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33

TEACHING WITH FIRE: ON PASSION & OTHER DRIVERS OF LEARNING

“The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.” The maxim that few would disagree with is that teaching – be it lecturing, tutoring or guiding – needs to be imbued with the fire of passion, if those we teach are to be ‘infected’ or inspired to learn and to continue learning in ways that go beyond impersonal memorization. It would be easy, of course, to dredge out more similar maxims than to think through how precisely one could go about ‘infecting’ learners in positive ways. How, indeed, does one ‘teach with fire’? What are the required tools, attributes and strategies? These constitute the focus of TCX33.

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ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) is a non-profit 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

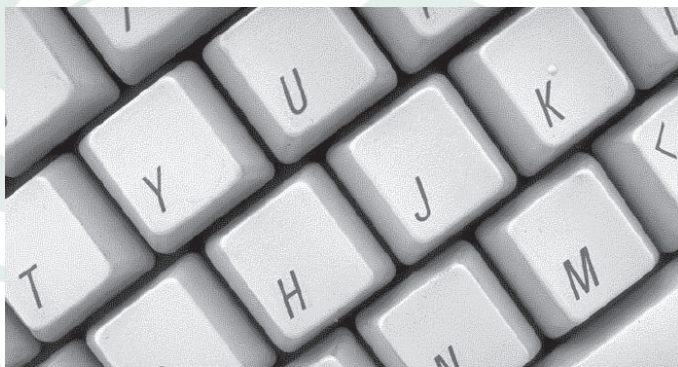
We know from our days as students that a teacher who teaches without passion is something like food without salt or, more dramatically, nature without trees. We know that teaching without fire is unlikely to inspire learners, let alone keep them awake. Yet, as this issue of TCX explores, passion alone is insufficient if learners are to make advances in meaningful learning. Passion without knowledge, wisdom and compassion can in fact be more dangerous than having no passion at all!



We hope you'll be able to glean something from the featured articles here. We do not provide solutions to tutors on how to strike a balance between passion and the other necessary 'ingredients' for successful teaching. Instead we provide perspectives to enable each tutor to individually formulate their own lessons on how best to approach their tutorials and seminars where teaching with fire is concerned.

Best

Dr David CL Lim
Chief Editor



IMPROVEMENTS & THE PLACE OF ENGLISH

I have been teaching IT courses at the Seremban Learning Centre for the past seven years and have seen a number of improvements.

One such change is the new learning centre under the charge of Puan Mazuin Omar. I am truly happy about moving into the new premises and I notice many smiling faces, tutors and learners alike, who are pleased with the facilities offered here.

In terms of learners' evaluation, I agree with the recent move to MCQs or Multiple Choice Questions. It is a good decision because it makes learners more focused in their studies. Learners will have no choice but to learn more about a particular topic in order to do well in assessment. Here, my only wish is that more real-life examples can be included. This move can help them in their jobs.

Apart from that, more emphasis seems to be given to the English language. My concern is our learners' level of English proficiency. Nowadays tutorials are conducted in English, yet a majority of OUM learners have poor command of this language. They seem to be struggling in this area. Perhaps, OUM should consider setting up an English Language Centre for our learners.

In all, I am quite satisfied with the changes at the university.

Sooraya Tairan
Seremban Learning Centre

Dear Sooraya,

The introduction of the MCQ format at OUM comes with valid reasons. It is a time-tested assessment tool, even with foreign open universities. Additionally, MCQs are a more objective and reliable indicator of learner understanding. You might have also noticed the MCQs at the end of each topic in the modules – these are meant to help learners to assess themselves. So you can see why OUM chose to migrate to using MCQs in some course and programmes. We will

consider your suggestion to include more real-life examples in the questions.

On learners' proficiency in the English language, we are aware that a segment of learners need to improve their language skills not only in order for them to follow their respective programmes, but also to be able to function better in the work environment where English is the dominant language. To help learners in this area, OUM has made several important initiatives. For instance, in 2009, we introduced the e-Kamus (an electronic dictionary software package) that was meant to aid learners. OUM also launched e-GATE, which is a website that provides various English resources, in 2010 (accessible at <http://egate.oum.edu.my/>). Another new portal will be launched soon for similar purposes. This will be known as PAQEES (Portal for the Advancement of Quality English Education and Support). Do look out for this new portal and encourage your learners to use these resources if they find English challenging.

Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid
Deputy Vice President,
Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA)

RETAINING LEARNERS' ATTENTION

I would like to thank Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid for his prompt and comprehensive response to my letter in TCX32. I agree that every mode of learning, whether face-to-face or virtual, has a role to play in the learning process.

I would like to comment a little on the challenge of retaining learners' attention during face-to-face tutorials. Given their level of maturity, holding the attention of adult learners will require more than just information and knowledge provided in the modules. To engage them, we would need to use real-life situations and examples to which they can relate.

My experience as an industry practitioner has been handy in that it provides me with ready real-life cases to cite, making it easier for learners to comprehend the subject at hand. I have also come to realise that tutors must constantly keep abreast with the latest developments in their own areas of expertise. Another way to maintain learners' interest in face-to-face sessions is to use more creative slide presentations to get the message across to the learners.

I believe these are some of the ways that can hold learners' attention and keep them interested during the face-to-face tutorials.

Thank you.

Selvarajan Velu
Shah Alam Learning Centre

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Dear Selvarajan,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us. It is great that tutors realise adult learners are different from younger learners, and that the teaching-learning environment is different for them as well. It helps to recognise these differences and to adapt one's teaching methods to suit adult learners' needs and temperaments. You are most welcome to share your personal experiences in class for the benefit of your learners and I hope other tutors take note of your suggestions to improve their own teaching.

Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid
Deputy Vice President,
Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA)

IDEAL QUALITIES OF AN ODL TUTOR

I am currently supervising OUM learners enrolled in a master programme. For a few years, I was also a tutor in courses taken by in-service teachers. I was once a school teacher myself, so I understand the issues they have to deal with.

When I was tutoring these in-service teachers, I had to put in extra hours to attend to their queries. I taught a difficult course, so I understood their predicament. This is why I think that the first quality an ODL tutor must have is passion to help their learners.

Another crucial quality is to be well-prepared for tutorials. Young tutors, especially, may be overwhelmed when facing a more experienced audience. Here, I wish to assure these tutors that as long as they have sufficient knowledge on their subject matters, they have nothing to worry about.

Sometimes I see tutors who are not well-versed in their subjects because they hardly read the modules. I make it a point to read every page of the module before facing the learners. If you want to help the learners, you need to study the subject to be taught.

Tutors are OUM's front-liners and they have to keep up certain standards. Even if this may be challenging, at the end of the day there is a lot of satisfaction to be derived.

Nurliza Haslin Muslim
Klang Valley Learning Centre

Dear Nurliza,

Showing empathy towards your learners is particularly important in ODL and the qualities you mentioned are worth emulating. Your point regarding the modules is

also an important one – the modules are there to help the learners as well as the tutors, so it is vital that tutors familiarise themselves with the modules. There is only one thing I would like to add: don't just read from your modules during the tutorials!

Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid
Deputy Vice President,
Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA)

PRACTISE PATIENCE & CARE

Having been an OUM tutor for nine years, I believe that teaching adult learners can be very challenging, especially those from the open market.

Some open market learners seem to lack the initiative I have seen in sponsored learners. There were times when I had to call or send text messages just to get them to hand in their assignments. Some don't even turn up for oral tests, despite my telling them that they are worth 40% of their scores! I suppose this is due to most of them being younger, hence needing to be pushed. This is where patience and care come in. These learners need to be given the chance to succeed.

In spite of all the troubles, I find my job satisfying. The course that I teach, i.e., Oral Communication, has indeed been useful to some of my ex-learners who are now working in places like the Road Transport Department and the Royal Malaysian Police.

Vera Voo Mui Yin
Tawau Learning Centre

Dear Vera,

Thanks for writing in. It is interesting that you have made a distinction between sponsored and open market learners. Perhaps there are other tutors who share your experience?

I am sure it is gratifying to know that your learners have benefited from your teaching. As I mentioned in my reply to Nurliza, empathy, patience and care are important qualities in a tutor. We are glad to know that many tutors already know this, so keep up the good work and do write in to TCX if you have other anecdotes to share!

Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid
Deputy Vice President,
Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA)



Important Dates

TUTORIAL 1	27-29 May 2011
TUTORIAL 2	10-12 June 2011
TUTORIAL 3	24-26 June 2011
ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE	28 June - 10 July 2011 (Tutors should remind their learners to use the special assignment template and to submit their assignments online. This applies ONLY to courses that require learners to submit their assignments online.)
MID-TERM EXAMS	1-3 July 2011
TUTORIAL 4	15-17 July 2011
FINAL EXAMS	30 July - 21 August 2011

On Assignments

1. Assignments, Assignment Rubrics and Assignment Template for Learners are now accessible on myVLE.
2. No late submissions will be accepted.

On the e-Tutor Mentor Programme

1. This new programme is effective beginning the May 2011 semester.
2. Seven e-tutors have been assigned as e-Tutor Mentors:
 - a. Dr Chai Bui Khiun
 - b. Wong Shin Voon, Johnathan
 - c. Rozlinda Binti Yaacob
 - d. Ayub Bin Nasir
 - e. Mohamad Kamal Bin Mohd Hassim
 - f. Lim Thong
 - g. Hardev Kaur D/O Jujar Singh
3. Some of the responsibilities of the mentors include:
 - a. Providing support and assistance to a group of e-tutors
 - b. Monitoring and evaluating e-tutors

e-Tutoring Updates, Reminders and Tips

1. e-Tutors are advised to log into their online discussion forums at least THREE times a week.
2. Learners' requests should be responded to within TWO working days.
3. Encourage active discussions by posting and redirecting questions where appropriate.
4. Post additional online resources related to subject-matter knowledge.
5. Log into the e-tutor community forum to share your views and to communicate with the mentors.
6. Automated email reminders will be sent out every Monday beginning 20 June 2011.
7. Regular reminders will be sent by mentors and the Head of e-Learning where necessary.
8. Please inform the Head of e-Learning of any prolonged absence and inability to facilitate the forum.
9. Payments for the January 2011 Semester are still being processed. Email itla@oum.edu.my if you have queries on payment.

Contact Info

E-TUTOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS	ITLA Staff ext. 2122/2490/2491 or Email: itla@oum.edu.my or safiah_mdyusof@oum.edu.my
F2F TUTOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS	a. LC Directors b. ITLA Staff ext . 2122/2490/2491 Email: itla@oum.edu.my or sitifarina@oum.edu.my
ASSIGNMENT ONLINE SUBMISSION QUERIES	Email: assignment@oum.edu.my
MYVLE TECHNICAL ISSUES	myVLE Helpdesk – LMS team Email: mylms_admin@oum.edu.my

ON PASSION, INQUISITIVENESS & VALUING LEARNING

Interview by Tengku Amina Munira with Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, Senior Vice President of OUM

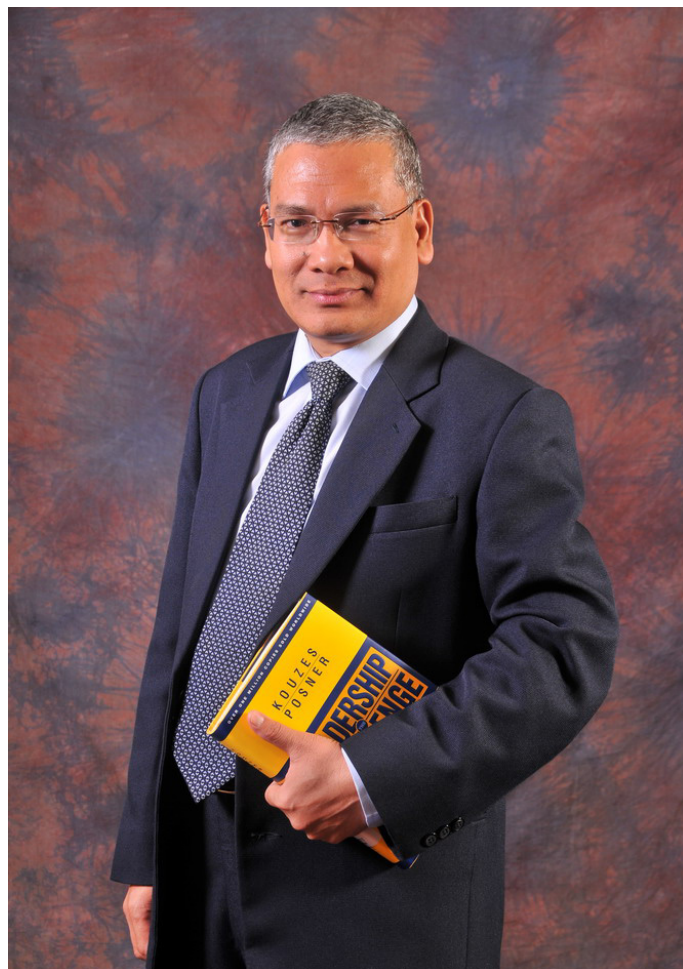
Before joining OUM, Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, OUM's Senior Vice President, taught at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels for 16 years at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Malaya. Prof Mansor has accumulated more than a little knowledge and experience to say a thing or two about what it takes to be an inspiring educator.

