

THOUGHTS OF A WINNER

Interview by Majmin Hanum Abdul Samad

CHEAH CHEE KEONG is a tutor from the Faculty of IT and Multimedia Communication (FITMC). He is attached to the Kedah Learning Centre. During the National Colloquium from 11 to 12 April, three tutors from different faculties, the Centre for Graduate Studies and the School for Nursing and Allied Health Sciences (SONAHS) were presented with Best Online Tutor Awards. Cheah was one of the three winners.

Majmin: Congratulations for winning the Best Online Tutor Award. What does this award mean to you?

Cheah: Thank you to OUM for the appreciation. I take it as a reminder for me to further explore ways to enhance my students' learning experience at OUM.

Majmin: Could you tell us about your work at OUM?

Cheah: This is my fifth year as a tutor at OUM. Since 2005, I have been tutoring in various subjects such as Information Technology and Applications and Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners. My experience as an off-campus student in USM helps me a lot in my work. I find the blended delivery mode helpful especially for students who study on their own. It has created a network for them to reach out to peers and tutors.

Majmin: How would you define "tutor" in the OUM context?

Cheah: OUM students are mostly working adults so their needs and priorities are different. We tutors need to guide them to focus on topics which will be discussed in tutorials. The learning process will be more interesting when there are a lot of contributions from the students themselves during the discussion.

Majmin: What do you feel is the role of OUM learners?

Cheah: They need to be active learners. Rather than wait for tutors to deliver information, they should also contribute ideas and information. They could also answer questions posted by their peers in the online forum. The tutor then acts as a facilitator.

Majmin: Are your tutoring styles based on your personality or situational factors in the classroom?

Cheah: Knowing students' learning environment does help. Most students are working adults with various commitments and demands on their time.

Majmin: How do you handle personality differences with your students?

Cheah: I see students as who they are – adults. They can accept decisions when these are clearly explained.

Majmin: What are the characteristics of a good tutor?

Cheah: A good tutor is prepared. Students will know if we are not prepared. Being prepared helps us to be confident and systematic in our lesson delivery.

Majmin: "The essence of effective adult tutoring is to set people on the road to confident learning." Do you agree with this statement?

Cheah: Yes, we learn better when we are actively involved in our learning process. As tutors, we should try to provide the necessary space for students to contribute ideas and knowledge, either in class or in the forum. Adult learners tend to have a shorter attention span, so it is vital for students to be encouraged to be more involved.

Majmin: You have been an OUM tutor for five years. What is your most memorable experience so far?

Cheah: Seeing graduates return to OUM to pursue their postgraduate degree. When I asked for the reason, they answered that it was because of the flexible learning schedule and the tutors.

Majmin: What can OUM do to further improve the quality of the education provided for its learners?

Cheah: OUM could use information and communications technology to improve the quality of the education it provides. More multimedia contents could be made available online.

Majmin: What advice would you give to new tutors?

Cheah: Tutoring at OUM requires tutors to see themselves in their students' shoes. They need to listen and be understanding yet firm at the same time.