TCX
TUTOR CONNEXXIONS

ISSUE 18/SEPTEMBER 2008

ARE ADULT LEARNERS *DIFFERENT?*

We are often told that adult learners are *different* from other types of learners in the way that they learn. The consensus seems to be that adults tend to seek out learning opportunities and that motivation is not an issue for them. Adults are autonomous and self-directed, hence tutoring them should be a breeze, compared to tutoring younger learners who tend to over-rely on the tutor – or should it? How do OUM tutors relate to the above outline of androgogy or the theory of adult learning? Do their unique personal experiences tutoring at OUM match the theory? In other words, to what extent does the normative theory of androgogy hold up at OUM?

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EDITOR'S NOTE

From this issue onwards, Tutor Connexxions or TCX (which is less of a mouthful) will appear not just as html pages but as a complete e-newsletter which you can download as a PDF file. You can then read it at leisure without needing to be online. Or you could print it out to read it anywhere.

In fact, you might not even have to download it as we plan to automatically e-mail the latest issues to all tutors the moment they are published.

In addition, TCX now has its own International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), putting it for the first time in the global database of periodicals maintained by the ISSN International Centre. This means that it is now identifiable globally, not to mention archived by the National Library.

As you would have noticed, TCX has a fresh new look. We hope you like it. The change is not just cosmetic, though, for it includes also a new cycle and a new editorial direction.

From Issue 18 onwards, TCX will be e-published five times a year: twice during the long semesters; once in the short semester. This new regularity represents OUM's strengthened commitment to enhancing continuous dialogue with all tutors. On the practical side, it allows OUM to communicate important seasonal reminders to all tutors on tutor-related matters.

Aside from the regular columns, each issue, starting with Issue 18, will be thematic. It will have an average of six features clustering around a theme related to teaching and learning at OUM. We feel that this will allow a more thorough treatment of the key issues which tutors in open and distance mode ought to be cognisant of, if not actively think through. In the end, what we aim to achieve with this approach is not simply to collect and exhibit unchanging truths but to provoke reflection and debate about the grey areas in the field of teaching and learning.

In Issue 18, we focus on adult learners. This seems like a logical, if not crucial, place to start. After all, adults constitute about ninety percent of OUM's learner population. Forthcoming issues will examine the "good and evil" of exams as an assessment tool (Issue 19) and OUM's full transition to English as the medium of teaching-learning (Issue 20). So, if you have something in mind which you'd like to develop and contribute, write to us! Do contact us even if you have something in mind that falls outside the foci.

TCX is ultimately about you – tutors who represent the face of OUM to learners on the ground. Let us hear from you. Or better yet, come on board as regular contributors. We're open to ideas and suggestions on how to improve TCX for you.

Best
Dr David C.L. Lim
Chief Editor
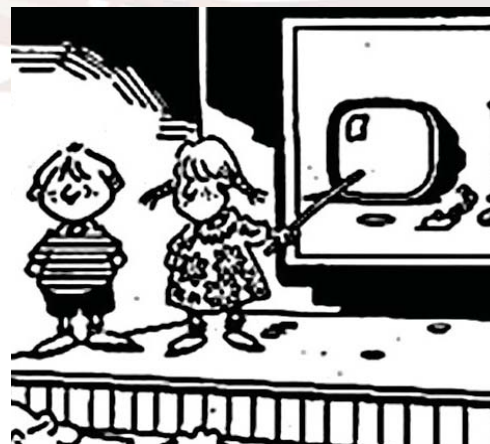
MARK DEDUCTIONS FOR LATE ASSIGNMENTS

I am glad that OUM has decided to reinstate Tutor Connexxions with Issue 17. I have the following queries/ suggestions which I hope you will bring to the authorities concerned for consideration and implementation.

- It is mentioned in the Letter of Offer (under attachments) that tutors should deduct one mark for each day that a student fails to submit his/her assignment. Thank you for the guidelines given. However, I think that same sentence should appear on all assignments so that ALL learners are aware of the penalty should they fail to pass up their assignments on time.

- The relevant parties should create a new column in the OMES to remind tutors of the deduction of marks for late submission of assignments. Currently, there is no specific column for the above purpose.

A positive response will minimise confusion and complaints when learners see their grades.

Joseph Sia
Sibu Learning Centre, Sabah

You're right. The one-mark deduction rule should be made explicit to learners on their assignment cover sheet. We'll pass on your suggestion to the faculties. As for OMES, could we suggest that you enter the final assignment marks (the net figure, after deducting marks for late submission)? Creating a new column might cause confusion to tutors. Changes, if implemented, will probably take effect from the January 2009 semester since all assignment questions have been uploaded for the September 2008 semester.

The Editors

WHERE ARE THE MARKING SCHEMES?

I've been teaching HBSC2103 Teaching of Science: Living & Material Primary School for three semesters already and I've found that OUM does not regularly supply marking schemes for this course to guide tutors in marking learners' assignments. The marking scheme is important to ensure validity and reliability in grading learners' assignments. I hope this problem will be solved by the September 2008 semester because I will be teaching that subject again. Thank you.

Norani Mansor
Bangi Learning Centre, Selangor

Agreed. We will pass on your comments to the faculty concerned.

The Editors

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF TUTOR CONNEXXIONS

Let me introduce myself. I am Segar Raja Manickam, a lead tutor in Kedah. Thank you very much for selecting me to be part of your team to give comments on Tutor Connexxions.