Tengku Munira: Let's get straight to the point, Prof. In your opinion, what can OUM tutors and facilitators do to inspire their learners and make learning contagious?

Prof Mansor: I think there are three fundamental characteristics that a tutor must encourage in a learner. First is the spirit of inquisitiveness. Learners must be inspired to be inquisitive and curious about everything; they must want to seek knowledge all the time, even outside the classroom. Second is passion; they must have a real sense of zeal about learning. Third is value; learners should understand that the value of learning is not just for the sake of getting a diploma or degree; they must see it as a truly useful vocation in their lives. They must be inspired enough to take to learning naturally and as a reward in itself, not as a burden.

Tengku Munira: What is the tutors' role in all of this?

Prof Mansor: First of all, as educators, tutors must embrace these three fundamental characteristics for themselves. Apart from teaching with fire, they must know how to leverage on these characteristics to guide their learners in the same direction. By projecting these values, tutors can thus provide the push factor, and they can also be role models in order to 'infect' their learners in the same way.



“Learners must be inspired to be inquisitive and curious about everything; they must want to seek knowledge all the time, even outside the classroom.”

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Tengku Munira: Can you illustrate how tutors can actually do this?

Prof Mansor: Tutors can organise activities to inspire learners. Connect with them by using examples that relate to their own lives. Keep reminding them of these three fundamental characteristics and look for ways to include them in any teaching and learning activity. Most importantly, tutors must encourage learners to read all the time, beyond their modules and textbooks.

Tengku Munira: What about the ODL environment? How does OUM help tutors to become inspiring educators?

Prof Mansor: OUM has implemented a number of plans to assist the tutors and learners. We try to provide good modules for every course we offer. We maintain a well-stocked physical and digital library so that both tutors and learners are within easy reach of knowledge. We have also designed our system in such a way as to promote a rich teaching and learning environment. For instance, assignment questions are developed to encourage learners to be more inquisitive. We also explore using exam questions in this same way. The online forum holds the same value; and the role of e-tutors here is paramount – they must use this platform to interact with their learners and encourage them to communicate with each other too. I would also like to reiterate the importance of reading. By encouraging the love of reading, the self-managed component of the pedagogy will surely be easier on the learners.

Tengku Munira: Are there other factors or variables that you consider important?

Prof Mansor: There are certainly many variables that go into creating an engaging, enriching and fulfilling teaching and learning environment. OUM provides the system, but the tutors must use it, and everyone must work together to bring this environment into actuality. A tutor must know how to leverage on the system and remember that what is important at the end of the day is producing a graduate with a complete ‘package’ – having not only the knowledge in his/her field, but additional soft skills as well. The institution and the tutors must be there to nurture learners to become such graduates.

“Remember the three fundamental characteristics: inquisitiveness, passion and value. This is how you can really ignite the passion in your learners.”

Tengku Munira: Has OUM done anything specific about that?

Prof Mansor: Yes. For example, we include additional components in the curriculum to teach learners these additional skills, including financial intelligence, environmental awareness, and so on.

Tengku Munira: Any final words for the tutors?

Prof Mansor: I have but one advice that applies to everyone: always think positively. I truly believe that positive thinking can overcome anything. Embrace good values and put your best foot forward all the time. Ultimately, you must always aspire to reach new heights and always be true to yourself. For tutors, remember the three fundamental characteristics: inquisitiveness, passion and value. This is how you can really ignite the passion in your learners. **TCX**

WHAT'S 'FIRE' GOTTA DO WITH TEACHING?

