



MARCH 2010/ISSUE

27

## THINKING ABOUT THINKING

We are often told that being able to “think” is good and that “thinking outside the box” is even better. Just as often, we accept the foregoing maxim as true without even needing to pause and think. But suppose we do. Suppose we take time to think about what it actually means to “think”, and to unravel the relationship between “thinking”, “knowledge” and “truth”. How might all this inform our practice as tutors? TCX 27 interrogates these issues in relation to ODL education.

### REGULARS

- Editor's Note ... p.2
- Letters to the Editor ... p.3
- Tutor Reminder ... p.5
- From the Dean's Office ... p.7
- Tutor Profile ... p.15
- Motivation ... p.17

### FEATURES

- The Reality Behind Educational Psychology ... p.6
- Beyond the Box ... p.9
- 10 Steps to Better Tutoring ... p.10
- Between Theory and Practice: Constructivism, Poststructuralism and the Role of the Tutor ... p.11
- Radical Thinking: An Historical Perspective ... p.12
- Thoughts About Tutor Training at OUM ... p.13



ISSN 1985-6415

## ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) is an OUM e-newsletter that provides a dedicated link between the University and its tutors. It serves as a channel for news and updates on tutor-related events and as a platform for the sharing of views, experiences and tips on best practices in university teaching and learning.

TCX is published electronically twice every semester.

## EDITORIAL BOARD

### *Advisor*

Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil

### *Chief Editor*

Dr David CL Lim

### *Editor*

Azahar Ahmad Nizar

### *Editorial Members*

Azeezah Jameelah Mohamed Mohideen

Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh

Jimmy Teo Hui Thian

Nazrai Ahmad Zabidi

Norazlina Mohamad

Dr Nurul Muiz Murad

Richard Ng

Assoc Prof Dr Santhi Raghavan

Dr Thirumeni T Subramaniam

### *Secretariat*

Mohamad Sulaiman

### *PHP Programmer*

Azmi Jamaludin

### *Graphic Designer*

Zairi Azhar

Mohd Aiman Junoh

### *Desktop Publisher*

Suhaila Mas Ayu Md Saad

### *Disclaimer*

All submissions will be edited for content, language and length.

The views and opinions of the individual contributors contained in TCX are not necessarily shared or approved by Open University Malaysia (OUM) nor do they represent OUM's official position or policy, unless explicitly stated.

No part of TCX may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the written consent of the Editorial Board of TCX.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Thinking, which at its height leads to the creation of new knowledge, is the primary business of the university irrespective of the mode in which the university facilitates teaching and learning.

In every discipline there is always a minimum body of knowledge to master – mastery which requires a lot of thinking in and out of the box.

There are also bodies of knowledge outside one's discipline proper which are far from irrelevant, not least because they have the potential to enrich, if not transform, one's discipline-bound understanding of the objects of study, including life itself.

TCX 27 attempts to think through thinking, the latter a task which, while everyone agrees is meritorious, can be challenging, if not also painful. Thinking, especially the divergent type which challenges normative ideas, is not always rewarded, even as we're told that thinking is good.

Indeed, history has shown that thinkers whose ideas can and have changed the world for the better, are often persecuted. Despite this, there are those who persist in thinking, which necessarily involves questioning received wisdoms and truths. Ultimately, it is those who think in this way that will materially advance knowledge.

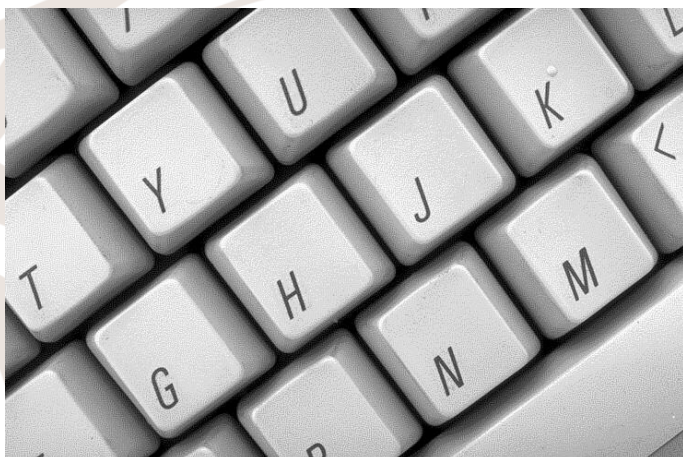
This issue seeks to radicalise tutors' understanding of thinking with the hope that tutors can in turn radicalise their learners' thinking, simply because thinking is our business.

We hope you'll enjoy this issue and we wish you all the best for the rest of the semester.

Best

Dr David CL Lim  
Chief Editor





### TCX BENEFICIAL TO TUTORS

I teach Public Speaking at OUM and have read a few TCX issues in the past.

Basically, I feel that this newsletter is indeed useful to tutors. They can gain knowledge and experience through the sharing of ideas and opinions.

Keep it up!

*Chanthravalli a/p Karuppiah  
Kuantan Learning Centre*

### PROBLEM WITH ONLINE ACCESS

Hello,

Firstly, on behalf of the tutors, I am happy to hear that there is a channel for our voices to be heard. Congratulations!

