

# A survey of learner training for junior secondary school students of English in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>

David Gardner  
The University of Hong Kong

Jacky Hon Ming Yuen  
Pooi To Middle School,  
Hong Kong

## Abstract

This paper reports the findings of an investigation of the ways 60 teachers of English in Hong Kong public secondary schools perceive and implement learner training. Results indicate that even though these teachers have generally positive attitudes towards learner training they do not always help their students develop learning strategies in the classroom. This is largely because either they find there is inadequate classroom time available to deliver strategy instruction, or because they tend to follow rigidly the set textbooks which contain no learner training. This paper recommends the need for incorporating learner training into the existing syllabus, the inclusion of learning skills in public examinations, and the formation of a network of teachers to share learner training materials and knowledge.

## Introduction

During the last twenty years there has been a growing interest in the notions of 'learner-centredness' and 'learner autonomy' a main focus of which is learners taking responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981) and thus becoming more independent as learners. While searching for ways to facilitate this new learner independence there has been a similar growth of interest in self-direction, self-access and independent learning (for an overview of these topics and their relationship to autonomy see Gardner and Miller, 1999:5-8). As independence and learner responsibility have become increasingly important, learner training has also received increasing attention because it aims 'to *prepare* learners for independence' (Ellis and Sinclair,

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<sup>1</sup> The data reported in this paper are taken from the dissertation written by Jacky Yuen in completion of his MA in Applied Linguistics at the English Centre of the University of Hong Kong.

1989b:3, original emphasis). Learner training consists of three main parts: self-awareness, language awareness and learning strategies training, the last of which has been most extensively studied.

Though few writers object to the idea of learner training, it seems that it is not much emphasised in most second language classrooms (Wenden, 1986). It has been suggested that this may be due to doubts about its feasibility and effectiveness (Rees-Miller, 1993; Wenden, 1986). The attitudes of teachers are an important factor in implementing learner training. Gardner and Miller suggest teachers' beliefs will 'have a strong influence on the learning environment' (1999:38). If teachers do not believe in learner training neither will students.

In Hong Kong the importance of autonomous learning has been emphasised by the Education Department. One manifestation of this is the encouragement given to primary and secondary schools to invest time and resources in self-access provisions, another is the in-service training opportunities currently on offer to teachers who wish to update their knowledge about self-access learning. While learner training seems an obvious accompaniment to an increased interest in autonomy there is, at present, little evidence of its implementation.

There are a number of documented implementations of learner training at tertiary level both in self-access centres and in classrooms (Ma, 1994; Martyn, 1994; Miller and Ng, 1996; Moynihan Tong, 1994; Nunan, 1996; Or, 1994). They provide useful research data as well as discussion of the issues involved and they cover all three kinds of learner training but the most detailed work is on learning strategies.

At secondary level we know of no documented implementations of learner training. A handbook for Hong Kong teachers, despite being entitled "Learning How To Learn" (Ingham and Bird, 1995), makes few references to learner training with the exception of one paper (Evans, 1995) which makes general points about introducing learning strategies but documents no practical implementation. The apparent emphasis on learner training at tertiary but not secondary level contradicts the suggestion of Ellis and Sinclair (1989b) that learner training should be started at lower intermediate

to intermediate level. In the Hong Kong context this equates to junior secondary English classes.

Little is currently known about attitudes to learner training in Hong Kong, particularly outside the tertiary sector. It seems likely, however, that teachers' attitudes and levels of familiarity with learner training will influence its successful implementation. This may be especially true with young learners. Ultimately, therefore, the success of implementing learner training with intermediate students in Hong Kong relies on the attitudes of junior secondary school teachers.

The study reported here set out to discover what those attitudes are and also to discover to what extent learner training is already being incorporated into the classroom practice of junior class secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong. The main focus of this study is on strategy training because it is grounded in the research reported in the literature. The intention is not to deny the importance of other parts of learner training but to attempt to establish research findings relevant to the Hong Kong context.

In this paper we will first define language learning strategies, then discuss why learner training is needed in Hong Kong, then we will explain the methodology of the study, present relevant findings and finally draw some conclusions from the study.

