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INNOVATIVE ORIGAMI, A BREAKTHROUGH IN TRADITIONAL TEACHING TOOLS

HAPPIKAMIWORKSHOP -
ANGELA CHENG

SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS, SPECIAL LEARNING APPROACHES

Angela has a relative with dyslexia. At family gatherings since she was a child, she has seen his parents making a big scene while calling him “stupid” and forcing him to go to university.

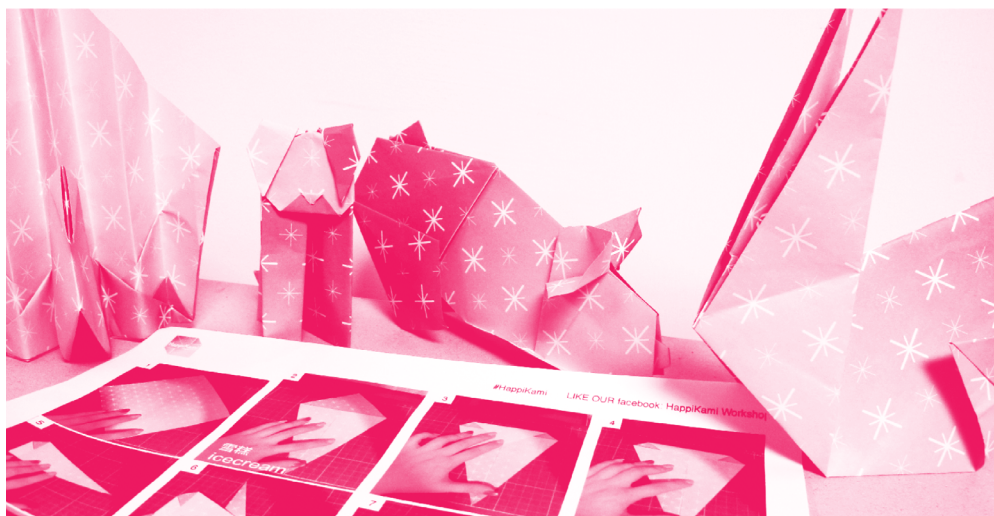
because we liked them.” Although she only spent a few years studying abroad, it had already left a deep impression on her that studying can be fun and does not have to be forced.

“I remember that he seldom spoke since he was small, and lacked self-confidence even in his 20s. I think society should take the needs of people with special learning needs seriously, like not forcing someone to get a university degree when they obviously lack the academic aptitude.”

In 2016, Angela joined Good Seed. During the brainstorming activities and learning process, she decided to use her design skills to help students in need and found various partners to work with. During her research, she learnt that Joseph Wu, a Chinese origami artist, suffers from attention deficit disorder, and that origami makes him sit still and concentrate.

Is studying the only way to get ahead in life? Angela has experienced it herself; she remembers clearly that when she was in kindergarten in Hong Kong, she was taunted by people who said she was dumb, and she felt stupid. “When I went to primary school in Australia, I was so happy to find out that there was no homework, no exams, and no school uniforms. I wondered if exams were essential to studying. Students were not categorised into those who were good at school and those who were not; we all read a lot and did things





In fact, origami requires not only the creativity of the right brain, but also a lot of left brain-led tasks such as mathematics, logic and sequencing, so origami can train both sides of the brain at the same time, and help improve concentration and behaviour. This discovery strengthened Angela's determination to bring the fun and benefits of origami into schools. She wanted to use the different textures of paper to enable students with special educational needs, including hyperactivity disorder, attention deficit disorder and autism spectrum disorder, to learn new things with their own hands, and enhance their social skills, patience, creativity and learning ability.

When it came to origami, Angela recalled doing it during the “origami stars” years; origami allowed her to let her mind to go blank and gave herself some quiet time.

“I think it’s a process of exploration. Something always emerges from the folding.”

Originally from China, origami is a way to create delicate designs through folding paper, but Japan made it popular. Traditional origami consisted of relatively simple designs, such as paper cranes; since the 1950s, origami techniques have undergone major transformations, with mathematical theories and laws introduced to elevate it to art. Stunning origami products have been created, including furniture, fashion items, and scientific equipment. Origami is now a professional craft.

“Learning is more than scoring”, but is that really so in the real world? The Hong Kong Education Bureau has listed nine types of students with special educational needs (SEN), including hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural problems, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, speech and language difficulties, specific learning difficulties, as well as giftedness.

The Government allocates funds to schools to provide small group education for SEN students in the hope that they can catch up. Do these groups push the children to grow too hard, or do they tailor teaching to the children’s needs?

To bring this professional art into the school, Angela not only needed to know how to fold paper, but also build a structured curriculum. They designed a 16-lesson course on folding 12 animals from the sea, land and air, as well as an origami booklet for students to keep their artwork. They also designed special handmade paper with gradient colours on both sides and grids to help SEN students follow and understand the instructions. “We wrote the instructions from scratch, step by step, short and precise, so that the students would be interested in following them. For example, we would say that a certain shape looks like an ice-cream cone that everyone would want to have a bite.” Because of the extreme details required for each step, what could have been a two-minute process would easily turn into a 30-minute one.

In fact, there are many origami centres overseas, but Hong Kong is relatively backward in this aspect. Angela admitted that it was very difficult to bring the course to schools.

“At the beginning, we struggled to find schools to work with. We had to knock on their doors and send letters. We even did workshops for free.”

However, after starting to do it, Angela found that many of the problems were

not about practicality, but mentality. She said that at first, she thought many people would be willing to help SEN students, but it turned out not to be the case. Parents think that SEN students should just go to special schools and do not want to send them to regular schools. On the other hand, schools think it would be more practical to have regular classes. All these make it difficult to develop the school market. “I think there’s a big discrepancy in the way society thinks about SEN students. Besides, many people think that they don’t need to pay social enterprises, but we all need to make a living.” As a result, Angela struggled between money and ideals. She said that she had been covering the costs of school workshops with her commercial business. “A SEN group of six students needs three instructors, which is not economical but a practical necessity.” Despite the difficulties, Angela often remembers the expression “fake compassion”, which she learnt during classes at Good Seed. It reminds her not to do things just for the sake of doing them; instead, she insists on recognising the audience and doing what is good for the participants. That is why she will not forget her original vision — learning can be done in many ways.

