaden their social awareness and expose them to different perspectives, but also helped them become self-directed life-long learners.

Mr LI has contributed significantly to the teaching community. He has played a leading role in the curriculum design and school-based teaching materials development of Liberal Studies in his school. Mr LI also promoted frequent professional sharing among teachers through peer lesson observation and collaborative lesson preparation so as to raise their competence in teaching for excellence.

Ways of Obtaining Information of the Teaching Practice



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C O N T A C T



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