### **Defining language learning strategies**

Language learning strategies are the things that learners do (often but not always knowingly) to develop their language skills. These range from broad areas like planning their learning or reading a target language newspaper once a week to narrowly focused areas like a specific technique for learning vocabulary or a preferred method for practising listening comprehension. There have been attempts to analyse the strategies used by good language learners since the 1970s (Naiman et al., 1978; Stern, 1975). Later attempts to build on and modify these early categorisations of strategies have led to a number of current and sometimes overlapping terminologies (Table 1). The terminology used in this paper is summarized in Table 2. It is based on that of Ellis and Sinclair (1989b) because it is

more comprehensive than those of O'Malley et al. (1985) or Wenden (1991) but simpler than Oxford's (1990).

**Table 1. Categorisations of strategies**

<b>Researchers/Educators</b>	<b>Categorisations of Strategies</b>
O'Malley et al. (1985)	Metacognitive strategies Cognitive strategies Socioaffective strategies
Ellis and Sinclair (1989b)	Metacognitive strategies Cognitive strategies Social strategies Communication strategies
Oxford (1990)	<i>Direct Strategies</i> Memory strategies Cognitive strategies Compensation strategies <i>Indirect Strategies</i> Metacognitive strategies Affective strategies Social strategies
Wenden (1991)	Self-management strategies Cognitive strategies

**Table 2. Terminology used in this paper**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Metacognitive strategies:	thinking about language learning
Cognitive strategies:	using language and learning materials
Socioaffective strategies:	learning with others
Communication strategies:	overcoming L2 communication problems

## **A need for learner training in Hong Kong schools**

In 1982, in a report compiled for the Hong Kong Government, a visiting panel described the classroom as lacking in student inquiry, interaction and involvement (*A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong: Report by a Visiting Panel*, 1982). The need for a major reform of the school curriculum in Hong Kong was eventually expressed by the Education Commission (1988) and subsequently, the Hong Kong Government published a booklet entitled *School Education in Hong Kong: A Statement of Aims* (1993), which clearly indicated a change in the curriculum focus. Two of the new aims are clearly related to independent learning and incorporate statements about learner training, most specifically strategies training (although it should be noted that they do not include the terms “learner training” or “strategy”):

*Aim (9) Learner skills – thinking and reasoning*

Schools should help students to think logically, independently and creatively; to make rational decisions; to solve problems independently and in cooperation with others; .... (1993:16)

*Aim (10) Learner skills – acquiring knowledge*

Schools should help students learn how to acquire a better understanding of their world, and encourage in them a desire to develop their understanding further after they leave school. (1993:17)

More recently, while considering the quality of school education, the Education Commission of Hong Kong suggested that schools should develop in their pupils a ‘self-learning ability and an inquisitive mind’ (1997: 8) and ‘strength of character, a spirit of enterprise, the desire for continuous improvement’ (1997: 9).

There is clearly a desire at an official level to encourage schools to introduce students to a higher level of autonomy in their language learning. It is equally clear that in more recent statements the education authorities have recognised a need for learner training even though it has not been expressed in the terms commonly used in the field.

Despite the official new interest in learner training, none of the published sources of learner training for students (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair,

1989b; Rubin and Thompson, 1994 and Sinclair and Prowse, 1996) or the resource books for teachers (e.g. Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991 and Gardner and Miller, 1996) have become recommended reading for teachers. Neither have there been attempts to introduce teachers to learner training through workshops or other in-service training. Course books published specifically for Hong Kong schools have also not taken their lead from the above government statements on autonomy and learner training. They remain almost totally devoid of learner training material.

### **The methodology and the subjects**

The data for the study to be reported were collected through a questionnaire survey of 60 teachers. The questionnaire (Appendix I) consisted of 43 statements using (where relevant) a 4-point Likert scale to prevent neutral responses. The questionnaire was distributed through friends to ensure a high return rate (82% of an original 73 questionnaires).

