



One Size Fits Whom?

It's hard enough getting through a middle or high school workload, but what happens when you add having to learn in a language that's not your mother tongue, and adapting to teaching styles that might be very different from what you're used to? Can teachers and schools learn from their students?

How We Teach, How We Learn

by **Sophie Rosen**

Everyone learns differently. In my eight years of living and learning in Shanghai, and going to three different international schools, I've found that students who come from all over the world also come from many different educational backgrounds. I've also discovered that learning happens best when the teacher's teaching style matches the student's learning style.

I've spoken with a lot of other students about what makes a good teacher, and compiled a list of qualities. Good teachers know each student well, are funny and animated, have a clear passion for teaching, and give only homework that's supplementary and enhances the subject matter. They are people who create an environment where every student has the opportunity to participate in the learning process.

An example of this is Ms M. She knows that while group work is important, I prefer to work alone and she lets me create my own projects based on my own interests. Once,

she had us come up with our own way to research, explore, and understand cell division in Science. One group made a video, another a rap song, and I made a board game. When I completed my project, I had a thorough understanding of cell division. I wouldn't have learnt nearly as much just by reading a textbook and completing worksheets.

Learning cannot be a one-size-fits-all concept. In my opinion, project-based learning is the way to go. Teacher-directed learning is limiting. This framework assumes, "I will tell you what to learn and how it will be learned." Conversely, a student-directed approach assumes, "You can tell me what I need to learn, but I'll tell you how I want to learn it". The more teachers empower students, the more enjoyment students will get out of learning. I think it's time to shift the way we teach and learn. Getting a good education involves more than reading, writing and arithmetic. The ability to become creative but critical thinkers is really what makes us life long learners.

New Way of Learning

by **Hakuei Pan**

Imoved from a typical Chinese education system to an international stream in grade six and the toughest challenges for me to adjust to have been my environment, teachers, and my own lack of willingness to take risks.

My home environment is not conducive to me learning English. My parents never speak English and my friends and classmates, except those who are non-Chinese, always speak Chinese with me. At home, all my books other than textbooks are Chinese. And at school, there's nothing to keep me from speaking Chinese all day outside of class.

Although most of the teachers at school are good, they're relatively inexperienced in teaching Chinese students. Their average age is about 29, and the average number of years they've been teaching in China is about three. They consider Chinese students the same as students from the US or UK and they use the same teaching methods. For example, Chinese students are not independent learners and are quite shy. Foreign teachers tend to inculcate independence in them by assigning work without leading them through the process.

The result is that students like me become frustrated because they can't understand the steps they need to take to adequately complete the process. Eventually, they fall behind and become discouraged.

Lastly, my inability to take risks has also contributed to my difficulty. If I come across something I don't understand, I don't ask the teacher to explain because I'm so shy. I'm afraid people will laugh at me if I ask stupid questions. Chinese students looking for the right answers would rather copy the answers from a classmate with high scores than risk doing the work themselves and giving the wrong answers. This lack of willingness to take risks has also affected my ability to speak in class.

These are the main reasons why it's so difficult for Chinese students to do well in international schools. These are the reasons why we need to change. 