Congratulations! Basically, you are doing very well. Please maintain this spirit and consider the following sincere comments:

- Increase tutor-learner activities and show them in Tutor Connexxions;

- Give input from the viewpoints of teaching pedagogy and virtual learning;

- Include articles on innovations related to virtual education, especially engineering programmes which require operational explanations on circuitry, machine and so on;

- Provide space for tutors to give opinions or share teaching experience. Provide incentives for each shared experience;

- Encourage tutors to be involved in research. List the names of OUM lecturers who are keen to conduct research with tutors;

- Include articles on the benefits given to OUM tutors pursuing their studies up to the Masters or PhD level such as discounts;

- Include articles which can motivate tutors to effectively assist learners who are weak in their studies so that the focus is not only on them as tutors but as a source of inspiration to the learners; and

- Include announcements on seminars and conferences both within the country and abroad for tutors who can personally afford to incur the cost of attending them.

Segar Raja M
Lead Tutor
Kedah Learning Centre

IMPORTANT DATES

The start of a new semester always presents exciting possibilities. There are new courses to teach, new learners to meet and new opportunities to make learning an enriching experience for all involved.

One thing that tutors need to remember is the importance of deadlines. In order to keep our ship sailing smoothly, we need the cooperation of all tutors to keep to the timeframe stipulated by the Centre for Tutor Management and Development. So, please have a look at the tables below for this semester's Online Marks Entry System (OMES) deadlines and dates of activities.

For further details, please call the Centre for Tutor Management and Development at 03-26168842/8846.

OMES Deadlines

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITY	DATE (2008)
Undergraduate	Key in marks for assignment and quizzes	27 October – 9 November
	Key in marks for online participation	24 – 30 November
Postgraduate	Key in marks for Assignment 1	13 – 26 October
	Key in marks for Assignment 2	10 – 23 November
	Key in marks for online participation	22 – 28 December

Upcoming Activities

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	DATE (2008)
Question Bank Workshop II/ 2008	Qualified tutors will be selected to participate	Middle of October
	Questions and answers will be developed for selected courses	
Tutors/ Facilitators Monitoring	Class observations will be done by Lead Tutors and OUM academic staff	Tutorials 2, 3 & 4
	Observations will be made based on the training programme conducted in August	
Teaching Permit Applications	Tutors who have not applied for a teaching permit must submit their application forms to the Administrator at your learning centre	Tutorial 2

BUILDING TUTORS' CAPACITY

By Nik Azlina Nik Yaacob

The year 2008 has seen a concerted effort taken by the University to enhance tutor capabilities. One of the initiatives taken is the development of a new training programme for senior tutors as well as new tutors. The initiative started off with the development of OUM's new Tutor's Handbook which was used as the foundation of the training content.

The handbook serves as a complete guide for tutors in Open and Distance Learning (ODL), particularly at OUM. It was specifically designed to provide all the information that tutors needed to know. This handbook is deemed crucial as tutoring in ODL is radically different from tutoring at conventional universities.

The handbook provides general information about OUM, expectations of tutors, the tutoring process, assessment methods and administrative matters that tutors need to deal with. It also explains how tutors could effectively carry out their duties according to the University's requirements.

Tutors were requested to read the handbook before attending the training programme. As some of the training content may already be familiar to senior tutors, this programme also serves as a refresher course.

To ensure high participation in this nationwide training, the University has strategised the implementation of the programme into three training phases: training Lead Trainers, training Lead Tutors and training

Tutors. Senior academic staff and Lead Tutors were roped in as trainers for the programme.

In the first training cycle, as many as 3106 Tutors and Lead Tutors were invited to take part in the programme. Out of this, 43.4% (1,348) tutors attended the programme, which was held at 18 learning centres.

Evaluations of the handbook and the training programme were both very encouraging. Based on a preliminary analysis, Lead Tutors who attended the programme were generally satisfied with it.

Participants said the contents of the training were practical, useful and very important especially to new tutors. Lead Tutors believed the information provided in the programme would help them to plan well for tutorials, be better in facilitating tutorials, lead quality online discussions and motivate learners better.

It was encouraging to observe that Lead Tutors had performed fairly well in the test conducted. A total

of 35 (76.1%) Lead Tutors scored at least grade B (65%) and above for the test. It is evident that the majority of the Lead Tutors were aware of the University's teaching and learning system, administrative requirements and support systems.

Analysis would later be done to gather responses from the tutors' group.

The Centre for Tutor Management and Development (CTMD) and the learning centres would be organising the next training cycle tentatively at the end of this September semester.

Tutors who have not been able to participate are strongly encouraged to attend the training programme at their respective learning centres not only because the training is important for improving their knowledge but also because OUM is in the process of setting up a Tutor Ranking System to ensure that only quality and trained tutors remain in its tutor pool.

ARE ADULT LEARNERS *DIFFERENT*?

By Dr David C.L. Lim

Are adult learners *different*? And do we need to approach them differently from pre-adults? Of course, on the immediate level, we know that adult learners are different from younger learners who enter university for full-time studies right after high school.

Adult learners are older, which means that they would have accumulated a wealth of life and work experience. The vast majority of OUM learners fall into this category. They work full-time and study part-time, on top of juggling personal and family responsibilities.

Aside from profile, another often highlighted difference between these two groups of learners has to do with the cognitive processes of learning.

Learning theories have it that adults, by virtue of their age, experience and maturity, have the advantage of being independent in learning. The common assumption is that adult learners are self-directed, while pre-adult learners require top-down direction from the teacher.

Adults are presumed to be self-aware, self-motivated and self-empowered to make rational choices for and by themselves when it comes to learning. The understanding is that they need not be forced to learn in the way that children will only learn when threatened by a cane-wielding teacher.

