Quality childhood education — a joint effort by school and home

The importance of quality childhood education may have become a cliché, yet I would like to share my personal stories on language learning to illustrate how it really could not have been done without the joint effort by school and home.

Setting the cornerstones

I remember when I was little I held my mother’s hand every day to go to St. Catherine’s Norfolk Road Crescent campus. There was a foreign-looking teacher in the class whom I looked forward to seeing, as she spoke a different language and read us stories. Though I did not understand a word at first, I began to comprehend more day by day because the teacher repeated the stories each week, while my mother also went through the stories with me at home. I did not realise at that time that I was actually being taught the meaning of the words, as well as sentence structures.

Soon I was able to read the stories back to the teacher upon her request, which was fun as I could “be” the teacher. Furthermore, she would ask me to repeat some words after her, which many years after, I realised she was correcting my pronunciation.

Then when I was in K3, my parents told me we would move to another country. After we settled down, I was sent to another kindergarten. I met kids speaking the same language as my foreign-looking teacher at St. Catherine’s. Though I could not speak the language fluently we could still communicate to some extent.

In hindsight I appreciate the English foundation laid by St. Catherine’s which enabled me to adapt to a native English environment at a young age.

Parental guidance

Later my mother started teaching me phonics as it was not taught at school (perhaps because English was their mother tongue). It helped a great deal with primary school
dictations as the teacher read aloud many words which I did not know. I managed to spell some of them right by listening to the teacher’s pronunciations. I continued to improve on spelling and could pronounce more unseen words after learning phonics. That really boosted my confidence.

At the same time, my father realised I needed to enrich my English vocabulary, therefore he encouraged me to look up the dictionary each time I came across new words. Although he could have bought me an electronic dictionary, he insisted I should use a hard copy as it provides more comprehensive explanations. Furthermore, an English-English dictionary should be used for effective learning. It was tedious at the beginning finding words on the right pages in the dictionary, but then I became experienced enough to locate the words with just a few flips. The best thing was I tend to retain what I learned because I had to work hard for it!

I went through primary school with this wonderful dictionary which indicates pronunciation in a child-friendly way, and explained the vocabularies using simple English.

Role model influence leading to self-learning

My father is a book lover. His wide collection of books made his study looked like a library. Seeing him always reading a book made me curious, what was so fascinating about it? So I began going through his bookshelves, picking out the books that looked interesting to a nine-year-old. Subsequently I understood the joy of reading, and I would go through a couple of books each day, let them be in English or Chinese.

It is from these years of reading I attained the level of Chinese which allowed me to settle
back into a traditional high school in Hong Kong studying normal Chinese curriculum (we moved back to Hong Kong eventually).

**Legacy for the next generation**

My childhood experience proved quality childhood education is critical, as it does not only give one a head start it also heavily influences one’s learning attitude. Moreover, joint effort by school and home is the key – complementing and filling the gaps for each other. Today I educate my children the same way.

So these are what I wanted to share and hope some of the tactics may be useful for other parents. I am sure everyone would have his/her own teaching strategies, let’s exchange tips and do our best to guide and inspire our children.

Happy learning everyone!

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