Selection of subjects for the study was restricted to qualified practising teachers of English at junior secondary levels (S1, S2 or S3) in Hong Kong (although not necessarily majoring in English in their studies). The group consists of male and female teachers. Some were novices (less than 5 years of teaching experience) and some were experienced teachers (Table 3). The sample was taken from government and aided schools (Table 4). Private secondary day schools were excluded from the survey as they have few qualified teachers. The sample was also spread evenly across the three districts of Hong Kong (Table 4).

**Table 3. Distribution of subjects (N = 60)**

	<b>Novice Teachers</b>	<b>Experienced Teachers</b>	<b>All Types</b>
Male	9 (15%)	12 (20%)	21 (35%)
Female	11 (18.3%)	28 (46.7%)	39 (65%)
Degree holders	16 (26.7 %)	34 (56.7%)	50 (83.3%)
Non-degree holders	4 (6.7%)	6 (10%)	10 (16.7%)

**Table 4. Distribution of schools by sector by district (N = 53)\***

District	Government	Aided	All Sectors
Hong Kong Island	7 (13.2%)	12 (22.6%)	19 (35.8%)
Kowloon	0	18 (34%)	18(34%)
New Territories	0	16 (30.2%)	16 (30.2%)
<i>All Districts</i>	7 (13.2%)	46 (86.8%)	53 (100%)

\* In some cases two or more respondents came from the same school.

### The areas of focus

The data collected revealed three main areas, namely: how junior secondary English teachers in Hong Kong perceive learner training; what teaching strategies they employ to help their students develop various types of language learning strategies; and what factors cause low implementation of learner training in Hong Kong classrooms.

#### *Teachers perceptions of learner training*

The majority of questionnaire respondents (80%) thought that learner training was *as important as* language teaching while a small group (17%) considered it *more important* (Table 5).

**Table 5. Summary of teachers' overall perceptions of learner training**

<i>Question 12</i>	Learner training is <i>more important</i> than language teaching	Learner training is <i>as important as</i> language teaching	Learner training is <i>less important than</i> language teaching
Novice Teachers Group ( <i>n</i> = 20)	5 (25%*)	15 (75%*)	0 (0%*)
Experienced Teachers ( <i>n</i> = 40)	5 (12.5%*)	33 (82.5%*)	2 (2%*)
<i>All Teachers</i> ( <i>n</i> = 60)	10 (17%)	48 (80%)	2 (3%)

\* Percentage of group

Interestingly, the relative importance placed on learner training is higher among novice teachers. The positive overall attitude of teachers towards learner training is further reflected in their responses to more detailed statements about their role in providing learner training for their students (Table 6, Q13 to Q18: the closer the mean is to 1, the more positive the attitude).

**Table 6. Teachers' detailed perceptions of learner training and student independence on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree)**

Question	Mean Response
13. To help students become independent learners, teachers should help students help themselves learn how to learn.	1.41
14. Teachers should help their students define learning objectives.	1.92
15. Teachers should be aware of their students' existing learning strategies while teaching.	1.91
16. Teachers should suggest effective learning strategies for their students to try out.	1.68
17. Teachers should help their students evaluate which strategies work best for them.	1.97
18. Effective use of learning strategies is rewarding and motivating to students	1.60
19. Many students in Hong Kong rely too much on teachers.	1.24
20. Many students in Hong Kong are unaware of the effective learning strategies that they can use to help them learn more effectively.	1.69
21. Many students in Hong Kong are resistant to trying new or unfamiliar learning strategies.	2.24

From their responses to statement Q19 (Table 6) it is clear that these teachers also perceive that many students in Hong Kong are not independent learners. As we have seen, official bodies have been making statements about the lack of independence of Hong Kong school students since 1982. These data illustrate that teachers believe little has changed.

An interesting paradox arises with regard to teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of learning strategies. They clearly believe that the effective use of strategies will benefit students (Q18) and that it is the job of the teachers to help students discover effective strategies (Q16), however, they also state that many students are unaware of effective strategies (Q20).



This is not because students are resistant to new ideas (Q21) but may be related to the teachers putting insufficient emphasis on strategy training.