Learning is thus seen as something adults volitionally choose to do to achieve certain goals and rewards (career advancement, self-satisfaction, etc.). They know what they want. Therefore, what they need is a supportive guide, not a pedagogue.

Some practitioners believe that, because of these marked differences between adults and pre-adults, pedagogy (literally, "the art and science of teaching children") should be abandoned when it comes to adult

teaching and replaced by androgogy ("the art and science of teaching adults").

Attractive as it is, the proposition is problematic because it rests on the faulty assumption that adult learners are homogeneous, all unwaveringly self-directed and autonomous. This, as those of us who have taught adult learners know, flies in the face of reality on the ground.

There is yet another problem with the proposition that adults ought to be "taught" differently from younger learners. The problem is it implicitly assumes that only adults deserve to be favoured with the learner-centred approach to learning, while pre-adults learn best as passive recipients of subject content transmitted by the all-knowing teacher-authority.

In all, it seems unproductive to me to preoccupy ourselves with the constructed dichotomy between pedagogy and androgogy when the

real issue should be how we ought to approach the learner, young or old.

Do we believe all learners have prior experiences which are worthy of respect and are valuable as the starting point of learning?

Or do we believe only adult learners deserve to be exempted from what are commonly prescribed to "children" and adults who are

The real issue for me, in other words, is not that we ought to treat adult learners differently from pre-adults but that we ought to treat both in the same way...

"slow" to learn; namely authoritative teaching, examinations which preclude original thinking, rigid pedagogical formulae and punitive disciplinary measures?

The real issue for me, in other words, is not that we ought to treat adult learners differently from pre-adults but that we ought to treat both in the same way – as thinking-feeling individuals for whom education should not be reduced to rote learning or any kind of learning that does not allow them to meaningfully

integrate what they learn into their self-conception.

This, then, brings us back to the original question of whether adult learners are different. My qualified answer is an emphatic yes: each learner – including the adult – is different from his or her peers in complex ways.

For me, in the end, if differences between adult learners are ultimately irreducible, then so much the better. After all, if everyone were the same, what would be left to learn?

In infinite permutations, each differs in combinations of cultural background, cognitive ability, personality traits, learning preferences, prior knowledge, expectations, gender, class, etc.

Hence, against reductionist textbook prescriptions of androgogy, we find in our living classrooms the counter-reality that not all adult learners are equally self-directed or capable of taking control of the mechanics and techniques of teaching themselves, as they are required to in open and distance learning.

Similarly, not all of them are equally autonomous or able to assume control and ownership of their learning. In any case, it is worth pointing out that even if an adult learner were self-directed or autonomous, it does not necessarily mean that he or she will reject a highly teacher-directed instructional setting, and vice versa.

What, then, is the lesson to be derived from the irreducibility of learner difference, both in the general and OUM contexts?

Having tutored and conducted seminars at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels at OUM for the past six years or so, I have found that it pays to respect individual learner differences.

Respect their determination to learn despite the many obstacles before them. Respect the responsibility they shoulder for self-directing their studies. And respect the success they set out to attain when they enrol for a course.

Part of this articulation of respect comes in the form of the attitude we bring to class as tutors or instructors. Being amply prepared for class and having a good sense of humour can go a long way in creating a conducive (read: non-dreary) teaching-learning environment.

So will the ability to contextualise principles, issues and examples in vivid ways that learners can connect with. Be respectfully irreverent if it helps them to approach their studies with a critical eye and to break the habit of swallowing everything they learn without questioning. Encourage them to draw from and relate issues to their own experiences.

Learners often know more than they realise, as I discovered in a Counselling class I once conducted, in which some of the learners were head nurses who had counselled countless distraught patients (including terminally ill ones) in their professional lives without fully realising they were in fact already experts in counselling!

For me, in the end, if differences between adult learners are ultimately irreducible, then so much the better. After all, if everyone were the same, what would be left to learn?

Androgogy – What's That?

By Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh

Have you ever wondered whether children and adults learn in the same ways? Are they motivated by the same reasons? Do they approach assessment challenges similarly? As a tutor, do you differentiate between child and adult learners and design your lessons accordingly? Or are they all the same to you?

Educationists have, over the years, created two different learning models for child and adult learners, which are called pedagogy and androgogy respectively. Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), who was known as the apostle of androgogy, was convinced that adults learned differently from children. He defined androgogy as the art and science of helping adults to learn.

Androgogy, which is also called andragogy, assumes that when an individual develops self-direction and independent learning, he psychologically metamorphoses into an adult learner. An adult learner will resent it if he is not allowed to be self-directing. In fact, according to Knowles, their learning process would be hindered if they felt they were being treated like children.

For us to understand androgogy, we need to understand pedagogy as well. Both terms come from Greek words, with "pedagogy" meaning "child-leading" and "androgogy" meaning "man-leading." Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching children while androgogy is a theory of adult learning. In pedagogy, the teacher decides how and what a learner learns, thus promoting dependency on the teacher. In contrast, androgogy is learner-centred and the learner is not as dependent on the teacher for knowledge.

Knowles said both perspectives were so different that the term "androgogy" rather than "pedagogy" should be used to refer to adult learning activities. He added that adult learners differ in several ways:

- They are self-directed and willing to take responsibilities in making decisions;
- They have a vast and growing reservoir of experience and prior knowledge which becomes a rich resource for learning;
- They are ready to learn things which are relevant to their job, personal life and social roles;
- They are problem-oriented, thereby focusing more on immediate application of knowledge to solve problems; and
- They have internal motivation to learn.

An adult learner will resent it if he is not allowed to be self-directing.

