

HONG KONG REFLECTIONS 2016

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My Main Learnings

1. There is mounting evidence that most or all retainable learning is **self-directed**.
 - Numerous TED talks
 - Sugata Mitra – now a visiting professor at MIT – demonstrated how children can learn computer skills, along with English proficiency, and learn complex information without aid from a teacher, by playing with a computer through a hole in the wall.
 - <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/self-organized-learning-sugata-mitra>

My Main Learnings

2. During 4-5 years of Ph.D. studies, my Peking University students are allowed to take one (1) English course. They must decide whether to take conversation or composition. They have to be able to practice and improve English proficiency primarily on their own. One main observation is that students who speak fairly well often report that they learned on their own by watching English language movies.

My Main Learnings

3. “Byron – what do you like best about my class?” [Answer] “Every Thursday I wake up happy because I get to come to English class, and I know that for once attending class won’t be tedious.”
 - Aha! The way they’ve studied English all these years is dry and tedious. Constantly memorizing lists of vocabulary words, verbatim recitation of English phrases, etc.

Conclusions

1. They have to do most of the work to practice and improve on their own.
2. That's doable because most retained learning is self-directed.
3. The best way I can motivate them to work on their own is to demonstrate and model the fact that practicing English doesn't need to be tedious.