I taught a new subject called “English Across Time and Space” last semester. Basically, a teething problem that I noticed is that the learners cannot download modules and questions on this subject. Apart from that, I have some difficulty assessing the TSDAS Digital Library.

I sincerely hope that OUM will quickly look into this matter for the sake of its learners.

Thank you.

*Khaliyah Abdul Karim  
Melaka Learning Centre*

There is no module for the course “English Across Time and Space”. We use textbooks and a study guide for the course. That might be the reason why you could not download the module. We did, however, face a hiccup with myLMS early last semester which caused a delay in materials being uploaded. Our apologies for that.

*Dr David CL Lim  
Programme Manager, Bachelor and Master of English Studies*

All users who can access myLMS should be able to access the library. You may not be able to use the digital library if you open the library URL directly. Instead, you should access the library from myLMS. Once the iPortal has been fully loaded, please choose the databases in “Online Databases”. Remember to click Off Campus Access to start using them. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [munawar@oum.edu.my](mailto:munawar@oum.edu.my) should you have more enquiries.

*Ahmad Munawar Mohamad Anuar  
Librarian, TSDAS Digital Library*

### GOOD EFFORT

As a channel to share views, TCX is indeed a good effort.

As an English tutor, I find the content quite informative with a lot of contributions from OUM tutors throughout the country. The topics discussed are wide ranging and I get to know about the experiences of other tutors. Among other things, I get to learn the dos and don'ts of being a good tutor.

I have yet to share my own experience and I am looking forward to doing so in the near future.

Thanks.

*Rajentharan a/l Subbiah  
Melaka Learning Centre*

### MAINTAIN FREQUENT QUIZZES AND TESTS TO EVALUATE LEARNERS

I've been teaching mathematics (for example, SBMA 4303: Basic Mechanics) at OUM for almost 8 years. Generally, I feel that the university is well-equipped and the staff support is satisfactory.

However, I am somewhat surprised by recent changes in the assessment of learners. In the past, there were many quizzes and tests spread throughout the semester for the learners to assess their specific knowledge. In my opinion, this is a great way to evaluate learners and motivate them to study. Quizzes and tests contribute positively to learners, in that they depend more on the modules, making them read the modules instead of just glancing through them.

Yet around last year, this form of assessment was phased out and replaced with one coursework. Our learners (especially the adult ones) tend to study at the very last minute. So if you give them only one coursework rather than a number of assessments, this will only encourage their bad



habit. If they get through their coursework, they will feel contented as if they have learnt everything. Consequently, they will read less and even skip classes. Hence, there will be no continuous learning, which is vital for maths and I believe for other subjects as well.

Basically, everybody can get a degree. However, a tutor's role is not only to create graduates but to ensure that learners gain knowledge and improve their thinking skills (particularly critical thinking). This can be achieved by having a series of quizzes, tests and assignments.

*Mohd Noh Abdul Rahim  
Melaka Learning Centre*

We appreciate your comments regarding the role of tutors and your suggestions regarding quizzes and tests. We share the view that quizzes and tests are useful to evaluate learners' knowledge and motivate them to study. It was with this in mind that OUM has (since its inception) included quizzes and tests as an important component of the coursework assessment for many courses offered in our degree and diploma programmes.

Notwithstanding the merits, the manner in which quizzes and tests was conducted over the years had been found wanting, lacking control and transparency and generally open to abuse. From the reports received and a study following that, it was found that quizzes and particularly tests in a number of learning centres were administered without proper monitoring and without adherence to proper examination procedures.

We also established that it was problematic to conduct tests and quizzes in an examination-controlled setting in many learning centres due to the unavailability of suitable rooms, lack of staff to assist with invigilation, and difficulties with scheduling and logistics. Tests were largely held in tutorial rooms immediately after a tutorial with students sitting close to each other.

There were two tests for many courses which were supposed to be held fortnightly. However, due to time constraints and student numbers, these tests were held weekly and sometimes back-to-back in some learning centres. This leaves the students with little time to study. There were occasions too where students who did not sit for a quiz or test on a scheduled date were arbitrarily given replacements and sometimes the same test questions. Given the situation, there were reports and frequent complaints from students of alleged copying among students, poor monitoring and a lackadaisical attitude when conducting the tests. In short, lack of transparency was a major problem.

Mention of the above is not intended to cast every learning centre in a negative light. Far from it, quizzes and tests in many of them were run by tutors professionally. However,

the increase in the number of complaints every semester, despite remedial efforts taken by us, tended to reflect negatively on the transparency in the conduct of quizzes.

For these reasons, OUM decided to gradually phase out tests and quizzes and replace them with the mid-semester examination which accounts for about 25% of the overall assessment marks. Like the tests, the mid-semester examination also compels students to study their modules carefully if they intend to do well in the examination and the courses. Since the May 2009 semester, the mid-semester and final examination for a number of courses have been set in the MCQ format. Eventually, we hope that all faculties will comply with the MCQ format when setting the examination papers.

