

Exclusive Interview with Principal Kwan The value of "Associate Teaching Fellows"

In order to promote the professional development of kindergarten teachers through teaching assessments, the Early Childhood Education department has launched the "Associate Teaching Fellow (ATF)" course since 2015, training current teaching staff from partnering schools to participate in evaluating the learning and teaching of student teachers. Upon understanding the theoretical foundation and evaluation tools, participants can learn to evaluate teaching effectiveness, guiding student teacher's development through practice and self-reflection. After completing the course, participants might be invited to join our team of associate teaching fellows to work towards cultivating the next generation of kindergarten teachers.

Principal Kwan Shuk Ling from Rhenish Mission School has been one of our associate teaching fellows for three consecutive years since she completed the course. Principal Kwan recalled when she enrolled in the course, "I enrolled in the course initially with the intention of self-improvement. Although I have comprehensive experience in early childhood education, it is essential that I improve my teaching competencies through learning, in order to cope with the fast-changing education system." The course includes one day of

Ms Kwan Shuk Ling Elaine

lecture and two practical workshops. She found that "the entire learning process was systematic, starting out simple and progress gradually, giving a comprehensive overview on the use of teaching evaluation tools and evaluation indicators."

Throughout the mentoring process, Ms Kwan found it the most valuable to communicate with students who lack teaching experience. "As a mentor, not only did I have to ensure my students have reached an excellent standard in teaching, I also have to take into consideration the background and emotions of my students, teach them in accordance with their aptitude." Ms Kwan emphasized that the most important mission for mentors is to "build students' enthusiasm for early childhood education; teach them to be unafraid of the tedious work of teaching, and to do their best in the work that they do." Finally, Principal Kwan gave her appreciation to the teaching team of the ATF course for giving her the opportunity to participate in training early childhood educators, and letting her experience the process of learning while teaching.



"Suspending classes without suspending learning": Experimental teaching plan

Hong Kong schools are closed due to the coronavirus outbreak. Distance learning was introduced with the goal of achieving "suspending classes without suspending learning", which has imposed a huge challenge in the education sector. During the suspension, our department implemented an experimental teaching plan. Our graduating kindergarten teachers learned how to produce online teaching materials suitable for young children through attending online lessons conducted by our instructors and watching sample teaching videos filmed by students from different courses, both of which helped to improve their online teaching skills, and on designing and producing online teaching materials.

The experience of teaching online has broadened the students' horizons on using a variety of teaching resources, such as guiding children to explore things that are rarely seen in their daily life using e-learning materials. Students also gained satisfaction from creating their own online teaching materials such as e-books, interactive presentations, and virtual reality 360 clips. These learning outcomes showed that students are capable of facing challenges and preparing themselves for the next stage of teaching internship.

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Microteaching is suitable for the current situation in Hong Kong; it takes into consideration the various problems that teachers might encounter during online teaching and the lack of interaction during face-to-face teaching. It is a valuable learning experience for us.

Au Ting

Student's feedback:



To Ching Man

We have learned how to make good use of online resources to teach children effectively and increase their learning motivation through microteaching. Online teaching is more difficult and challenging than face-to-face teaching. In addition, through microteaching, we have the opportunities to create our own e-books, which was a new experience for us.

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The scientifically-proven language card game "Bumper Cards™" boosts children's creative thinking

Morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of a language. Morphological awareness is the ability to perceive the meaning and manipulate the structure of words. The Chinese writing system comprises of three units - morphemes, syllables and the character itself, that is, each Chinese character corresponds to a syllable and a morpheme. For example, the Chinese character "蟲(worm)" correlates with a syllable "cung4" and the meaning of "small arthropod or insect".

More than 80% of Chinese words are compound words, which made up of two to three morphemes. For example, both "飛蟲(flying insect)" and "蟲草(cordyceps)" contain the same morpheme "蟲(worm)". "飛蟲(flying insect)" refers to flying worms or insects; whereas "蟲草(cordyceps)" refers to a kind of Chinese herbal medicine that resembles worms. When the morpheme "蟲(worm)" is combined with other morphemes, new meanings can be formed: "書蟲(bookworms)" are small worms found in books, it can also be used to describe people who love to read. We can stimulate children's associative thinking and creativity by asking questions like: "If we call a kind of Chinese herbal medicine that looks like a worm "蟲草(cordyceps)", how would we call a flower that looks like a worm?" Children would answer, "it's a 蟲花(worm flower)."

The new words created may not be found in dictionaries yet, but the process of making new words follows the rules of Chinese words formation and shows children's ability to understand and manipulate the morphemes. According to my research, training children's morphological awareness has a more significant influence on expanding their Chinese vocabularies and improving their reading comprehension than training their phonological awareness. Moreover, there is a positive reciprocal effect between training Chinese and English morphological awareness, training children's Chinese morphological awareness can help with developing their English vocabularies and reading skills.



