

# 27. Students Taking Charge: Creating and Web-casting TV Programs for Language Learning – A Whole School Approach

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**Abstract.** This study examines the implementation of Putonghua TV program production and web-casting in a secondary school in Hong Kong. It emphasizes the importance of autonomous language learning and adopts the Constructivist Approach. It then examines the perceptions of all the students studying the language, and the teachers involved, in order to find out the extent this approach can help students to generate the need to learn. It finds that students take more initiative to learn the language, and their learning motive increase at a considerable rate. And they shared that they had great fun in the process of both the production and the web-casting.

The conceptual framework of this study suggests that the greater extent the students take charge, the students will be more motivated to learn the language. With students' hard work, more than 100 TV programs are seriously made. They are creative and interesting to watch too. Teachers expressed that lessons were more enjoyable, and the amount of students-teacher interaction also increased. The technology is proved available and user friendly enough to serve the purpose. It is suggested that the support from the whole school greatly contributes to the success of the webcasting.

**Keywords:** autonomous learning, Constructivist Approach, webcasting, language learning.

## 1. Introduction

To push up students' language standard, some educational institutions are making use of the technology to promote campus TV. With the cautious consideration of the importance of the school's image, programs were produced with professional equipment. Selected students receive the scripts from teachers and rehearse many times under strict surveillance, so that it ensures the quality of the programs and the language to be broadcasted. All other students become audience and their role in the process is rather

passive and limited. How can we reconstruct the learning process, through which all students can actively and consciously take up the learning responsibility and develop a need to upgrade their target language?

This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a TV webcasting approach for autonomous language learning. In this approach, all junior form students involved will be asked to take charge in the process of TV program production in the target language, Putonghua, and their programs will be webcasted to the public.

## **2. The Research**

### ***2.1 The supporting theories***

It is a common believe that ‘autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning.’ (Benson, 2001) The notion of autonomous learning, as defined by Holec (1981), is as follows:

‘Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning.’

In Holec’s idea, to ‘take charge’ is to determine the objectives, contents, methods, procedure and evaluation of one’s own learning.

Pennycook (1997) stresses that special attention should be put on autonomy in language learning, as these learners learn a foreign language autonomously in order to acquire a ‘voice’ to fight for their rights and to improve their cultural contexts. He then expands the version of autonomy to a broader context: the social, cultural and political contexts of education and says that to become an autonomous language learner is ‘to become the author of one’s world.’

Candlin (in Benson, 2001) also support the notion of autonomous learning. He finds that educationists are now searching for ways to ‘change from the base: the curriculum.’ And their main aim is ‘to enable and empower learners to make their own meanings.’

In Benson’s (2001) opinion, it is a ‘natural tendency’ for learners to take charge of their learning; and given suitable situations and preparation, learners lacking the attribute are able to develop it. He also assures that virtually any practice that ‘encourages and enables learners to take greater control of any aspect of their learning can be considered a means of promoting autonomy.’

To foster learning autonomy, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is essential. Voller (1997) suggests a ‘transfer of control’ from the teachers to the learners. Rogers (1983)

proposes that the aim of the language teachers should be training his/her students to ‘develop their own learning strategies so that they will not be dependent on him(/her).’

According to Wang and Peverly (1986) the Constructivist approach shares the similarity of ‘active participation’ with the concept of autonomous learning. The former denotes that knowledge is actually constructed by the learners through the learning process and cannot be taught. (Candy, 1980)

## ***2.2 The project implementation***

As supported by the theories stated above, a ‘TV program webcasting project’ was commenced in a secondary school in Hong Kong, in the school year 2004 to 2005. To encourage autonomous language learning, it was decided that students should be taking full charge in the TV program production. The teachers should give minimum guidelines. For example, students may do any programs about either informative or narrative. Then teacher facilitates students to do discussions and rehearsals inside the classroom, and students finish their production at their own time. This attempt gives students a sense of responsibility, and a ‘job’ to get focus on.

The project first involved a major change in the teaching methods, the syllabus and the term mark composition. After gaining the support from the Principal and all Putonghua subject teachers, a new syllabus was drafted. Students were asked to create and submit a total of 2 TV programs in groups, each in term 1 and term 2. This was counted as part of their term marks.