Selina Marie Rogers (nselina@hotmail.com)



Like romance, teaching is all about passion. Also like romance, teaching is about allowing the 'fire' to consume and take us to a higher level. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to be consumed by this intense desire to share knowledge with our learners would definitely be able to identify with this analogy. We know that it is this 'fire' that helps us fulfil our lifelong vocation of teaching.

Yes, teaching is a vocation, not a mere profession or a half-day job. While it is undeniable that there are many who go into teaching when they have no other choice, there are also some who wish for no other job but teaching. These are the ones whose teaching 'infects' us with a burning enthusiasm and makes learning a 'contagious' experience. I am quite certain we have met at least one teacher in our lifetime who has had such an effect on us.

Where does this fire for teaching originate from? Those who come from families of teachers would probably cite their upbringing, values and early exposure to the world of teaching. The more idealistic ones would say their interest in teaching is sparked by intellectual curiosity and social consciousness. What about you? Where does your fire for teaching come from?

Having taught for the past 17 years, I have wondered why the thought of switching to another more lucrative job has never dawned on me. Writing this piece got me thinking: Could I be one of those who have been infected with this 'fire'? Personally, I do not have any grand illusions of the origin of the fire that has kept me going all these years. I reckon my interest in teaching is ignited each time a learner shows joy in learning. The sheer satisfaction of being able to simplify and personalise learning is what gives me an emotional 'high'.

Teaching is not all about telling and showing, it is a lot more than that – teaching is about searching for ways to reach out to learners through examples,

“My interest in teaching is ignited each time a learner shows joy in learning. The sheer satisfaction of being able to simplify and personalise learning is what gives me an emotional ‘high’.”

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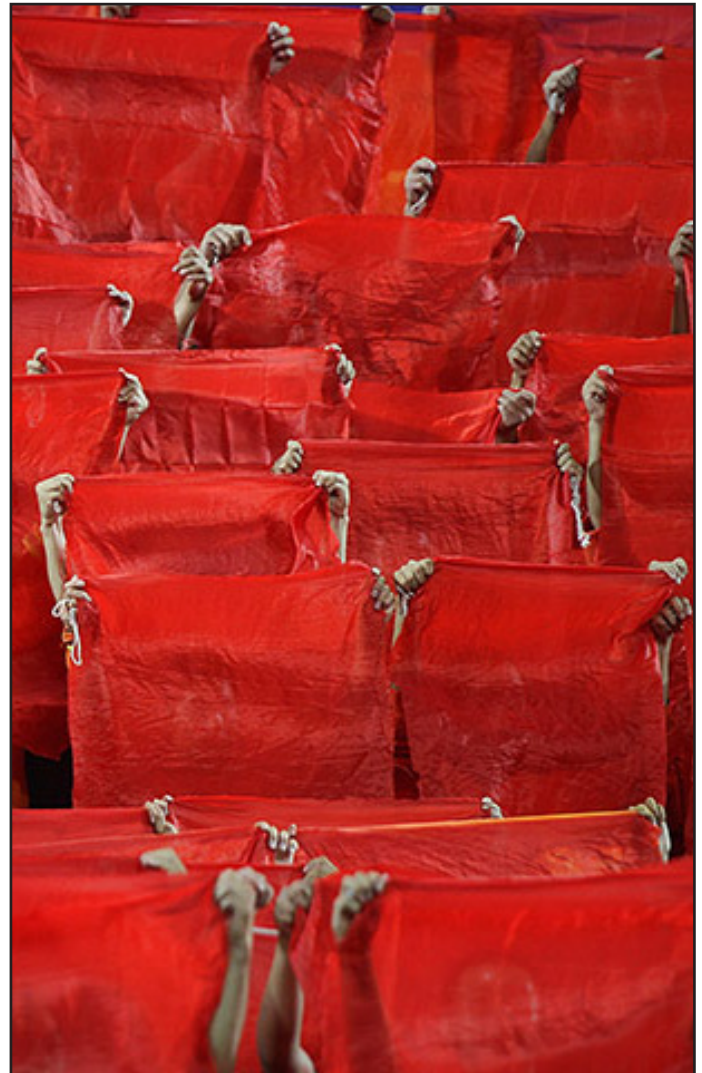
“The fire of teaching makes learning alive and fun. It not only consumes the teacher to build bridges with her learners, it also sparks the desire for learning among her learners.”

illustrations and analogies that reflect the reality of their lives. Teaching is about making sure that learning means something to learners. And this is the ultimate manifestation of the fire of teaching.