We hope this answers your query. Thank you for writing and for your contribution to our teaching programme.

*Teoh Beng Kuan  
Deputy General Manager,  
Assessment & Examination Department*

**We welcome letters from our readers on any issue that may be of concern to you. You may use a pseudonym if you wish but please mention which learning centre you are from. Please e-mail us at [tcx@oum.edu.my](mailto:tcx@oum.edu.my).**



# IMPORTANT DATES

## OMES Deadlines

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)
Undergraduate	Key in marks for assignment and quizzes*	8 – 21 Mar
	Key in marks for online participation*	22 – 28 Mar
	<i>*Except for MCQ-format subjects</i>	
Postgraduate	Key in marks for Assignment 1	22 Feb – 7 Mar
	Key in marks for Assignment 2	22 Mar – 28 Mar
	Key in marks for online participation	5 – 11 Apr

## Upcoming Activities

ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)	REMARKS
Malaysian Qualifications Agency Visit/ Interview	6-7 March	<p>Melaka Learning Centre: Bachelor of Hospitality Management with Honours (BHM) &amp; Bachelor of Tourism Management with Honours (BTRM)</p> <p>Petaling Jaya Learning Centre:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Bachelor of Information Technology with Accounting with Honours (BITA),</li> <li>2) Bachelor of Information Technology Networking with Honours (BITN)</li> <li>3) Bachelor of Information Technology with Software Engineering with Honours (BITS)</li> </ol>
Monitoring of New/Senior Tutors and Facilitators	Tutorials/ Seminars 1-5	Observation during tutorials/seminars will be conducted by Lead Tutors and academic staff

## WRITE FOR TCX AND WIN RM50!



Are you currently a tutor at OUM? Looking for an outlet to share your thoughts about any aspect of teaching and learning?

If so, we'd love to hear from you.

Send us your completed articles. Or, if you prefer, chat with the Editors about story ideas you're thinking of developing. E-mail us at [tcx@oum.edu.my](mailto:tcx@oum.edu.my).

If your article is published, you'll receive a token sum of RM50. (Internal and full-time staff are not eligible).

# THE REALITY BEHIND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

By Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh (harvinder@oum.edu.my)

Educational psychology concerns itself with psychological theories which may be used to inform effective educational practices. Educational psychologists are interested in learning about how humans learn. Various psychological theories abound in educational psychology, among which are behaviourism and cognitivism.

Behaviourism focuses on how behaviour is learned and conditioned. For example, classical conditioning owes a large debt to Ivan Pavlov's classic experiment with dogs, suggesting that humans learn through conditioning or changes in behaviour. Behaviourist theories, however, could not explain how certain behaviours are reinforced.

This is where cognitivism comes in. Cognitivism investigates the mind and the processes of thinking. It is a theory of learning that explains how organisms come to know or learn something. Cognitivism proposes that in every domain of human learning, thinking plays an integral part in the processing of information. For example, Piaget proposed four sequential stages of cognitive development which children have to go through: (1) sensorimotor period, (2) preoperational period, (3) concrete operational stage and (4) formal operational stage. Their level of thinking becomes more and more sophisticated as they pass through each successive stage.


Educational psychology is useful insofar as it enables educationists to build sound educational models. One example of the application of educational psychology is in the field of instructional design. In order to design user-friendly learning materials, instructional designers rely on learning models like Bloom's taxonomy, among others. Bloom's taxonomy includes six successive levels of cognition arranged in a hierarchy: (1) knowledge, (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis and (6) evaluation. The learning material is stratified according to ever increasing levels of difficulty. This way, learners will be gradually exposed to learning tasks in order of difficulty, thus building their confidence and motivation to learn.

Educational psychology certainly has a lot to offer to learners and educators alike. However, educationists are not always cognizant of the fact that individuals learn



*The outside world is bigger than the box which attempts to describe it.*

differently. What if certain individuals fail to demonstrate cognitive competence according to certain psychological models that have been developed? Do we then assume that there is something wrong with that learner? Or is it possible that the models available to us are inadequate to measure the myriad diversity of human potential?

Thinking is a complex activity and no one method of teaching will be sufficient to cater for all types of people. While educational psychology provides but one way of understanding what it means to think, it is by no means the only way. Our models represent the way we look at reality rather than the reality itself. Educational models appear very orderly and structured, but life is rarely that neat and tidy. Artists, for instance, may have no need for theoretical models to represent their vision of reality. Out of the chaos of existence, they bring form and order through the use of words, images, colours, shapes and sounds. The act of artistic creation also requires thinking, but perhaps a kind of thinking which is wilder than the clinical models suggested by educational psychologists. While educational psychology certainly has its merits, it is perhaps unwise to presume that all thinking can be described and contained by its theoretical constructs. 

