

Fanny Law Back To Education

by Gladys Cheung

Since resigning in June, the controversial former top education official Fanny Law Fan Chiu-fun has yet to take a pause. She spends most of her time working in education and charity in the mainland.

In an exclusive interview after her sudden departure from the government, Mrs Law told *Varsity*, "I like my job now because I am at the frontier, and I feel satisfaction from my work. I can do what I want to."

She is what she used to be. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) probe in which she was accused of interfering in academic freedom has not exhausted her.

Former Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mrs Law is an honorary principal in Huizhen Academy, a secondary school in Ningbo. Huizhen Academy was established in 1996 and was jointly funded by the municipal government and the Fan Family Charitable Trust, a foundation set up by Mrs Law's parents. The foundation appointed Mrs Law as honorary principal in September.

Recently she has also joined the Heifer International, a non-profit organization based in the US dedicated to alleviating poverty problems. She is one of its directors.

"I can do what I want to."



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Fanny Law's Album

1. A collapsed roof.
2. A child of a rural family wears a shirt with holes.
3. A bed is placed in open space as the roof of the house has collapsed due to heavy rain.
4. Minority students are celebrating the ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of a new primary school in Qinghai donated by Hong Kong.
5. An old lady is scraping corn from a cob.

Heifer International Hong Kong supports Heifer's program in China. "A lot of people always think that China is now a prosperous country, but people don't understand the seriousness of peasants' problems there. They do not see the actual China," Mrs Law said.

Working with Heifer and the school, she traveled extensively in China. She found education and alleviating poverty were inter-related. Mrs Law said:

"I believe education is one of the key ways to extricate people from poverty. Shaking off poverty does not only mean a full stomach. Knowledge changes fate."

To familiarise herself with the mainland, she visited many places right after her resignation, such as Sichuan, Xian, Xining, Chongqing, Kunming, Shanghai, Beijing and Ningbo. "I did not just visit the scenic spots; I took the opportunity to understand the situation of the poor in China," she said.

When speaking of the experience she had in these visits, Mrs Law recalled a trip to Sichuan this summer. She saw a family whose roof had collapsed, and when it rained they needed to ask to share the beds of their neighbours. This made her realize that comparatively, youngsters in Hong Kong were very lucky.

She contacted various organizations to help address poverty in China in a number of ways. For instance, she found charity organizations could solve the economic problems while people from the educational circle could work out education reform for students.

Mrs Law also works at improving education for students in China. As the honorary principal of Huizhen Academy, she makes visits to the secondary school in Ningbo once a month. Every time she brings some new English-language books for the school. They have accumulated to a few thousands until October. Once she even bought a new colour printer to the school.

"They are quite heavy indeed. I always negotiate with the airlines to see if I can raise the baggage weight limit for my outboard trip in return for a lower weight limit when I go back to Hong Kong."

Even though it is hard work, she still insists on doing it. She said the language environment in the mainland was not good enough to cultivate students' language proficiency and that was why she wanted to do more to help the students there.

She said resources were insufficient in the mainland, and therefore Hong Kong students should cherish what they possess. She works hard for the school because she wants to realise the wish of her mother, who died in 1996; she wished to build a school in China. Meanwhile, Mrs Law also finds happiness in the job. "I am a person who makes all-out effort all the time. But it can also be my weakness. People said that I cared too much."



Mrs Law said she had no regrets in the job as Director of Education



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Fanny Law's Album

- 6. Mrs Law is receiving a certificate of appointment from the Director of the Education Bureau of Ningbo City as the Honorary Principal of Huizhen Academy
- 7. She is visiting a kindergarten in Ningbo where students are doing a science experiment
- 8. Volunteers from Hong Kong at Qinghai Normal University
- 9. A picture with early childhood workers at a kindergarten in Xian which practises bilingual education.

Once a high-flier among administrative officers, Mrs Law started out as an executive officer in 1975. She then applied for administrative officer in Hong Kong government two years later.

When Mrs Law was appointed as Director of Education in 1998. A man whom she highly respected warned her about the difficulty of the job. There is a Chinese saying, "Men of letters tend to despise one another." She said the job in the Education Department was difficult, but someone had to undertake the post.

"I have no regrets in my career."

She said, "Throughout the years, I always remember what the man said, and he encouraged me to do my best in the job." She admitted she used to put in a lot of time at work. "My bal-

ance between family and work was not good," she said. It took her nearly a month to tidy up and clear all the things she took back from office when she left the job.

"Fortunately, my family is very supportive and tolerant," Mrs Law said, "When I was in the dark chapters of life, family was always my backup."

Family photographs of hers are displayed all around her house. Another picture shows her with the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Embroided in a number of turbulent matters when she was a civil servant, Mrs Law said she had her own principles. Although people say the art of politics is to reach consensus, there is no way one can fulfill all the wishes of the others, so people should live with no qualms and no conscience.

In the course of the interview, she did not want to answer any question regarding the HKIEd probe. She resigned after the investigation. Her former boss, Secretary for Education and Manpower Mr Arthur Li Kwok-

Fanny Law's Profile

Mrs Fanny Law Fan Chiu-fun, GBS, JP

- 1975 graduated from the University of Hong Kong with an Honours Degree of Bachelor of Science
- 1990 received a Master Degree in Public Administration at the Harvard University
- 1975 worked as an Executive Officer
- 1977 appointed to the Administrative Service of Hong Kong Government
- 1986-1988 appointed as the Administrative Assistant to the Chief Secretary
- 1998 appointed as the Director of Education of the HKSAR
- 2000 appointed as the Secretary for Education of Manpower
- 2002 appointed as the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

cheung also left the government in July this year when the Chief Executive Mr Donald Tsang Yam-kuen started his new term of office. The government later applied for judicial review of the investigation into HKIEd case, and the High Court accepted the application in October.

Mrs Law has remained silent since her departure. "I declined all interviews from the media after my resignation, but I appreciate that university students make an effort to interview me," Mrs Law said.

The top education civil servant loves to talk to young people. She said young people should find out both their strength and weakness.

"No one is perfect. But in the course of development, we should move towards perfection. Understanding our weaknesses is an important part of it," Mrs Law said.

She said following one's interest to work and study was vital to succeed, and blindly following the trend of the society would frustrate you once the trend was over. If one's interest was not in that field, she said, forcing yourself to work there could be painful.

When asked why she chose to be an administrative officer, she said:

"I studied science at that time, and there were too many career paths for me to select. I took a test about attitude. It showed that I was suitable for jobs like public administration and public welfare management, and so I moved on to the civil service."

"When I was in the dark chapters of life, family was always my backup."

Mrs Law had worked for the Hong Kong government for 32 years. She said she never thought of retiring because she was too involved in work. ▣



Fanny Law advises teenagers to follow their interests to work and study.

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