In 1980, Knowles altered his stance on the differences between pedagogy and androgogy. Now, he said androgogy was simply another model of assumptions about adult learners which was to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions. Just as one size would not fit all, one teaching model would not be suitable for all learners. Therefore, he suggested, the purpose and situation at hand should be considered in deciding whether to use the pedagogical or androgogical model of teaching. The use of both models, could, in fact, be beneficial to adult learners. Pedagogical principles could be used in adult learning according to the needs of the learners.

Knowles referred to pedagogy as a content model and androgogy as a process model. In pedagogy, the teacher designed the teaching methods so that the content would be covered, organised and taught in the media effectively. In contrast, in androgogy, the teacher emphasised on the designing and transmission of the content that would help the learner in acquiring it.

Knowles' views were widely criticised. The following questions were posed:

- Is the androgogical model an attempt to describe characteristics of adult learners? Or is it a set of prescriptive state ments on what adult learners should be like?
- Is androgogy a theory or set of assumptions about learning; or a theory or model of teaching; or a theory or a set of guidelines for practice?
- Could the androgogical model succeed with two quite different and opposing learning theories – humanist and behavioural – integrated in it?

Although Knowles shed great insight into androgogy, it has yet to receive comprehensive analysis. Thus, the question remains – Does an adult learn differently from a child?

A BREEZE OR A SNEEZE?
Responses From Tutors On Tutoring Adult Learners

By Lilian Kek Siew Yick

What do our lead tutors and tutors think of adult learners and adult learning? Are there any differences between teaching adult learners at OUM and teaching fresh school-leavers? Here are some of the responses we received.

"Fresh school-leavers are more focused. Adult learners tend to participate more in terms of discussions."

Dr Sapora Sipon
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"Adult learners tend to ask better-quality questions and are more responsive to tutors. They are more receptive compared to fresh school-leavers."

Mohd Irwan Mohd Mubarak
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"Adult learners are individuals with working experience but without any paper qualification. I believe they tend to understand better and learn faster compared to fresh school-leavers. Adult learners can understand better if we give them practical examples instead of just theories."

Kevin Kong
Sibu Learning Centre

"There are some differences between teaching adult learners at OUM and teaching fresh school-leavers. Adult learners are very experienced in their field of work. They have the intrinsic motivation and desire to improve themselves academically. As tutors, we need to treat them with dignity and respect without compromising on the quality of teaching. Most of my adult learners do not prefer 100% lectures as this bores them. They prefer to be given a task or situation and ample opportunities to have discussions."

Law Sze Yung
Sibu Learning Centre

"Fresh school-leavers have gone through the basic education system to prepare them for higher learning, while adult learners suffer from an education gap and struggle to cope with learning. Adult learners prefer to relate their daily activities to their learning as this makes it more interesting."

Koh Yew Meng
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"Adult learning is a process of knowledge transfer and sharing among working adults who seek advancement in their careers. Adults carry a significant weight of experience. While fresh school-leavers are adapting and entering a new phase of their lives, adult learners are more independent. I see myself as a 'bus driver' to these OUM learners and I believe that by giving lots of real-world examples in relation to theories, my passengers will get a clearer view."

Abby Ashraff Saprudin
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"Basically, fresh school-leavers are very energetic when seeking information; they pick up and digest information easily. It is quite challenging to make OUM learners understand concepts as they cannot digest information correctly. I encourage learners' participation in discussions by giving them questions that I hope can trigger their mind towards critical thinking."

Dr Fahrul Zamanhuyop
Johor Learning Centre

"Adult learners are slightly more mature (depending on their age) and most have working experience that forms a useful component in their learning repertoire. Tutors should play the role of facilitators and motivators by training them with the necessary knowledge and skills of learning. Learners, on the other hand, should take a more proactive role (ask, explore, experiment, read, etc.) rather than playing the passive role of mere note-takers or copycats."

Dr Berhannudin Mohd Salleh
Batu Pahat Learning Centre

"Adult learners are people who have left school for some reason or other and are now going back to study to seek new knowledge. They have lots of commitments but little time and resources. Most of them face problems in their studies as well as the need to make adjustments to their lifestyles in order to handle the courses that they have signed up for. Compared to fresh school-leavers, adult learners need to put in more effort to improve their studies and IT skills as well as their competency in English."

Koay Soon Yuan
Taiping Learning Centre

"There are significant differences between teaching adult learners at OUM and teaching fresh school-leavers. Fresh school-leavers are more receptive but need to be spoon-fed while adult learners are more outspoken due to their personal exposure and interaction with the general public. In addition, adult learners tend to be more demanding while fresh school-leavers tend to be more passive rather than proactive."

Chen Nguk Fa George
Sibu Learning Centre

"Adult learning may be activity-oriented, learning-oriented and even socially-oriented. At OUM, there are different standards of adult learners. In my opinion, drilling is the best method to teach Mathematics. Hardworking learners will gain a lot from the course. On the other hand, fresh school-leavers listen more to what we teach and tend to follow instruction more closely."

Teng Hie Ping
Sibu Learning Centre

"Adult learning is all about change – in attitude, knowledge, behaviour, skills, how we think and productivity. There are many significant differences between adult learners and fresh school-leavers. Adult learners are much more self-directed and take responsibility for their learning experiences. Adult learners are learner-oriented, unlike fresh school-leavers who prefer to be teacher-oriented and expect to be spoon-fed by their lecturers. Adult learners have vast life experiences to bring to and support new learning. They also prefer a practical and immediately relevant approach to their studies and would better appreciate a subject if it is relevant to their field."