***Learning strategies training in the classroom***

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which they engaged in learner training in the classroom for the four kinds of learning strategies identified earlier (Table 2). For each strategy type they were asked to respond to a number of statements related to their own behaviour as teachers (Table 7). They responded on a 4-point Likert scale which has been calculated for ease of reviewing as a mean response (note that the larger the number, the more frequently teachers engaged in that particular strategy training). The most striking thing to notice about the mean responses is that few of them rise above 2.5 which means that for most statements the majority of respondents selected “sometimes” or “almost never” rather than “usually” or “almost always”. This suggests that learner training in learning strategies is not a common occurrence in junior form classrooms.

**Table 7. Teachers’ use of strategy training in the classroom on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always)**

Question	Mean Response
<b>DEVELOPING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>	
22. I ask my students to analyse their learning needs in order to set long-term aims.	1.83
23. I ask my students to set realistic short-term aims by selecting what to work on next and how to do it.	2.21
24. I provide opportunities for my students to assess their performance against pre-selected criteria either during or after the activity.	2.07
25. I ask my students to make a weekly schedule.	1.56
26. I ask my students to keep a diary by writing a personal record of, and reflecting on, language learning.	1.60
27. I teach my students how to use a dictionary to find out about pronunciation, usage, and grammar.	2.53
28. I teach my students how to find books of interest from the school library, or the public library.	2.19

<b>DEVELOPING COGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>	
29. I ask my students to collect various specific language examples such as labels of canned foods, invitation cards, letters, etc.	1.86
30. I ask my students to classify new words into meaningful units. For example, groups based on types of words (e.g. all nouns or verbs), topic (e.g. words about food and drinks), language function (e.g. apology, giving opinions), word family (e.g. satisfy, satisfied, satisfactory, satisfaction), and so on.	2.23
31. I create opportunities for my students to review samples of their own writing over time, and note the improvement in such areas as accuracy, content and organisation of ideas.	2.28
32. I ask my students to imitate a language model orally to aid retention and production.	2.17
33. I ask my students to audio-record themselves for the purpose of self-assessment.	1.47
34. I give encouragement to my students when they speak so that they do not worry about making mistakes.	3.47
35. I allow my students to try out different learning strategies so that they can choose the one(s) they prefer most.	2.26
<b>DEVELOPING SOCIAL STRATEGIES</b>	
36. I provide opportunities for my students to role-play with other students in different situations.	2.43
37. I encourage my students to seek various opportunities to learn and use English in or outside the classroom, e.g. talking to their classmates, reading English newspapers, watching English TV programmes, etc.	3.00
38. I encourage my students to join a study group or club so as to learn or practise with other students.	2.32
<b>DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES</b>	
39. I give opportunities for my students to guess unknown words using language-based clues such as prefixes or suffixes, or using the context, text structure, or general world knowledge.	2.79
40. I encourage my students to ask someone for help to provide the missing expression in English.	2.28
41. I encourage my students to use mime or gesture in place of an expression to indicate meaning.	2.22
42. I introduce to my students various ways of 'thinking-time' techniques such as using gap-fillers to create more time to think when speaking so as to sound fluent.	1.91

In the following discussion we will look at which strategy training was most and least frequent for each strategy type. We will also give an overall rank for each strategy discussed which relates to its frequency of use out of all 21 strategies mentioned in the questionnaire (Qs 22 to 42).

Of the metacognitive strategies training, the most frequent was using a dictionary (Q 27) and it ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall. This was probably because teachers usually require their students to bring a dictionary to school, and it is easy to teach them how to use it. On the other hand, the least frequently used metacognitive strategies were making a schedule (Q 25, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) and keeping a diary (Q 26, ranked 19<sup>th</sup>). Although these strategies could be taught relatively quickly they both require considerable amounts of time on an on-going basis for them to be used effectively by students. It is perhaps this consideration which makes them less popular with teachers conducting learner training. It is interesting to note that no metacognitive strategies are ranked among the top three of teachers' preferred strategies training, two metacognitive strategies, however, are ranked among the bottom three (Table 8). Perhaps this emphasises the often repeated criticism implied in the reports cited earlier that the education system in Hong Kong spoon-feeds learners with teachers managing their students' learning rather than encouraging them to do it themselves. In such a system teachers frequently decide what learners should learn and how they should learn it.