When learners ask questions without feelings of insecurity, engage in lively interactions, participate actively in activities and look forward to the next class – these are, to me, clear effects of meaningful learning. Scoring A's in tests, assignments and examinations is not a guarantee of learning, as many of us would sadly agree. After all, while rote learning and meaningless drills are strategies that can produce 'A' learners, they don't necessarily set learners 'on fire'. So would it be fair to say that the fire of teaching could lead to the fire of learning?

Back to the question that forms the title of my piece – “What's fire gotta do with teaching?” A lot. The fire of teaching makes learning alive and fun. It not only consumes the teacher to build bridges with her learners, it also sparks the desire for learning among her learners. My next question is “Would you allow your fire of teaching to spread?” TCX

** Selina Marie Rogers is an OUM subject matter expert (SME).*



FIREWORKS IN THE CLASSROOM

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



Is passion the magic ingredient in the making of a good teacher? Can passion alone sustain a person to continue teaching? Will the fire in you spark off other fires in your classroom? These are some of the questions that popped up in my mind when asked if passion makes a good teacher.

This reminds me of an article I read several years ago in *The Teaching Professor*. The article, which I would like to share, was written by Professor Richard Leblanc of York University, Ontario after he won the Seymours Schulich Award for Teaching Excellence in 1998.*

Good Teaching: The Top Ten Requirements

One. Good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. It's about not only motivating students to learn, but teaching them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful, and memorable. It's about caring for your craft, having a passion for it, and conveying that passion to everyone, most importantly to your students.

Two. Good teaching is about substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge. It's about

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doing your best to keep on top of your field, reading sources, inside and outside of your areas of expertise, and being at the leading edge as often as possible. But knowledge is not confined to scholarly journals. Good teaching is also about bridging the gap between theory and practice. It's about leaving the ivory tower and immersing oneself in the field, talking to, consulting with, and assisting practitioners, and liaising with their communities.

Three. Good teaching is about listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each student and class is different. It's about eliciting responses and developing the oral communication skills of the quiet students. It's about pushing students to excel; at the same time, it's about being human, respecting others, and being professional at all times.

Four. Good teaching is about not always having a fixed agenda and being rigid, but being flexible, fluid, experimenting, and having the confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances. It's about getting only 10 percent of what you wanted to do in a class done and still feeling good. It's about deviating from the course syllabus or lecture schedule easily when there is more and better learning elsewhere. Good teaching is about the creative balance between being an authoritarian dictator on the one hand and a pushover on the other.

Five. Good teaching is also about style. Should good teaching be entertaining? You bet! Does this mean that it lacks in substance? Not a chance! Effective teaching is not about being locked with both hands glued to a podium or having your eyes fixated on a slide projector while you drone on. Good teachers work the room and every student in it. They realise that they are the conductors and the class is the orchestra. All students play different instruments and at varying proficiencies.

Six. This is very important – good teaching is about humour. It's about being self-deprecating and not taking yourself too seriously. It's often about making innocuous jokes, mostly at your own expense, so that the ice breaks and students learn in a more relaxed atmosphere where you, like them, are human with your own share of faults and shortcomings.

“Good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason.”

Seven. Good teaching is about caring, nurturing, and developing minds and talents. It's about devoting time, often invisible, to every student. It's also about the thankless hours of grading, designing or redesigning courses, and preparing materials to still further enhance instruction.

Eight. Good teaching is supported by strong and visionary leadership, and very tangible institutional support – resources, personnel, and funds. Good teaching is continually reinforced by an overarching vision that transcends the entire organization – from full professors to part-time instructors – and is reflected in what is said, but more importantly by what is done.

Nine. Good teaching is about mentoring between senior and junior faculty, teamwork, and being recognised and promoted by one's peers. Effective teaching should also be rewarded, and poor teaching needs to be remedied through training and development programmes.

