Acceptance Speech

Learning by Exploration

LIU Zhi-Qiang

School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

As a teacher, this is a great **honour** for me to **receive** the UGC Teaching Award.

Thank you very much!

I would like to **take** this opportunity to also express my sincere thanks to the enormous dedication of BScCM staff members and passionate and enthusiastic students, the support of City University of Hong Kong and the School of Creative Media.

Confucius is often quoted saying "学而时习之，温故而知新". This is traditionally understood as 'to review frequently what one has learned and to renew one's knowledge'. But I **believe** it also portrays the sense that one should *practice* and *explore* more **often** in order to learn. Nearly two and a half thousand years ago Plato established his Academy in opposition to the entrenched ancient oral tradition and rote learning of the time. Using written texts, the Academy's purpose was to train students in critical and abstract thinking. This movement opened doors to new possibilities of the intellect and unleashed creativity in the young. Learning has since been detached from ritualized memorization and recitation of Homeric poetry and is regarded nowadays as a life-long pursuit. The teachings of Professor John Dewey have promoted the idea of **learning** through *doing* and *experiencing*, to which I would add the idea of exploration - "*To teach is to let students explore and to provide guidance in their exploration.*" I believe this is **precisely** where education begins. In exploration, students go through the process of trial and error in a never-ending cycle of making mistakes, correcting them, practicing self-reflection and evaluation.

Guidance, or learning support, is particularly important in today's world where students are spending more time online, enticed by the multiplicity of media platforms that include games and social networks. There is a widely held misconception that such interactive media platforms will automatically make learners more creative. In my opinion, they are more likely to lead to shortened attention spans and a lack of **patience** towards delayed gratification. As a consequence, students are drifting towards intellectual passiveness. *Active learning* and *learner-centred approaches* are therefore essential. Specifically, in this era of mobile lifestyles and Internet-enabled social networks, effective learning requires practice, collaboration and peer-to-peer critique.

I strongly believe that in order for students to effectively learn and become successful professionals, a teacher must find ways to *draw out* students' passion for learning and create more opportunities for them to discover and innovate both inside and outside of the rigorous, well-designed and disciplined

higher education curricula. Teaching and learning can then be closely integrated with well-defined projects, which transcend beyond the classroom. At CityU's School of Creative Media, students in the BScCM programme work year-round on extracurricular projects in Special Interest Groups and exhibit them at a grand show, the Playful Media. Students' performances are constantly monitored and evaluated by their advisers, peers, the public and industry.

This also removes the year-level barrier, meaning that all students from all three (and soon four) years in the programme are able to participate making it conducive to peer-to-peer mentorship, peer-to-peer critique and deep group collaboration, hence helping to build immense team-work spirit. I have found this approach to be extremely beneficial to student learning, because when the senior students are mentors, they are able to reinforce what they have learnt in the classroom, whereas the junior students learn more effectively by learning from the experiences of their senior peers. In such a learning environment, both in-class and out-of-class, the BScCM students have become remarkably motivated in their learning and social activities. Through very close interaction with students, teachers have also improved their teaching because of their intimate knowledge about the students' needs.

I have been promoting *Learning-by-Exploration* through *SIG, Playful Media and Industry Nights activities* in City University of Hong Kong and in collaboration with other institutions in Hong Kong and China; for instance, the College of Business and the Department of Media and Communication of City University, and more recently, the Department of Science and Technological Communication and Policy of the well-known University of Science and Technology of China (USTC), the prestigious Tsinghua University, and the famous Communication University of China (CUC). In my view, students' learning will benefit greatly if we can assist them in organizing an annual or a biannual international student forum in which they can collaborate on specific projects and showcase their interdisciplinary work covering a large variety of areas and disciplines, including, Art, Media, Human Sciences, Design, Technology, and Sciences. I believe on such a platform students of the world can meet face to face, *physically*, to exchange ideas about their discoveries and adventures in their learning, and to ask questions and challenge what is known.

To start, I have discussed this possibility with the ACM SIGGRAPH Asia Conference Management Group (SACAG) in my capacity as a SACAG member and ACM SIGGRAPH Asia Steering Committee adviser, and have received a very positive initial response.

Tonight I want to take this opportunity to invite colleagues from all universities in Hong Kong to join in this effort in creating a peer-oriented learning environment that extends beyond the classrooms, promotes discovery and innovation, and challenges our students to be the best they can be. Please join me in this endeavor.

Our students are our best and only hope.

Thank you!