**Table 8. The most and least used strategy types**

Rank	Strategy Type	Strategy Category	Mean
<b>TOP THREE (MOST USED STRATEGIES)</b>			
1	Risk-taking (Q 34)	Cognitive	3.47
2	Resourcing (Q 37)	Social	3.00
3	Guessing unknown words (Q 39)	Communication	2.79
<b>BOTTOM THREE (LEAST USED STRATEGIES)</b>			
19	Keeping a diary (Q 26)	Metacognitive	1.60
20	Making a weekly schedule (Q 25)	Metacognitive	1.56
21	Audio-recording (Q 33)	Cognitive	1.47

Of the cognitive strategies, risk-taking (Q 34, ranked 1<sup>st</sup>), in this case risking making errors, was the most commonly used strategy training among the teachers. The reason may be that training in this strategy can be given

with no preparation work by the teacher and an immediate result can be observed by teachers and students within a very short period of time. Audio-recording for self-assessment (Q 33, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>) was the cognitive strategy which teachers least frequently offered training in. This may be because the substantial amount of time required for teachers to listen to students' recordings is prohibitive even though it has been shown to be interesting and useful (Ferris, 1981).

Of the social strategies, the one which was the most frequent subject of learner training was resourcing (Q 37, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>). This is a strategy by which learners turn all available resources into language learning opportunities. Examples of the strategy are: talking to friends in the target language, using target language newspapers and trying to have conversations with foreigners. The popularity of this strategy with teachers is probably because it is widely believed that exposure to authentic language can improve learning. The least commonly taught social strategy was joining a study group or club (Q 38, ranked 6<sup>th</sup>). Perhaps this is due to the unavailability of study groups or clubs in the respondents' schools.

Of the communication strategies, guessing unknown words (Q 39, ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>), was the strategy the teachers most frequently trained their students in. Most students in Hong Kong are required to buy English readers and subscribe to English newspapers in school, so it is likely that teachers tend to spend a lot of time in reading skills in the classroom. It is not surprising, therefore, that they frequently spend time explaining this kind of learning strategy. It is surprising, however, to find in the communication strategies category that most teachers only sometimes train their students in creating time-to-think techniques (Q 42, ranked 16<sup>th</sup> and the least frequently trained communication strategy). Such techniques involve finding ways to create a thinking space during oral communication without resulting in communication breakdown, for example, phatic sounds, slight slowing down of speech and use of gap-fillers. If, as Dornyei (1995) suggests, direct instruction of communication strategies is effective, then it is a pity that none of them receive the teachers' full attention.

It can be seen that there is considerable difference in the frequency with which different learning strategies are encouraged in class. In the case of some strategies this may be due to the ease with which they are assimilated

by students. There seems little point in labouring over a strategy if it has been adopted by students. However, in most cases the differences in frequency seem to relate to other factors. In some cases external factors apply, like the amount of time needed to use a strategy effectively. In other cases, it is likely that the teachers' own attitudes to, and their level of knowledge about individual strategies are playing a part.

***Reasons for low implementation of learner training in Hong Kong classrooms***

Twelve (20%) respondents, through scoring their responses on the questions related to the frequency of training they offer in learning strategies (Qs 22 to 42), were identified as low frequency strategies trainers. They were asked to complete one extra questionnaire item (Q 43). In this item they indicated the reasons they gave little attention to learner training in their classrooms. They could select more than one reason (Table 9). The most commonly cited reason was lack of time (83%), but a lack of confidence about implementation (58%) and a lack of knowledge about learner training (33%) are also important factors. Notably, a considerable number of respondents (41%) offer no learner training because they just follow the textbook. It is interesting, however, that not one of the teachers who infrequently conducts learner training sessions about learning strategies considered that such strategies were unnecessary.