Segar Raja M
Kedah Learning Centre

"Adult learning or andragogy views teaching and learning from a different perspective – where learners have prior knowledge and experience, and use these as part of their learning process. Tutors need to incorporate these prior knowledge and experience into their teaching methodology."

Vijaya Malar Arumugam
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"I try to employ the open discussion approach since adult learners are more experienced. However, learners still prefer lectures rather than tutorials."

Izdihar Baharin @ Md Daud
Shah Alam Learning Centre

"Adult learners are often busy people with many commitments and a lack of time to pursue academic endeavours. So, they have to learn using a blend of theoretical grounding as well as by harnessing their work experience to solve real-life problems and discuss theoretical tasks. Group work is much preferred by adult learners as they could synergise their experiences and thoughts with adult peers. Adults will participate actively if the topic is their forte at work. Else, they will listen passively and behave like passengers in class."

Goh Thian Hee
Penang Learning Centre

"Adult learners usually study with a purpose. It can be either to upgrade their knowledge and skills for their present job or to find a better job. They are more matured and enjoy meaningful learning more than theoretical learning. Fresh school-leavers, on the other hand, do not have a clear direction of their studies compared to adult learners. They try to 'absorb' as much as possible whatever is offered by the lecturers with little questions on the validity, reliability and applicability of the knowledge. The learning process for adults must be meaningful to their jobs.

Quite a number of OUM learners still have the mindset of 'fresh school-leavers.' They want to be spoon-fed rather than enjoy the process of meaningful learning. Hence, I think Learning Skills for ODL (OUMH 1103) is a good course for them to start with. It is important to ensure that they have the right attitude to enjoy and benefit from OUM's modes of learning."

Dr Chai Bui Khiun
Sarawak Learning Centre

When Expectations Collide …

By Christine Ling Bee Fong

Are there any differences between tutors' and learners' expectations? I asked a few OUM tutors throughout the country on how they perceived tutor-learner expectations and how the unmatched expectations were reconciled. I would like to share their stories here with the hope that these will serve as a source of knowledge and inspiration for you.

"I expect that learners have read through the required topics before coming to class. I would also need the learners to think of issues that may arise from their reading to be discussed during tutorials or online.

I would be happy if learners could give fewer excuses and be more independent in learning, honest, consistent, accountable, productive and on time with their obligations.

They expect me to be available, helpful, fair, kind, patient, understanding, consistent, knowledgeable, on time and considerate in awarding grades.

In that sense, our tutor-learner expectations do collide. But I am still firm when it comes to grades. I tell them early in each semester that I will not stoop low and will not compromise on grades."

Basil Surin
Kedah Learning Centre

"Very often, adult learners expect tutors to provide them all the information they need for assignments and exams with the excuse that they are busy part-time learners with little resources available to them. Worse, they expect to do well with only the information provided.

I expect them to be mature enough to take the initiative to look for the needed information, besides relying on modules and tutors. I also expect them to enjoy the process of learning rather than just focusing on marks.

For certain learners, their expectations are not aligned with the tutors' expectations. It takes a lot of effort to communicate and educate with the learners.

We must have a give-and-take attitude to reconcile our differences. It requires time and effort. To improve the service quality of OUM, it is important for both tutors and learners to play their roles effectively."

Dr Chai Bui Khiun
Sarawak Learning Centre

"Tutors' expectations from adult learners:

- Ask sensible questions if in doubt;
- Be more independent and take the initiative to acquire more knowledge;
- Possess excellent time management skills to meet deadlines; and
- Possess a good learning attitude as they are paying for their studies out of their own pocket.

Adult learners' expectations of tutors:

- Be an expert in the field of teaching;
- Give guidance when needed;
- Prepare notes for them;
- Be less stringent in enforcing rules related to deadlines such as assignment deadlines; and
- Don't just read the text during tutorials.

So far, I have not encountered any major problems in meeting expectations. My only main concern is the poor time management skills of some adult learners. However, I have managed to pull through in the past few years as it is my duty as a tutor to guide them."

Chen Nguk Fa George
Sibu Learning Centre

"I expect learners to:

- Be accountable for all the activities pertaining to their learning environment;
- Read the module before coming to tutorials. (This is the most difficult task that till now I am facing problems with. This is in spite of the many strategies I have introduced such as forming groups, asking learners to prepare a set of questions based on their reading, etc.) Most of them attend tutorials without reading the module and expect the tutor to teach them 100% from the module;
- Take part and be responsible in online discussions; and
- Seek help immediately if faced with any difficulty (Good interpersonal skills would be useful).

Learners expect me to:

- Possess good communication skills, be simple and speak clearly;
- Be experienced and possess sound knowledge in the subject taught;
- Provide additional and appropriate learning materials;
- Actively and promptly respond to all messages in the forum;
- Discuss and give proper guidance for assignments;
- Have a sense of humour;
- Be friendly and approachable;
- Provide real-time examples; and
- Be easily contactable via telephone and e-mail.

To date, I have yet to face any problem with my adult learners. All of them have accepted my approach well including postgraduate learners. Many of them still keep in touch with me and occasionally ask me for ideas, such as whether to pursue higher education and so on. This clearly shows that I have achieved my goal to impart my knowledge and experiences. This is my great achievement."

Segar Raja M
Kedah Learning Centre

"I expect learners to participate actively in discussions and give a lot of ideas. They must go through the module before each tutorial.

They expect me to guide them and make the conclusion brief and accurate.

Our expectations do collide. I resolve this by motivating them and being well-prepared so that they feel it is worthwhile to attend my tutorials. Sometimes, my strategies are successful but they also depend on the subject matter. Some subjects are just theories, therefore a bit boring."