Ten. At the end of the day, good teaching is about having fun, experiencing pleasure and intrinsic rewards... like locking eyes with a student in the back row and seeing the synapses and neurons connecting, thoughts being formed, the person becoming better, and a smile cracking across a face as learning all of a sudden happens. Good teachers practice their craft not for the money or because they have to, but because they truly enjoy it and because they want to. Good teachers couldn't imagine doing anything else. TCX

*Leblanc, Richard, “Good Teaching: The Top Ten Requirements,” The Teaching Professor (June-July 1998), 1,7 and reprinted in Insight: Advanced Learning Through Faculty Study, newsletter of the Teaching Excellence Centre, Rutgers University, Camden Campus (Fall 1998); The Point, newsletter of United Faculty of PBCC, (November 1998); Briarcliffe College Faculty Newsletter, Briarcliffe College, Bethpage, NY (January-February 1999); and Focus on Teaching, Newsletter of Buffalo State University of New York (Spring 1999).

****Jimmy Teo is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Languages***

FIRE IN THEIR BELLIES

By Basil Jude Surin (bjs@oum.edu.my)

Remaining relevant in a sea of change is the main challenge for educators in 21st century Malaysia. With the deluge of technological advances, educational institutions and the role of teaching have been transformed and are no longer comparable to what they were even a decade ago. Educators at all levels are challenged to be professional, innovative, creative, open to change, adaptable and they need also to keep up with technological progress so that they may invigorate and inspire their learners.

Real teaching is not the simple task many perceive it to be. It takes a special breed of inspired educators to remain unshaken when facing a massive responsibility with numerous professional decisions, while at the same time; they must also give their full commitment to each and every learner. So, what is it that makes an educator remain passionate after so many years of service? What is it that helps them to kindle and sustain the fire in their bellies?

I invited three tutors from the Kedah Learning Centre, collectively sharing 70 years of teaching experience, to share their thoughts.

Dr Baharudin Yaacob



Leaders play an important role in evoking teachers' desire to teach and teach well.

The role of leadership in helping an educator to remain interested and focused in teaching is something that cannot be stressed enough. Educational leaders who know how to motivate and lead others to perform and work effectively as parts of a whole can

help increase a teacher's productivity in the classroom. Just by finding out about the teachers' interests and getting to know them better can help to avert problems. This can reduce the number of misfits within the faculty.

“Educational leaders who know how to motivate and lead others to perform and work effectively as parts of a whole can help increase a teacher's productivity in the classroom.”

So what can educational leaders do? For one thing, they should take the initiative to bring team members together. Administrators and subordinates should meet regularly and periodically. Have scheduled meetings to deal with professional matters and to discuss good teaching practices. Keep an eye on avoiding burnouts. Organise occasional trips to other institutions as an exercise in benchmarking, or simply as a fun eye-opener.

Having said that, kindling the fire in teaching is also the teacher's responsibility. The teacher needs to take pride in what he does and learn to be patient all the time. Having self-discipline and learning not to be unnecessarily bothered by what others say is a good way to remain passionate about teaching.

Tan Bo Ji

My love for teaching grew from my days as a temporary teacher. I enjoyed teaching the weaker classes and underprivileged learners who generally displayed a lack of self-esteem and confidence. I learned not to be too harsh and tried to be flexible in the hope of bonding with them. That was when I noticed the learners warming up to me. They also became more confident. Seeing this change in them gave me immense satisfaction and helped to nurture my love for teaching.

I read a lot in my free time to make sure that I am always growing from strength to strength in this profession. I had a strong athletic background and I was interested in teaching physical education. The knowledge I gained from reading helped to cultivate self-belief. This was augmented by mingling with other teachers. The

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“I learned not to be too harsh and tried to be flexible in the hope of bonding with them. That was when I noticed the learners warming up to me.”



confidence and exuberance of my more senior colleagues has rubbed off a little on me.

If I were to feel dispassionate about what I do, I would try to verbalise my feelings to close friends whom I can trust and are willing to listen. I also realise that I can put things in perspective quicker if I take a short time-out to relax. This way, I can regain my steadiness and that helps me to get on with my job.

Simply put, I would say that enjoying what one does for as long as possible would help to keep the interest. When you consider what you do to be a chore, that means it is time to take stock and try to inject some life into the mundane. If you can take a short break once in a while, it can help to prevent a major burnout. Personally, I try to keep finding new things to enjoy and keep myself actively focused on my teaching.