**Table 9. Reasons for low implementation of learner training (sorted by frequency of response)**

Reason	Percentage of Low Implementation Group (n = 12)*
Tight syllabus, so inadequate time to implement learner training.	83.3%
Not sure how to integrate learner training with normal class teaching.	58.3%
Just follow the textbook, which hasn't got the element of learner training.	41.7%
Others:	
Don't know much about the idea of learner training.	33.3%
Don't think learner training is necessary.	0%

\* Respondents could select all that were relevant

It is hard to interpret these data because it seems clear all 12 of these respondents believe learner training is important and yet they rarely implement it. Their reasons for doing so are, no doubt, valid but also, it has to be said, they are not insurmountable difficulties. Classroom teachers have a certain amount of control over the use of time in their lessons so it would not be impossible to find time for some learner training. While teachers have to follow a syllabus, there is room for some flexibility so those who just follow a course book could choose to supplement it with learner training materials.

Those who lack confidence in the implementation or know little about learner training may have the biggest problem. There are sources of information among the standard teacher training textbooks but such literature needs to be sought out (because it is rarely available in schools) and studied quite carefully. This is time consuming and without an opportunity for discussion with colleagues or experts may be a de-motivating option. It is interesting that in follow-up interviews with some of the subjects a common theme was the suggestion that in-service training courses should be organised and two proposed the Education Department should publish pamphlets to explain the concept and implementation of learner training.

## **Conclusions**

It is encouraging to find that the junior secondary English teachers in the sample have positive attitudes towards learner training. This suggests that other teachers in Hong Kong are also likely to recognise the importance of learner training. The findings indicate, however, that in general, the teachers only sometimes help their students develop learning strategies in the classroom. The main reason given for this is a lack of time within a busy syllabus, but also of importance are: an over reliance on textbooks; a lack of confidence and knowledge about learner training; and lack of learner training materials.

The learner training that does currently take place includes some important strategy types such as risk-taking, resourcing, guessing unknown words, and using a dictionary. However, it is a pity that training in the use of audio-recordings, making a weekly schedule, and keeping a diary, is less

popular because there is some research evidence to support their use (Ferris, 1981; Cotterall, 1995; McNamara and Deanne, 1995; Nunan, 1996).

It seems from the findings that teachers would be most willing to implement learner training in their classrooms if a sizeable portion of time were made available by removing a part of the syllabus. This, of course, is not feasible. Teachers, on the other hand, have considerable flexibility in the way they teach to the syllabus and this seems to be particularly true in junior forms where there is less pressure from impending examinations. If teachers were shown how to integrate learner training into language learning activities they would be able to cover considerably more simply by rearranging the way they cover the topics prescribed by the syllabus.

Although teachers might arrive at this solution autonomously they may feel more confident if given official support. It is encouraging, therefore, that the latest published syllabuses for secondary schools (*English Language and Use of English*), which were published after the study reported here was completed, have included the components of language development strategies and study (Curriculum Development Council, 1999a, 1999b). The effective teaching of these components will require learner training so it is expected that teachers will put more emphasis on it in their future teaching.

## **Recommendations**

Further support for a new emphasis on learner training would be given if the Examination Authority included study skills in the HKCEE English Language and AS Level Use of English papers as this would have a wash-back effect of emphasising the importance of learner training in the classroom. Although not all learning strategies could be supported in this way some could. For instance, candidates could be tested on how to use a dictionary or search for information in a library or via the Internet. Candidates might also be required to submit their learning diaries for part of the assessment of the subject.

For learner training to become a mainstream part of English teaching in Hong Kong secondary schools it must be integrated into local textbooks. Although these ideas may be new for local textbook writers they can learn

from examples in textbooks such as the classic *Learning to Learn English* (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989a), *Activate Your English* (Sinclair and Prowse, 1996) and *ATLAS* (Nunan, 1994), or from materials 'recipes' books like *Tasks for Independent Language Learning* (Gardner and Miller, 1996).

In addition to providing resources for learners and mandating the introduction of learner training, the Education Department has a role in providing in-service training for teachers. Possible ways in which this could be done are: workshops in which teachers learn about learner training, discuss its implementation and produce their own materials; the production of a CD-ROM to give teachers greater depth of knowledge about autonomy, self-access, learner training and how they contribute to learning; the distribution of specially commissioned learner training materials which meet the needs of the Hong Kong context; the establishment of a web site to act as a repository of useful materials which can be accessed by all teachers; and the facilitation of a teacher network for the production and sharing of appropriate learner training materials. Each of these moves would serve as an endorsement of the introduction of learner training by the Education Department which would send a strong message to teachers.