Ling Hau Ching
Sibu Learning Centre

"Learners expect us to do all the assignments and questions for them. They also expect us to give them exam questions. They want to just memorise the answers and get As. On our part, we expect them to know how to learn independently, find out what they do not understand and ask for explanation.

Sometimes, we have to guide learners to solve difficult past-year questions through explanation and some model answers. The learners do appreciate to a certain extent what we do for them.

I have learned how to face the different types of learners at OUM. I have a lot of praise for hardworking learners."

Vincent Teng Hie Ping
Sibu Learning Centre

"I expect learners to read up and search for the relevant information in the Internet or digital library. Furthermore, they should be able to discuss issues, share ideas and give opinions based on the module as well as their working experience in order to demonstrate their understanding of what they have read from the module; rather than just rely on me to tell them what the issues or concepts are all about.

In return, they expect me to provide them with all the information that they need to know. So, I have to tell them and answer their queries.

I'd learnt from the different expectations that I need to always remind them that at the tertiary level, we should not expect to be spoon-fed all the time and that we need to spend time to read widely besides just reading the module only."

Koay Soon Yuan
Taiping Learning Centre

Providing Quality Tutoring

By Prof Zoraini Wati Abas and Nik Azlina Nik Yaacob

Tutors play a key role in the teaching and learning process at OUM. They are central figures in tutorial sessions and online forums, where they facilitate learning and encourage learners to share and expand their knowledge. Whether a tutor does a good job will be no secret. Most of our learners are mature working adults who are a discerning lot. They know it when a tutor is lackadaisical or lacking in his or her teaching performance.

There is a centre in OUM which is specifically dedicated to managing and helping tutors. Called the Centre for Tutor Management and Development (CTMD), it provides training and retraining for all tutors at the University. When you take up the job as an OUM tutor, you will be asked to go for the training. If you apply what you learn in this training, you will be on your way to becoming one of our cherished quality tutors.

Besides the training, you will also receive guidance and advice from lead tutors. There is at least one lead tutor at each centre whose job includes helping and advising the other tutors. In addition, OUM recently published a Tutor's Handbook, which would make a reliable and useful companion in your quest to provide quality tutoring.

As a tutor, you do not just teach. Instead, you act as facilitators in both classroom and online discussion forums. During tutorials, you need to help your learners to understand difficult concepts and master necessary skills. In online forums, you need to be available and ever-ready to help your learners

in discussing what they have learnt and any other issue related to the course they are taking. It is your duty to help keep them on track in these discussions. Overall, one could say it is the tutor's responsibility to make the online forum a conducive and active learning environment.

It is important to build a good tutor-learner relationship with your learners. When marking their assignments, be fair and provide constructive feedback so that they could improve their future assignments. Guide them in preparing for final examinations. If needed, provide them with academic counselling so that they could perform better.

If you take a look at the Tutor's Handbook, which we strongly hope you will, you will find that there is a section on effective tutoring. Six habits of a highly effective tutor have been outlined for your benefit. Why don't you read up and see whether you could inculcate these habits in yourself?

Quality tutoring is a key concern for OUM. Consequently, the

University has ways of checking to ensure that its learners are receiving the best guidance from their tutors. Feedback is sought from learners on their expectations, the learning opportunities provided to them and the issues that they face.

Criticism has been received on tutors who did not carry out their roles adequately in tutorial sessions and online forums. These have been taken note of by the CTMD with a view to addressing them for the benefit of our learners. The lesson in this for all of us is that each and everyone of us needs to perform our roles and responsibilities to the best of our ability so that we will earn bouquets, not brickbats.

To those of you who have been bending over backwards in order to be a great tutor to your learners, thank you! Your efforts have not gone unrecognised. We hope you will soar even higher with us. And if you have any suggestions on how we can improve ourselves, please drop us a note. We would love to hear from you.

WHAT OUR GRADUATES SAY

By AP Dr Santhi Raghavan

The number of adult learners in Malaysia is on the rise, which is good news to providers of higher education in the country. Now, more of these institutions are introducing programmes for adult learners.

In this regard, OUM has proven that it could deliver quality yet affordable programmes. Its delivery of open and distance learning (ODL) through a blended pedagogy which also involves tutor-led sessions and technology-based learning, has received positive response. The University's total enrolment of almost 70,000 learners is testament to this. In fact, other providers of higher education are emulating OUM's strategies and offering ODL programmes as well.

Tutors play an important role in OUM as they lead our face-to-face tutorials, which are an integral part of our blended pedagogy. Apart from engaging in self-managed learning and participating in the myLMS online discussion forums, the University's adult learners look forward to attending tutorials.

So, why is a tutor very important? Are the tutors at OUM able to meet the expectations of their learners? What do the learners really want from them? We decided to seek the answers from three of our own staff who received their scrolls at the Sixth Convocation of OUM recently.

Kavitha Raman, who obtained a Bachelor in Multimedia Communication with Honours degree, said that her tutors were passionate and professional in helping their learners. A Senior Desktop Publisher at the Centre for Instructional Design & Technology (CiDT), Kavitha said the tutors not only shared their knowledge but also continuously guided and supported their learners. They gave insightful comments and helpful suggestions which helped to enhance their learners' thinking skills.

However, Kavitha did not totally rely on her tutors. She sought out learning materials on her own as well, in order to supplement what was provided by her tutors. According to her, learners must realise that OUM is an ODL institution so they must make the effort to understand a subject matter instead of waiting to be spoon-fed by their tutors.