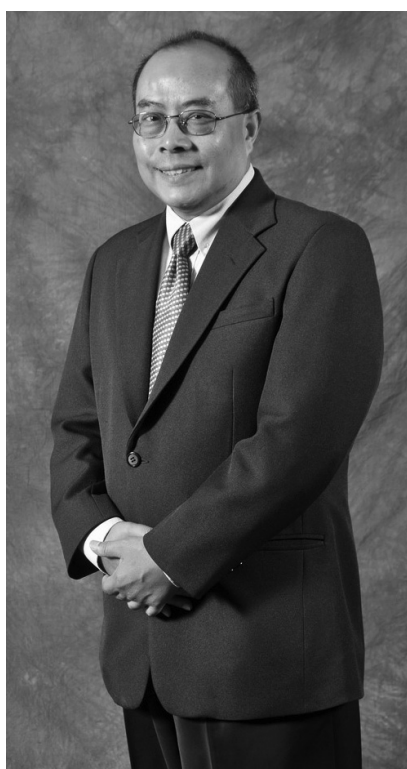
# INTERVIEW WITH PROF DR MOHAMED YUSOFF ISMAIL DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES

By Dr Thirumeni T Subramaniam (thirumeni@oum.edu.my)

*Thiru: Please tell us a bit about yourself.*

Prof Yusoff: I studied anthropology in Australia during my undergraduate and postgraduate years. My field of specialization is Buddhism, in particular Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia. My PhD thesis was on the social organization of a Buddhist temple in Kelantan.

I started my academic career in 1974 when I joined the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. My last post at UKM before retirement after 33 years of service was as Dean of the Faculty.



*Thiru: Is thinking about thinking considered a learning strategy?*

Prof Yusoff: Thinking is not merely a strategy, but it is a natural process that is fundamental to learning. If you fail to think, you will fail to learn. We can say that first and foremost university education is about thinking.

*“ODL learners cannot learn by merely reading their modules. They must think beyond the module.”*

Regardless of your discipline, a graduate will learn three things: (1) you will learn how to assess a situation or recognise a problem, (2) you will learn how to analyze that problem using whatever theoretical knowledge that you have been taught, and (3) you are expected to come up with suggestions on how to solve that problem using whatever limited resources that you have at your disposal. All these involve thinking.

*Thiru: Should a student try to capture his or her thinking process while learning?*

Prof Yusoff: Yes, otherwise real learning will not occur. However, one must remember that learning does not only involve textbooks. You must go beyond that. Thoughtful and wise decisions arise not only from wide exposure to knowledge, but from the ability to integrate experience gained from everyday situations.

Likewise, ODL learners cannot learn by merely reading their modules. They must think beyond the module. They must also rekindle their curiosity. If you are curious you will automatically start to think. There is truth in the saying “Laziness is the mother of all invention.” Out of their laziness, some people are motivated to think, to focus and to tap into their creativity and ability to innovate.

*Thiru: Can “thinking about thinking” help students to improve their learning skills?*

Prof Yusoff: Definitely. Thinking is not a linear process because the human brain is a very complex machine.

*Thiru: Do you think that the activity of “thinking about thinking” has different effects on students engaged in a technical course compared to students who are engaged in a non-technical course?*

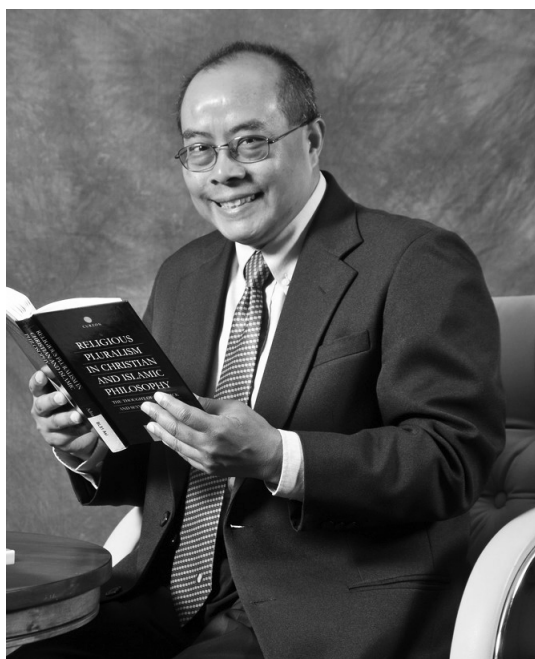
Prof Yusoff: Yes, to a certain extent. However, since thinking about thinking is actually based on previous experience, it



would be wise to widen that experience. Hence, educational curriculum must be designed to encourage development of both technical and non-technical abilities in an individual. The cause and effect is still the same.

*Thiru: In your opinion, what are the necessary steps in encouraging students to think about their thinking process?*

Prof Yusoff: Academic tasks (such as essays and assignments) must be structured so as to encourage students to think, rather than to mechanically reproduce the work of others. However, it is rather unfortunate that quite often students resort to plagiarism and other unethical means to get their assignments done. The will to learn is an intrinsic desire that must drive a learner to make the right choices.



*Thiru: What are the challenges and issues in encouraging students to think about their thinking while they are learning?*

Prof Yusoff: There seems to be a lack of interactive discussion despite the existence of various facilities (both face-to-face and online).

*Thiru: Many ODL institutions encourage the use of thinking about thinking as a self-directed learning strategy. Why is it so?*

Prof Yusoff: Because learning is a thinking process. And this should be encouraged not only in ODL institutions, but at all educational institutions including schools.