In fact, the Education Department has already taken some important teacher training initiatives. Since late 1998 it has hosted a number of workshops on self-access learning conducted by experts in the field specifically for Hong Kong teachers. Some of these have touched on learner training. One large series of workshops by Gardner and Miller (2000) resulted in a considerable amount of self-access material being produced collaboratively with Hong Kong secondary school teachers. Much of this material takes into account the importance of learner training and it is currently being compiled by the Education Department into a CD-ROM to be released to all schools. In a separate initiative, the Education Department has published sets of resource materials (circulated to all secondary schools in April 2000). These materials are designed to support task-based learning and will be useful in developing students' learning strategies. These materials have also been made available via a web site. These initiatives are, of course, to be applauded and we are happy to see our wish list beginning to be fulfilled even before it is published. However, we must still stress the need for a certain focused effort on the part of the Education Department to bring a greater understanding of learner training to teachers and then to



provide the wherewithal to allow teachers to make it a reality with their students.

As more English teachers implement learner training in the classroom, more autonomous and effective language learners will be produced. This will lead to a new generation of learners who are able to carry their learning skills beyond the secondary school classroom into higher education and the workplace.

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## APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

### Survey of LEARNER TRAINING for Junior Secondary Students in Hong Kong

#### Section 1: Personal and School Details

Please tick (✓) in the appropriate boxes.

1. Sex:  Male (34%)  
 Female (66%)
2. Rank:  CM (25%)  
 GM/AEO (70%)  
 SGM/EO (2%)  
 Others (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ (4%)
3. English teaching experience:  Below 2 years (13%)  
 2 years - < 5 years (17%)  
 5 years - < 8 years (28%)  
 8 years - < 11 years (13%)  
 11 years or above (28%)
4. TESL qualification:  Teacher Certificate (English major) (42%)  
 Postgraduate Cert./Dip.Ed. (English major) (30%)  
 None (21%)  
 Others (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ (8%)

#### For non-degree holders only:

5. My major subject of study:  English (15%)  
 Non-English subject (2%)

#### For degree holders only:

6. My highest academic qualification:  Bachelor's degree (68%)  
 Master's degree (13%)  
 PhD (2%)  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_ (17%)
7. My major subject of study:  
 English / English related subject (28%)  
 Education (25%)  
 Other Arts majors (e.g. History, Business, etc) (27%)  
 Maths/Science related subject (0%)  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_ (4%)

8. Location of my school:  Hong Kong Island (36%)  
 Kowloon (34%)  
 New Territories (30%)
9. School type:  Government (13%)  
 Aided (87%)  
 Private (0%)
10. Ability band of my school in general:  Band 1 (26%)  
 Band 2 (19%)  
 Band 3 (36%)  
 Band 4 (17%)  
 Band 5 (2%)
11. On average, the total number of **ENGLISH LESSONS** per cycle/week:  
 Less than 10 (11%)  
 10 – 20 (43%)  
 21 - 25 (25%)  
 26 - 30 (11%)  
 More than 30 (9%)

### Section 2: Perceptions of Learner Training

12. Please tick (✓) only **ONE** of the statements below which you agree most:
- A. Teaching students how to learn (learner with training) is more important than teaching them vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, or writing (language teaching). (17%)
- B. **Learner training** is *as important as* **language teaching**. (80%)
- C. **Learner training** is *less important than* **language teaching**. (3%)

For **Q.13 to Q.21**, please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements by circling an appropriate number.

	<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Strongly disagree</i>	
13. To help students become independent learners, teachers should help students help themselves learn how to learn.	62%	36%	2%	0%
14. Teachers should help their students define learning objectives	23%	60%	15%	2%
15. Teachers should be aware of their students' existing learning strategies while teaching.	26%	60%	11%	2%

16.	Teachers should suggest effective learning strategies for their students to try out.	43%	55%	2%	0%
17.	Teachers should help their students evaluate which strategies work best for them.	23%	64%	11%	2%
18.	Effective use of learning strategies is rewarding and motivating to students	47%	51%	2%	0%
19.	Many students in Hong Kong rely too much on teachers.	75%	23%	2%	0%
20.	Many students in Hong Kong are unaware of the effective learning strategies that they can use to help them learn more effectively	43%	49%	8%	0%
21.	Many students in Hong Kong are resistant to trying new or unfamiliar learning strategies.	15%	45%	36%	4%

### Section 3: Strategy Training in the Classroom

Please rate **Q.22 to Q.42** according to your experience in teaching your S1, S2, or S3 students.