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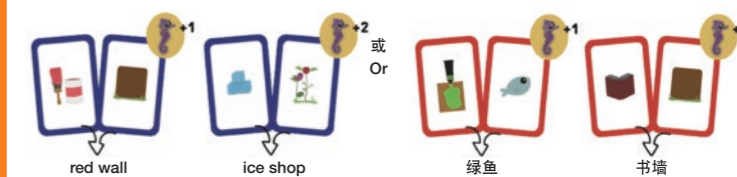


Dr. Zhou Yan-ling
Assistant Professor

Partner with Prof. McBride at CUHK, we designed and developed a language card game called "Bumper Cards™" in both Chinese and English. You could get more information about the card game on <https://www.cayanedu.com> (Creativity through Language).

Bumper Cards™ featured Chinese characters and English words which are age-appropriate for children; children can master thousands of Chinese and English words through playing the card game. There are four ways we would recommend for teachers and parents to play with their children. Here is one of them:

1. Each player gets eight cards.
2. Starting with the youngest player and continue clockwise. Players can use the eight characters or words on their cards to "bump" (combine) with other cards to form new words until no more words can be formed. When two cards are put together, it means that they can be combined to form a compound word. If the player makes an existing compound word, he/she will get a seahorse token. If the player creates a new compound word, he/she will receive two seahorse tokens.
3. Please refer to the following example on how to "bump" the cards.



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Children need not give up Cantonese for English

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"Should I stop speaking Cantonese with my children?" Some parents believe that knowing Cantonese is detrimental to English learning. Some even reported that Cantonese-speaking children could not hear the difference between "bad" and "bed". Does Cantonese weaken children's ability to distinguish between English speech sounds? Not necessarily.

According to the Perceptual Assimilation Model, native language causes confusion of foreign speech sounds only in some – but not all – contexts. When hearing foreign speech

sounds, listeners tend to draw on their native phonological system. Listeners are easily confused when two foreign speech sounds are mapped into a single native phonemic category. For example, the English consonants /r/ and /l/ are mapped into the same Japanese phonemic category so it is difficult for Japanese listeners to distinguish between "rock" and "lock".

However, in a number of contexts, native language helps. Listeners can easily differentiate between two foreign speech sounds when they are mapped into two native

phonemic categories. For example, the English consonants /b/ and /p/ can be assimilated into Cantonese /p/ and /pʰ/ categories respectively. As such, Cantonese listeners can perfectly distinguish between the English consonants /p/ and /b/, or the words "pin" and "bin". Surprisingly, my recent study even revealed that Cantonese listeners were better able to discriminate English stress – that is, which syllable is emphasised – than native English listeners. This ground-breaking finding dispels the myth that Cantonese impedes English speech sound acquisition.



Useful tips :

- ▶ Children need not give up Cantonese to master English.
- ▶ English speech sound acquisition is easier for early learners than late learners.
- ▶ Parents should pay attention to their own pronunciation and avoid code mixing when speaking with their children.

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Children with Autism: Language Development and Strategies



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Most children will have developed good comprehension skills and displayed nonverbal imitation behaviors before they start speaking (Berwick & Chomsky, 2016). Children's language development is influenced by various factors, such as their intelligence, receptive and expressive language skills, non-verbal communication skills, joint attention, imitation skills and social motivation (Brignell et al., 2018; Ellis Weismer & Kover, 2015). However, for the children with autism, the factors that affect their language development are more complex and touch on a broader set of criteria. The language abilities of children with autism vary widely: some may develop normal language ability; some may experience language deficits; while some may suffer a complete loss of verbal language ability (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009; Boucher, 2011).

Language development can be divided into receptive language and expressive language, and children with autism might show variation and developmental delay in both aspects. Studies have shown that preschoolers with autism have stronger expressive than receptive language skills (Kwok et al., 2015), which can be worked on and improved.

Here are some recommendations that could improve the language skills for children with autism:

1 Teaching materials found in daily life

Materials for language teaching should be related to the people, objects and activities found in children's daily life. Starting from single words, and increases the number of words according to children's ability. Teachers should pay attention to their children and teach the right vocabularies suitable for their needs. For example, names of familiar people (dad, mom, brother, teacher, principal, etc.), objects (cup, ball, car, apple, water, toilet, classroom), activities (washing hands, drawing, playing with toys, drinking orange juice, having snacks) and these are common utterances that children will encounter every day.

2 Assign roles and create opportunities for self-expression in games

Teachers or caregivers can assign roles or set up scenarios in games, and provide opportunities for children to develop functional language through observing their reactions. For example: when playing with bubble blowers, the teacher would hold the bubble wand but not blow out any bubbles until the child is prompted to say "blow/bubbles!"; giving the child a tightly-closed transparent candy box, the teacher would prompt the child to say "open/help/please open it!" before the teacher opens the box and let the child eat the candy.

3 Giving positive feedback and encouragement

During the initial stages of learning a language, children may occasionally mispronounce words, skip words, or use of words incorrectly. Teachers are recommended to pay attention to their facial expressions, voice and intonation when they give children positive encouragement and feedback, so that children would enjoy communicating with others. Teachers should refrain from using negative feedback such as "it's wrong/repeat again/don't say that!". This will affect children's confidence and undermine their motivation to speak.

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