In the lessons, students prepared the script through active participation of discussions. During the rehearsals, they searched for the correct pronunciation, choice of words, the stress, the intonation and gestures. This was the time when they discovered about the language. Teachers gave assistances when asked.

In our school, about half of the junior form students learnt the technology of making a short movie, while all of them possess the potential to be good actors/actresses. So after simple briefing, they took charge of the process of creating scripts, acting and directing. They also used a DV recorder to record a short clip, to edit it, change the file format and put the clip onto a disc. To edit the clips in the eye of young people, the jobs were done by the students of the PTH TV Committee.

At the end of the first term, since the website was not ready, individual teacher shared all the programs with the students. And when the second term finished, lessons were arranged so that students met in the Computer Room, to freely choose and watch the TV

programs of their schoolmates. They evaluated the programs through the voting function. At their own time, students also watched the film on the website.

### ***2.3 The collection of data***

The present study is a combination of an experimental, a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Three types of data will be collected through three different methods: 1. Data collected from the TV website; 2. Questionnaires collected from all junior form students; and 3. Interviews with the 3 subject teachers.

To use questionnaires, it is possible to get the general perception of all the students towards the new approach. The second part of the questionnaire aims at using the exam as a point of comparison with the program production. Various questions will be used to find out in which way students are more willing to take initiatives to learn the target language. They can also express their feelings in the open-ended question.

## **3. The Research Results**

### ***3.1 Characteristics of the students' TV programs***

In total, about 120 TV programs are uploaded for watching. The total number of visits to the website is 1687, and the total number for programs watched is 4031. Most Form 1 and Form 3 students chose to make narrative programs, while the Form 2 students preferred the informative style.

The contents of the programs are suitable for a secondary school context. Majority of the topics are about school life, some others are about the popular culture, and the rest are articles taken from newspaper. The programs are mainly about students' immediate surroundings. Students tend to have great interest in the personal lives of the people around them, especially teachers, outstanding students and family members. During the two terms, many teachers of other subjects, including the Principal and the Assistant Principal, were willing to be webcasted.

Although the programs were produced by students with limited equipment, generally speaking, the quality of the TV programs is acceptable. The commonly used video recorders nowadays can serve the purpose. The 'wmv' file format, which is 1/6 in size, does not cause much reduction in the quality of the original avi files. Most programs are within the length of four minutes and are very convenient for downloading because it has a relatively short delivering time. Thus a general PHP + MySQL platform and a common media server can satisfy the needs of webcasting.

### **3.2 Findings**

From the analysis, it is shown that certain teacher is a little more transmissive in teaching style, while other teachers are more interpretative in nature. But students of both types of teachers demonstrated high level of increase in motivation for learning Putonghua. The increase is especially prominent for Form 3 students, who are known as having lowest learning motivation at the beginning of the term. The TV approach even brings positive effect to students' learning when they go back to original exam style.

Form 1 and Form 2 students did not find the equipment and post-production very difficult, since they got assistances from older schoolmates. However, Form 3 students tried more special effects and expressed greater difficulties encountered.

A great majority of the students strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements: 1. they produced the program seriously; 2. they felt satisfied with their production; 3. they felt happy in the process; 4. they enjoyed watching schoolmates' program; 5 other schoolmates' programs are interesting; 6. I will prepare for the next program seriously; 7. other schoolmates' programs helped improve their Putonghua. 8. watching TV programs enhance understanding of my schoolmates; and 9. It is better to involve the whole school than to have participation of selected individual.

More than half of them expressed that they agreed/strongly agreed with the following: 1. I don't want other schoolmates to watch my program; 2. I watch the programs made by other schoolmates; 3. I like other teachers watch my programs; 4. like other schoolmates watch my programs; and 5. programs of other schoolmates contain incorrect pronunciation and can't help improve my Putonghua. Point 1 and 4 are in contradiction.