Learning should not be seen as rote-learning. That is what happens in most learning institutions when students memorise facts rather than understanding, analysing and applying the facts in their learning process.

*Thiru: There are many thinking strategies that are promoted such as “Thinking out of the box” and others. What is your plan in encouraging students to develop such methods in their thinking process?*

Prof Yusoff: One of these methods is to make the teaching and learning experience as interactive as possible, to encourage learners to be more critical about their learning materials, and to be as open as possible in their interaction with lecturers and tutors.

*Thiru: Do you have any advice for tutors in helping students to use the above strategy?*

Prof Yusoff: Tutors are the best people to break the ice and encourage learners to engage in interactive discussions (both in class and in online forums). **TCX**



# BEYOND THE BOX

By Dr Nurul Muiz Murad (nurul\_muiz@oum.edu.my)

When we think about thinking, it might dawn upon us at some point that our thoughts usually circulate within a rather tight and rigid compartment. Our thoughts are boxed in, as it were, preventing us from departing from certain presumably “correct” ways of thinking and looking at the world. The box keeps us “safe” within conventional codes of conduct and cognition. It keeps us from exploring uncharted mental territories for fear of the unknown truths which we might discover for ourselves.

What is this box that keeps us fenced in? Often this box is invisible and unmentioned, though its constraining presence is very much felt. Authority figures often construct boxes to keep their followers under mental lock and key. For example, religious fundamentalists would distort the meaning of religious scripture to control and condition the behaviour and thinking of the ignorant masses. Ideas which contradict the assumed sanctity of received dogma are frowned upon and are usually met with punishment. While this may be good for the vested interests of the powers that be, it is questionable whether this is good for those confined by the box.

This is not to say that we should do away with the box entirely. The box is comforting because it gives us a sense of order and regulation. The box gives us a safe platform, a foundation upon which to build our expectations of life. But too much order makes the mind older. We need to redefine our relationship to the box so that we can think outside the box while having our feet firmly planted within its orderly borders.

Let us imagine for argument’s sake that the box in question is our education system. Admittedly, our education system is flawed; many graduates have been produced yet not all will make the grade. The over-emphasis on grades and examinations has created a certificate culture, where we equate intelligence with the number of As obtained. Despite all this, nobody in their right mind would claim that this particular box is defunct and should be dismissed as irrelevant. This is too harsh a stance to take.

It is important that we know precisely what the box can offer and what it cannot. Our education system may be instrumental in providing us a context to acquire book knowledge, but it is certainly no substitute for actual



*As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.*

immersion in the realities of the outside world. The outside world is bigger than the box which attempts to describe it.

We learn about theories and concepts within the box; outside the box, we learn which theories work and which don’t. The box gives us a starting point from which we draw our point of reference, but the moment we step outside its borders, we need to drop all preconceived assumptions and our presumptions of knowing. Now we know that we don’t know. **TCX**

# 10 STEPS TO BETTER TUTORING

By Jimmy Teo Hui Thian (jteo@oum.edu.my)

A tutor is someone who gives instruction to an individual or a small group of people with the objective of helping, assisting and guiding them towards becoming independent learners. Having said that, tutoring can be either fulfilling or frustrating depending on how tutors handle their learners. Dr Haim Ginott once said:

*“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour; hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.”*

Such power our tutors wield! With this in mind, tutors should take steps to ensure that their tutoring experience is a fruitful one:

**Step 1: Know your students** – Take time to read your learners’ profiles and investigate their background. This will help you form a general idea of your audience so that you can pitch your discussion accordingly.

**Step 2: Set rules** – Set class rules from day one. This will ensure transparency as well as clarify what you expect of your learners and what they can expect from you.

**Step 3: Play a holistic role** – Tutors are expected to assist learners to understand course materials and assignments, facilitate group discussions, clarify issues related to the course and provide clear course information.

**Step 4: See the bigger picture** – Tutors are advised to map out their tutorials well. Usually, there are 10 topics to cover within 5 tutorials. Ideally, a tutor must cover 2 topics per tutorial. This translates into 1 topic per hour. Manage your time wisely!

**Step 5: Focus on content** – Since time is not a luxury, tutors must have sound content knowledge in order to run focused tutorials. There is simply no room for idle talking and story-telling.

**Step 6: Delivery technique** – Tutors need to find the best way to deliver content. The use of ICT and multimedia are



*As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.*

recommended when trying to explain difficult concepts and theories.

**Step 7: Have empathy and humour** – Having empathy means having the ability to put yourself in your learners’ shoes. Learners will feel more comfortable in tutorials if you show them you care. Humour can help create better rapport between tutors and learners.

**Step 8: Higher levels of thinking** – Tutors should constantly challenge learners to think at higher levels. Conventional thinking only brings the same old results. They should encourage learners to look at familiar situations with fresh eyes.

**Step 9: Provide feedback and increase motivation** – Tutors should constantly motivate learners to further their knowledge. This can be done by charting their learning progress and giving honest and positive feedback on their understanding of the subject. A kind word goes a long way!