Tutors must understand that the learners come from diverse fields, so their experience and nature of work would vary. They should use the appropriate teaching tools, such as slides, visual forms and notes, she said.

Sazrin Mohd Mohtar, a staff in the Vice President's Office (Learner Management & Campus Development), had high expectations of his tutors while he was pursuing his Bachelor of Business Administration with Honours degree.

He said OUM tutors must possess wide knowledge and experience in the subjects they taught because most OUM learners are working adults who have diverse backgrounds and experiences.

According to Sazrin, tutors need to create an interesting and interactive class by encouraging discussions and debates instead of merely giving lectures. This approach would indirectly motivate the learners to prepare for tutorials and engage in meaningful discussions, he explained.

Kavitha Raman

Sazrin Mohd Mohtar

When asked if he was satisfied with his tutors, he replied, "On the overall, I am satisfied with the tutors who taught me. There were a few tutors who even gave extra classes for free."

He said some of his tutors provided interesting slide presentations and brief notes which were helpful. But there were a few tutors whose lack of commitment dampened their learners' motivation.

In addition, said Sazrin, a tutor was not just a teacher but also a guide and a coach. In addition, they acted as a link between the learners and the University. He felt that OUM should strive to cultivate quality tutors because most of the tutors were part-timers and hence, their level of commitment was lesser than that of full-time tutors. He said a sense of belonging needed to be instilled in the tutors so that they would feel more appreciated and a part of the OUM community.

Therefore, OUM should encourage the part-time tutors to participate in university-level activities such as learning skills workshops and also the convocation so that they would appreciate their learners better.

They managed tutorials and the myLMS forum with enthusiasm and sought to include all of their learners.

Mohamad Sulaiman

Organised, up to date and helpful. These are some of the words Mohamad Sulaiman, who graduated with a Bachelor in Business Administration with Honours, used to describe his tutors. Mohamad, who is an Executive at the Centre for Tutor Management and Development, said his tutors even assisted him after tutorial classes. They managed tutorials and the myLMS forum with enthusiasm and sought to include all of their learners.

He added that since the tutors came from different backgrounds, whereby some were attached to other higher learning institutions while others were from the sphere of industry, they provided a wider view of the subjects, thereby helping to open his mind. They also presented the learners with useful pointers on how to tackle assignments, he said.

Ideally, said Mohamad, a tutor should be creative by using different teaching techniques. As OUM learners were relatively more mature than those in most conventional universities in Malaysia, he said tutors needed to cover not only the topics in the modules but also those that go beyond them.

There are lessons to be learnt from the experiences of these graduates. Contained in their comments are various suggestions on how tutors could upgrade their level of performance. If carried out, these would, in turn, help to enhance the performance of our learners. When this is achieved, OUM's aspiration to be well-known for producing quality graduates of world-class standard would come true.

ONLINE POLL

From my lived or vicarious teaching experience, I believe that adult learners should be …

1. guided actively by the tutor in every aspect of learning.
2. allowed to direct their own learning with moderate tutor intervention.
3. independent enough to find ways to master their studies without depending on anyone.

Please cast your votes online!

INTERVIEW WITH V.P. THINAGARAN

By Majmin Hanum

Majmin Hanum Abdul Samad: Please tell us briefly about yourself.

V.P. Thinagaran: I joined Universiti Putra Malaysia as a Research Assistant and I am now pursuing my PhD there. I am also a part-time tutor at OUM's Lembah Kelang Learning Centre at the International Islamic University in Gombak.

In terms of interests, I enjoy reading, writing and sports – especially badminton. I like to engage in intellectual discussions on global issues and matters related to my research interest.

Majmin: Please describe your experience as an OUM tutor.

Thinagaran: The entire experience is interesting and rewarding. I always feel that there is a new challenge every semester as you meet new people across generations. I enjoy working at the Lembah Kelang Learning Centre because the Administrators are very supportive and provide excellent coordination.

Majmin: Please describe your most memorable experience as an OUM Tutor.

Thinagaran: There are plenty but let me single out one especially memorable incident. I received a message from an OUM graduate who studied at the same learning centre where I was tutoring. He told me that I had stirred his interest to do research. I was then tutoring on research methodology. Stirring and sustaining interest in an individual wasn't an easy thing to do and at that moment, I knew that I had reached my objective by motivating the learner.

Majmin: What do you think of OUM's mode of ODL delivery and the administration of tutors in general?

Thinagaran: OUM's leveraging on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides a flexible learning environment, which I feel is the most practical way of learning. We have seen the outcome of how learners interact, giving feedback and getting in touch with their tutors anytime and anywhere via myLMS. The ODL mode of delivery fits in well with our learners who have different learning needs and styles. It helps our learners to manage their studies and learn systematically. The Centre for Tutor Management and Development is doing a great job by continuously providing support to tutors in implementing OUM's blended pedagogy approach.

Majmin: In your opinion, what can OUM do to further improve the quality of education provided to its learners?

Thinagaran: It could carry out impact studies to ensure that it meets the learners' expectations and delivers quality education. Revising the content of OUM modules and e-learning materials from time to time would ensure that quality is always maintained.

Majmin: Is there anything you would like to tell the OUM community in general?

Thinagaran: As the environment around us is changing, we should always gear up in gaining knowledge, particularly in the area of our specialisation.

Majmin: What do you think of OUM going fully English starting from the January 2009 semester?

Thinagaran: In an era where globalisation is more important than technology itself, borderless education is the ultimate objective. Going fully English would nurture competitiveness among our learners. This would be the first step in producing quality graduates who meet international standards and I believe this is readily achievable at OUM.