When comparing webcasting with examination, students apparently more preferred webcasting with the following statements: 1. Through this mode my confidence in learning the language increased; 2. I take greater initiative to ask the teacher for help; 3. I am more involved in the preparation; 4. more schoolmates offer helps; 5. I find learning Putonghua interesting; 6. I am more willing to share the production; and 7. I find Putonghua lessons more interesting.

For the following statements, webcasting is slightly more preferred than examination: 1. I have greater improvement in Putonghua; 2. I find Putonghua more useful.

And for these statements, students opted more for examination: 1. I learn more knowledge about the language; 2. I wish to do better next time; 3. I spend more time in the preparation; 4. I take greater initiatives to seek for correct pronunciation. But despite the

higher number for choosing examination here, one should not forget the level of importance of examination in the mind of students.

In the free response, most students expressed that they need more time for the TV preparation. Many of them also showed their encouragement and support towards the webcasting. A few expressed that they thought the webcasting was meaningless and prefer not to have it held the next time.

From the interviews, it was found that despite concerns about exam marking and the allocation of the approach within the school year, all teachers preferred to adopt the approach in the coming year. Their positive experiences when interacting with students also gave evidences that webcasting helps low motivated students, especially boys, to take greater initiatives to learn the language. It is mainly due to the fact that students are able to get better marks with their multi talents.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From this study, it is learned that the advancement in technology has made “One language class, one TV!” possible. With a ready-made PHP program including a data-base system, and a school media server with a storage size less than 1 GB, every language teacher can set up a TV station, to post his/her students’ TV programs for sharing. And this is an interesting way in fostering students’ autonomy. To students, as well as teachers, TV approach is found to be readily acceptable.

In fostering autonomy, TV approach is more effective than examination. The higher the form, the more apparent result is seen. Since they are full of creative ideas, despite their lowest level of motivation at the beginning, they generate the greatest interest from the approach at the end.

Despite the various level of worries, all teachers are positive about adopting the TV approach in the future. However, careful planning needs to be undertaken before the implementation. This include exam marks allocation, change of syllabus, arrangement schedule of equipment, and teachers’ agreement on the facilitation process. The approach also needs to be carried out step by step. Constant meeting about what is observed can help lessen students’ hardship. The sooner the processing the more programs will be produced.

For junior secondary students, producing narrative programs seems to be much more effective in fostering students’ learning autonomy, than for informative programs.

School culture is changing due to higher expectation from the society, and is more ready to support such kinds of learning activities. Most teachers are prepared to work together, to find effective ways to motivate students to learn. A higher level of collaboration among teachers is seen.

The following points are suggestion for future implementation for web-casting:

1. Favourable school culture (friendly members, collaborative and cooperative environment for growth, open-mindedness, brave enough to try).
2. Teachers' facilitation (especially about the whole school approach and the collection of products at various stage).
3. Support from school (equipment and venue for shooting).
4. Clear introduction and guidelines about the web-casting should be given to students: Students' responsibility should be clearly stated.
5. Suitable allocation of the TV approach in a school year.
6. A more reasonable marking breakdown to allow for better reflecting the ability of students.
7. More time is to be given to students for preparation.

After the webcasting the following advantages are found:

- increased class participation and collaboration
- generally, the learning autonomy of students is fostered
- students tried communicating with an authentic task and see a purpose behind their performance beyond the assignment itself.
- an audience beyond the teacher is generated.
- students can watch the programs at their own pace, and under the most favourable environment.

In this approach, the latest development in technology is not essential. The crucial factor is whether the members within the learning community are ready to adapt themselves to new way of teaching.

To foster autonomy with this approach, it is hoped that in the future, students will study hard not because of marks but because language learning is interesting and empowering. They will take up more responsibility as it is even more fun to be involved as actors/actresses, than to be audience. They will respect others' opinions, as their own minority voice has once been openly heard and accepted. They will be full of confidence in expressing themselves, because they are not shy about telling others what they like and don't like. They will also understand that correct pronunciation is not a must for effective communication. And most importantly, they will learn to be

**the director of their own lives!**

Related link

The Putonghua Webcasting website of PHC Wing Kwong College  
([www.studentstv.net](http://www.studentstv.net))

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