**Step 10: Reflect upon the past and plan for the future** – It is good to get feedback from your learners so that you can reflect on what is happening in your tutorials. Reflection is an important tool you can use to identify weaknesses in your tutorials and an ally in planning for better tutorials ahead.<sup>TCX</sup>

# BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: CONSTRUCTIVISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE ROLE OF THE TUTOR

By Dr David CL Lim (david@oum.edu.my)

Most teachers and tutors would be familiar with the term “constructivism”, which describes the theory that knowledge and meaning are not found or received but “constructed” by learners.

Constructivism has been and continues to be highly popular, including in Education Studies. Teacher trainees are still taught to value the varied pedagogies based on constructivist theory.

They learn, for instance, that learners learn from the experience of failure, and that making mistakes along the way is actually a good sign.

They also learn that teachers should not teach in the conventional sense of pouring knowledge into learners’ minds, and that they should instead facilitate learners’ discovery of principles, concepts and facts related to given subjects.

The constructivist belief here is that knowledge and meaning cannot be transmitted; they can only be acquired when learners put them together through active exploration and engagement with the objects of study.

We might believe in all this but do we always practice our belief? Can we, as tutors, maximize the benefits of constructivist pedagogies for our learners if we do not also believe in the tenets of poststructuralism and act on them?

Constructivism and poststructuralism share the same fundamental premise. They hold that knowledge, meaning, and even reality do not exist out there, independent of us; and that they exist only as constructs created out of discourse.

As Michel Foucault puts it: “Knowledge is a matter of the social, historical, and political conditions under which, for example, statements come to count as true or false.”

Based on this understanding of the terms, can we – to return to the question – help our learners construct knowledge and meaning in the constructivist sense if we disagree that knowledge and meaning are contingent constructs to be critiqued and challenged?

Can we claim to be pedagogic constructivists if we encourage learners to challenge knowledge but disapprove



*Knowledge is a matter of the social, historical, and political conditions under which, for example, statements come to count as true or false.*

when learners respectfully challenge the position we take in relation to given issues under study?

Would we be facilitating learning if, instead of encouraging, we discourage learners who express interest in exploring ways of developing and measuring child creativity because we believe it has been established for all perpetuity that creativity can neither be nurtured nor measured until the child’s psychomotor skills are developed?

Would we be doing our learners service if, instead of encouraging them to explore novel interdisciplinary ways of thinking through a problem, we expect them to conform unbendingly to strict mono-disciplinary protocols?

Experience shows that many learners, even adult ones, look to tutors as a key source of authority, someone with whom they can check if their learning is on track.

In this sense alone, tutors carry a heavy responsibility, for we not only guide learners in content knowledge acquisition, we also influence their attitude towards knowledge and scholarship through our own attitude towards the same.

The latter will remain with them long after they have forgotten the content knowledge they learnt. **TCX**



# RADICAL THINKING: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Norazlina Mohamad (norazlina\_mohamad@oum.edu.my)

*“Try not to become a man of success but rather to become a man of value.”*

– Albert Einstein.

This quote reflects the lives of great men in world history who have gone against the grain to produce ideas which have revolutionized the way we live. Their ideas and inventions were not meant for self-promotion but remain as their undying contribution to human civilization. Though their radical ideas may have met with stern resistance in the past, people at present will find it difficult to imagine life without the inventions and innovations which they have introduced.

The following are some of these great men who have immeasurably enriched our lives:

## 1. Johann Gutenberg

Johann Gutenberg is often regarded as the father of printing. The invention of movable type by Gutenberg ushered in a new age of mass production. Before movable type, block printing was the main method of producing books. The major drawback with block printing is that you need to come up with new sets of woodblocks to produce a large variety of books. Movable type allows the printer to rearrange the various elements of a document (letters, punctuation symbols) to come up with a whole range of possibilities on the printed page. This in fact is instrumental in the rapid dissemination of knowledge throughout Europe and the rest of the world, culminating in historical watersheds like the Renaissance.

## 2. Joseph Lister

Antiseptic surgery owes a great debt to the pioneering work of Joseph Lister, who himself was greatly influenced by Louis Pasteur's germ theory of disease. At the time, many patients died of serious infections such as gangrene following surgery. Initially it was thought that noxious vapours caused these infections, but Lister thought better. He reasoned that microbes caused these infections, and that by killing the microbes before they were exposed to open wounds, a higher number of patients would survive surgery. He was right. By applying certain antiseptic procedures such as ensuring the cleanliness of surgical instruments and his hands, he managed to cut down postoperative



*Millions of lives have been saved because of the incisive thinking of one man.*

mortality by a significant amount. Millions of lives have been saved because of the incisive thinking of one man.