<b>DEVELOPING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>		<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Some-times</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
22.	I ask my students to analyse their learning needs in order to set long-term aims.	23%	72%	6%	0%
23.	I ask my students to set realistic short term aims by selecting what to work on next and how to do it.	15%	51%	32%	2%
24.	I provide opportunities for my students to assess their performance against pre-selected criteria either during or after the activity.	28%	40%	28%	4%
25.	I ask my students to make a weekly schedule.	57%	32%	9%	2%
26.	I ask my students to keep a diary by writing a personal record of and reflecting on language learning.	57%	28%	13%	2%
27.	I teach my students how to use a dictionary to find out about pronunciation, usage, and grammar	11%	40%	34%	15%
28.	I teach my students how to find books of interest from the school library, or the public library.	17%	53%	25%	6%

	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Some- times</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
<b>DEVELOPING COGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>				
29. I ask my students to collect various specific language examples such as labels of canned foods, invitation cards, letters, etc.	30%	55%	13%	2%
30. I ask my students to classify new words into meaningful units. For example, groups that based on types of words (e.g. all nouns or verbs), topic (e.g. words about food and drinks), language function (e.g. apology, giving opinions), word family (e.g. satisfy, satisfied, satisfactory, satisfaction), and so on.	26%	38%	23%	13%
31. I create opportunities for my students to review samples of their own writing over time, and note the improvement in such areas as accuracy, content and organisation of ideas.	19%	45%	25%	11%
32. I ask my students to imitate a language model orally to aid retention and production.	21%	43%	34%	2%
33. I ask my students to audio-record themselves for the purpose of self-assessment.	62%	28%	9%	0%
34. I give encouragement to my students when they speak so that they do not worry about making mistakes.	0%	9%	34%	57%
35. I allow my students to try out different learning strategies so that they can choose the one(s) they prefer most.	21%	43%	25%	11%
<b>DEVELOPING SOCIAL STRATEGIES</b>				
36. I provide opportunities for my students to role-play with other students in different situations.	8%	53%	28%	11%
37. I encourage my students to seek various opportunities to earn and use English in or outside the classroom, e.g. talking to their classmates, reading English newspapers, watching English TV programmes, etc.	2%	28%	38%	32%
38. I encourage my students to join a study group or club so as to learn or practise with other students.	19%	42%	28%	11%



<b>DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES</b>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Some- times</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
39. I give opportunities for my students to guess unknown words using language-based clues such as prefixes or suffixes, or using the context, text structure, or general world knowledge'.	4%	40%	30%	26%
40. I encourage my students to ask someone for help to provide the missing expression in English.	15%	49%	28%	8%
41. I encourage my students to use mime or gesture in place of an expression to indicate meaning.	23%	43%	23%	11%
42. I introduce to my students various ways of 'thinking-time' techniques such as using gap-fillers to create more time to think when speaking so as to sound fluent.	30%	49%	19%	2%

**To score:** Total all the points from **Q.22 to Q.42** to get a grand total. How did you do?

Write your score in this box.

63 - 84 ☺

41 - 62 ☹

21 - 40 ☹

**If you score 21-40, please answer Q.43 below:**

43. What is the reason that you seem to give little attention to learner training in your junior class(es)? (You can tick (✓) more than one.)

Don't think learner training is necessary. (0%)

Don't know much about the idea of learner training. (33%)

Not sure how to integrate learner training with normal class teaching. (58%)

Just follow the textbook, which hasn't got the element of learner training. (42%)

Tight syllabus, so inadequate time to implement learner training. (83%)

Others (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ (42%)

★END★

**Thank you for completing the questionnaire.**