Majmin: What advice would you give to new tutors?

Thinagaran: Tutors shoulder a huge responsibility in producing well-rounded graduates. Tutors should walk the extra mile to ensure that their learners excel in their studies. Balancing family commitments, studies and work could prove too much for learners and this might lead them to neglect their studies. Therefore, it is important for tutors to motivate, provide moral support and encourage learners in order to sustain their interest in completing their studies. Be professional and always strive to create a friendly learning environment while tutoring.

Is Androgogy at Its Best in OUM?

By Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh

Androgogy was advocated by Malcolm Knowles as the art and science of helping adults learn. According to this model, adults learn distinctively from adolescents. Does this model apply to our learners?

To find out, we need to investigate whether our learners fulfil the assumptions of androgogy. A general inspection of androgogy at OUM shows the following:

- Our learners need to spend close to 80% of their study hours in self-managed learning. So they are self-directed up to a point;
- Most of our learners have a reservoir of knowledge due to their experience and prior learning from training, work and life;
- Our learners are ready to learn because they could have quit if they wanted to;
- Our learners do not want to learn irrelevant stuff or be assessed on things that have no application of knowledge; and
- Our learners are motivated to complete the programme or else they would not be willing to sacrifice time and money for it.

If one delves into androgogy, one might see that it is not a teaching/learning model but rather, a model that requires the tutor to acknowledge the nature of an adult learner in a distance learning environment.

Androgogy works best when the unique needs of adult learners are recognised and addressed through suitable pedagogical instructions and methods.

Although OUM learners are required to engage in self-managed learning most of the time, they are dependent learners up to an extent. They depend on modules, tutorials and online learning support. The pedagogy of teaching is incorporated in these elements. Hence, androgogy cannot work on its own without pedagogy.

We cannot continuously use the same methods but expect different results.

The model of androgogy is effective if it works as a process of engaging adult learners in the making of learning experiences. Tutors can play a crucial role in developing the learning process.

Common grievances among tutors are that OUM learners are not proactive and do not discuss or actively participate in the class or online forum. Does this imply that the assumptions of androgogy are untrue for our learners?

Before the model is discarded, let's ask ourselves: "Have we geared our teaching strategy towards leveraging on the unique capabilities and attributes of adult learners?"

Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity is doing things the same way and expecting different results." So, we cannot continuously use the same methods but expect different results. We need to provide opportunities for androgogical learning by creating small-group discussions and breaking away from traditional room arrangements. But we must be discerning in using the learner-centred approach as it is not apt for all adult education settings.

The assessment component is another crucial aspect of adult learning that needs attention. Assessment questions and methods should be formulated in such a way that they could evaluate and reveal the actual ability of the adult learners. The learning aspects of androgogy should be reflected on in designing assessment for adult learners.

To sum it up, like any adult learner, OUM learners require help in their learning. Androgogy has some potential as it recognises the unique nature and needs of OUM's adult learners.

Nevertheless, the success of adult learning rests on the teaching approach that is contextual in the adult learning setting. Tutors should be able to manoeuvre learning strategies from a combination of diverse education theories but bear one purpose, that is, to engage learners in effective learning experiences.

So is androgogy at its best in OUM? The answer lies in our tutoring!

THE THREE ABILITIES

How do we make our lives more meaningful? What abilities do we need? Different people will come up with different answers. The story below presents one perspective of the abilities you need in order to make your life meaningful. Do you agree with it? Read on and find out.

One day, a village wise man heard that a person from a neighbouring village was coming to visit him. The visitor was coming to enquire about a rumour he'd heard regarding the three abilities. He was said to be a greedy man who always wanted more than everyone else; so, after hearing about the three abilities that hold the secret to a meaningful life, he decided that he must acquire them for himself.

While travelling to see the wise man, the visitor's mind wandered to thoughts of what the three abilities might be. Maybe, he thought, one would be the ability to rule over mankind. Or maybe, one is the ability to change the world. Could it be, he thought, the ability to win the praises of his fellow villagers? He could hardly contain his excitement; how great and mighty he felt he would be, if only those were the abilities.

The visitor finally gained audience with the wise man and eagerly asked, "Is it true that there are three abilities that hold the secret to a meaningful life? And, if so, how can I acquire them?"

The wise man gazed thoughtfully at the eager visitor for a moment and then responded, "Yes, these three abilities do exist ... and they are meaningful only to people of greatness."

The visitor assured the wise man, "Oh yes, I am a man of true greatness. The three abilities will not be wasted by sharing them with me."

Leaning towards the visitor with narrowed eyes, the wise man uttered, "Then you must pay very close attention; for these abilities are greater than all others in their capacity to influence humanity." The greedy visitor nodded in anticipation.

"The first of these great abilities is the ability to rule over man; the man is yourself, and the ability is responsibility. The second is the ability to be answerable and liable for the changes over man; again, the man is yourself, and the ability is accountability. The third of these abilities is the ability to win the praise of your fellow villagers because you are believable when you speak; this ability is credibility."

The visitor sat back, mumbling to himself, "Responsibility, accountability, credibility..." As the realisation of the message sunk in, he jumped to his feet and exclaimed, "This isn't what I expected at all! You're not giving me something I can acquire; these are things I'd have to do all the time! Who on earth would have the stomach for such tasks?" With that, he turned on his heels with a huff and strode home.

The wise man smiled to himself and said, "Men of greatness have the stomach for they are those with the capability to exercise the three abilities."

Source: Mosser, V. P. (2008, August 20). The Three Abilities. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Three-Abilities&id=1426716