## 3. Nicolaus Copernicus

In his book *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres*, Nicolaus Copernicus outlined his heliocentric theory which went against the prevalent notion at the time that the earth was the centre of the universe. Copernicus managed to prove that in fact the earth and other celestial bodies revolved around the sun. Copernicus' discovery greatly influenced a long line of great astronomers such as Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei (who was persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church and forced to recant his support for heliocentrism). His example paved the way for other great thinkers to question what was then considered to be evident and indisputable truths about our universe and existence. When the earth was believed to be the centre of universe, man was symbolically enthroned as the masters of all creation. Copernicus knocked man off his precarious perch and installed the sun (the light of truth) as the rightful centre of the universe. TCX

# THOUGHTS ABOUT TUTOR TRAINING AT OUM

Interview with Assoc Prof Dr Santhi Raghavan (santhi@oum.edu.my)

By Dr David CL Lim (david@oum.edu.my)



*Dr David: Tell us a bit about yourself and your position as Director of CTMD.*

Dr Santhi: I started off as a tutor in August 2001 at UKM. 3 months later, I was interviewed by the late Tan Sri Dr Abdullah Sanusi for a permanent position as a lecturer at the then School of Business & Management, OUM. I currently teach postgraduate students pursuing PhD in Business Administration at the Centre for Graduate Studies.

In late 2008, I assumed the position of Director of the Centre for Tutor Management and Development (CTMD). CTMD was set up for the sole purpose of enhancing the pedagogy of face-to face tutoring, online tutoring and self-managed learning in an open and distance learning (ODL) environment. My team and I are responsible for the overall management of tutors, ensuring that they support OUM's blended learning pedagogical approach.

*Dr David: OUM has embarked on numerous initiatives to lift the standards of its tutors. Which areas of tutor management and development do you think require rethinking? Can you elaborate?*

Dr Santhi: We continuously guide and coach OUM tutors to enable them to be more effective in delivering content

during tutorials and facilitating online interactions. Our recent series of colloquiums for tutors titled "Knowledge Sharing & Knowledge Building through OUM's Quality Open Distance Education" held both at the national and regional level (Southern, Northern, East Coast) were avenues where we enhanced tutors' capabilities through the exchange of ideas and experiences in teaching and learning. Similar colloquiums will be held in Sabah, Sarawak and the Central region this year.

There is also a need to provide innovative quality services and products that exceed tutors' expectations. From our continuous effort of rethinking our products and processes, I am pleased to share that we are embarking on a new e-learning methodology. Selected tutors have been commissioned to develop online repositories of FAQs that have emerged in recent years in our myLMS which include detailed descriptions of questions and answers, tips, secrets and the beginning-to-end guidance. The objective of this initiative is to supplement learning with appropriate questions and answers to be used as reference in their myLMS forums. In the World Wide Web, FAQs nowadays tend to be stored in Content Learning Management System (CLMS). We at OUM are planning to do the same for the benefit of our learners.

Our modules too will be developed in HTML format and uploaded. This new format will increase the quality of modules where tutors and learners can go beyond the boundaries of hardcopy texts into a virtual learning environment.

These two initiatives support CTMD's mission to help tutors integrate new and innovative print and e-learning content into their tutoring processes.

*Dr David: What other plans are in store for OUM tutors?*

Dr Santhi: Subject matter and skills are not enough to ensure our tutors' success and performance in teaching. More important are the tutors' behavioral traits, for example, who they are as a person, what drives them, how they make decisions, how they work and how they interact with our learners.

These traits are usually very difficult to identify or measure without the help of measurement tools. We plan to conduct “Psychometric Profiling” on our new recruits as well as our senior tutors (in batches) to help us describe the indescribable – the human personality. Research shows that psychometric profiling can assist our tutors to realize their full potential to achieve success not only in their career with OUM but also in all areas of life. This goes in line with CTMD’s mission to continuously attract, retain and develop tutors.

*Dr David: What are CTMD’s long term plans for tutors?*

Dr Santhi: At present, some overseas universities such as University of Sydney, Western Caroline University and The Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP) provide training that leads to tutor certification. Currently, there is no such tutor certification offered by local universities. Certification adds credibility and professionalism to

OUM. We would like to call this programme CODLT (Certification for ODL Tutors).

It is undeniable that the majority of OUM tutors are of high calibre in their respective fields. However, not all the tutors have higher education background as some of them come with industrial exposure. There is a fraction of tutors who have not undergone a formal teaching course, especially in ODL pedagogies. CTMD looks at this issue as a major challenge.

At present, OUM tutors are given training in the principles of ODL which underpin the University’s delivery mode. CTMD finds that this proposed certification programme is crucial as most of our tutors have been exposed more to the conventional teaching method which is traditional face-to-face lectures. We are hopeful that this CODLT programme, which consists of a series of planned short courses, will produce effective ODL tutors/facilitators. **TCX**



## ONLINE POLL

If I want my learners to succeed in their studies, I should guide them to:

- Think outside the box by being more open-minded about new knowledge.
- Apply their knowledge and experience to solve problems in the classroom.
- Understand the art of learning and memorise the relevant facts.
- Think for themselves on what suits them best in their studies.





# THINKING IN EDUCATION

Interview with Falilnesa Mohamed Arfan

By Azahar Ahmad Nizar (azahar\_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

FALILNESA MOHAMED ARFAN is a highly experienced tutor and educationist based in our Seri Kembangan Learning Centre.

*Azahar: Please tell us a little bit about your educational background.*

Falilnesa: I obtained my Degree in Malay Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. I went overseas on a JPA scholarship to study for my Masters in Curriculum Development at the University of Sussex in Brighton. When you study overseas, you really do get your money's worth ... but it's a lot of money for the worth you're getting!

*Azahar: What are your teaching experiences like?*

Falilnesa: I have experience teaching language and literature in both English and Bahasa Melayu. As a teacher, I am also privileged to have taught other teachers especially during my stint with Maktab Perguruan Islam (MPI). There, I used to teach OUM modules like Learning Skills, English for Oral Communication and others.

*Azahar: What do you understand by the word "think"?*

Falilnesa: To think is to use the mind to produce thoughts, ideas, opinions and the like. It is the highest and noblest activity available to humanity and as such distinguishes us from mere animals. All human progress and achievement are made possible because of our capacity for thinking.

*Azahar: Why is thinking so important in education?*

Falilnesa: Thinking is important in education because without it we are no better than parrots. Once upon a time, rote learning was very much prevalent as an acceptable method of transmitting factual knowledge. However, this "chalk and talk" approach obviously has its limitations.

These days, especially with the advent of Bestari or smart schools, we are gradually moving away from "chalk and talk" towards more ICT-oriented methods. The recent emergence of young inventors in increasing numbers is perhaps a sign of the times.




*All human progress and achievement are made possible because of our capacity for thinking.*

*Azahar: Are there many types of thinking?*

Falilnesa: Yes, you could say that. Allow me to illustrate by distinguishing between creative thinking and critical thinking. Creative thinking suggests that one is generating something out of nothing, for example, a poet might experience a flight of fancy and produces a poem as a result of that. To be critical, on the other hand, does not necessarily require that anything be created. Critical thinking allows us to examine and evaluate pre-existing ideas, to see it from various angles in an inquiring spirit.

*Azahar: Any last words about thinking?*

Falilnesa: Nowadays we hear a lot of people talking about "thinking outside the box". However, on a humorous note, I would like to say that there is one situation where this does not apply. It is when you are toilet training your cat. When your cat suddenly feels the urge to move outside its litter box, you say to your cat: "Don't you ever think out of that box!" 

**WE BELIEVE EDUCATION IS FOR ALL...**

this is why we are working so hard for you;

**WE BELIEVE AGE SHOULD NOT BE A BARRIER...**

this is why we do not ask for your age;

**WE BELIEVE TIME SHOULD NOT BE A HINDRANCE...**

this is why we bring you online learning;

**WE BELIEVE LEARNING SPACE CAN BE ANYWHERE...**

this is why we give you easy-to-carry  
size modules and mobile learning;

**WE BELIEVE QUALIFICATION IS MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER...**

this is why we have flexi-entry system;

**WE BELIEVE IN GIVING YOU MORE THAN WHAT YOU'VE ASKED FOR...**

**THIS IS WHY WE BRING YOU...**



**Online Now!**

**e-GATE**

YOUR ELECTRONIC GATEWAY TO ENGLISH RESOURCES

<http://egate.oum.edu.my>



egate oum



egate\_oum

# THE ELEPHANT AND THE FLY

Adapted by Azeezah Jameelah Mohamed Mohideen (azeezah@oum.edu.my)



A disciple and his teacher were walking through the forest. The disciple was disturbed by the fact that his mind was in constant unrest.

He asked his teacher: "Why are most people's minds restless, and only a few possess a calm mind? What can one do to still the mind?"

The teacher looked at the disciple, smiled and said: "I will tell you a story. An elephant was standing and picking leaves from a tree. A small fly came, flying and buzzing near his ear. The elephant waved it away with his long ears. Then the fly came again, and the elephant waved it away once more."

This was repeated several times. Then the elephant asked the fly:

"Why are you so restless and noisy? Why can't you stay for a while in one place?"

The fly answered: "I am attracted to whatever I see, hear or smell. My five senses pull me constantly in all directions and I cannot resist them. What is your secret? How can you stay so calm and still?"

The elephant stopped eating and said:

"My five senses do not rule my attention. Whatever I do, I get immersed in it. Now that I am eating, I am completely

*The mind is restless and goes wherever the attention is. Control your attention, and you control your mind.*

immersed in eating. In this way I can enjoy my food and chew it better. I rule and control my attention, and not the other way around."

Upon hearing these words, the disciple's eyes opened wide and a smile appeared on his face. He looked at his teacher and said:

"I understand! If my five senses are in control of my mind and attention, then my mind is in constant unrest. If I am in charge of my five senses and attention, then my mind becomes calm."

"Yes, that's right," answered the teacher, "The mind is restless and goes wherever the attention is. Control your attention, and you control your mind." **TCX**

**Adapted From:** Sasson, R. (2001). The elephant and the fly. *SuccessConsciousness.Com*. Retrieved February 10, 2010, from [www.successconsciousness.com](http://www.successconsciousness.com)





Jalan Tun Ismail  
50480 Kuala Lumpur  
tcx@oum.edu.my

<http://tcx.oum.edu.my>