Gautaman Ganesan

A passionate teacher prepares for work in a professional and diligent manner. This teacher will want to see his work through from the moment of conception until the very end.



His passion is basically something that comes from within. But, how many are there who are truly passionate about their work? There may be a special group of ‘born-to-be’ teachers who have a natural talent for teaching and find themselves in the perfect profession. However, this is not the case for all of us.

We may be inclined to teach but the zeal to teach needs to be nurtured. External factors like money, compensation,

convenience and comfort are indeed prerequisites as we need to think of sustenance and our ability to maintain our interest.

Administrators of learning institutions have important roles to play; they have to try to ensure that the right person is given the right job. Being a misfit by force is no help to one’s morale.

Congeniality among administrators and colleagues can help to nurture passion. Focusing on strengths and positives and learning from negatives as a team are very important.

Where external factors or environments cannot be changed, we need to look into self-action or self-help. Though difficult, we should try to think of every teaching day as a breeze and not to complain too much.

We need to look at the positive and gratifying parts of the job. We need to focus on learner progress and building our own capacity. We need to strive to become better at our work. The sheer effort to succeed needs determination and single-mindedness and this can keep us going for a long time. Being an expert in your field and looked upon as a reference point can be rewarding too.

“We need to look at the positive and gratifying parts of the job.”

Self-help is about being open to seek the help and advice from those who are passionate in what they do. Their fire and zeal can be infectious and have a positive effect on you. We should make the effort to meet, talk and learn from other passionate teachers. We can hope to be infected by their fire.

If ever the fire to teach dies out, we become devoid of passion. We would then need to take a good look at our practice and seek help from others. We may need to start all over again and that needs guts! It is going to be difficult but many things in life are, aren’t they? **TCX**

**** Basil Jude Surin is an OUM tutor at the Kedah Learning Centre.***

PASSION IS NOT ENOUGH

Interview by Dr David CL Lim with
Prof Dr Widad Othman, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Languages (FEL)

Dr David: Tell us something about yourself as a teacher and your current focus in FEL as Dean.

Prof Widad: I was trained as a teacher way back in 1976. I taught Physics and Mathematics before focusing on technical and vocational education. I taught at a public university from 1981 to 2006. After that, I joined OUM.

Although I love teaching, I do not have much time to teach in my job as the Dean of FEL. Currently, my focus is to ensure that all FEL programmes have quality and are marketable. Of course, I give much emphasis to the

programmes for in-service teachers, as this is our main focus at the moment. I also focus on shaping the faculty as a team so that both academic and support staff can work well together.

Dr David: How much importance would you place on 'teaching with fire'? Why?

Prof Widad: I would say it is very important. A teacher's passion for teaching will push him/her to go all the way to ensure that learning occurs. Learning is not just about imparting knowledge, where teachers just talk and learners just listen. The passion one possesses can automatically make the teaching-learning process fun. Passion can certainly be contagious.

Dr David: Can you give us a real-life example each of how the passion for teaching worked and did not work for you?

Prof Widad: This is tricky... I don't quite have examples for that. But I can share something else. My passion in physics (during my early years as a lecturer) somehow transferred to my learners. Recently, I discovered one of my former learners through Facebook, and he has turned out to be an excellent teacher in physics. It seems that he too possesses the passion to teach physics. I am happy that he was able to learn and develop his own passion to be an excellent teacher while he was under my tutelage.

As for the other example, perhaps this happened when I was not able to convince one learner to continue teaching even though she completed her Diploma of Education course. I was not able to infect her with the love/passion for teaching.

Dr David: Do you think passion alone is sufficient to be a good teacher? Why?

(Continued on next page)



Prof Widad: No, while passion is important, it must be supported with other qualities like ‘sincerity’ (teaching because one wants to); ‘patience’ (dealing with diverse groups of learners); ‘love’ (for the learners); ‘creativity and innovativeness’ (in planning interesting and engaging lessons); ‘energy’ (especially when teaching youngsters); and ‘enthusiasm’.

Dr David: Of these qualities you mentioned, how would you rank them by importance?

Prof Widad: The most important quality is passion. The other qualities I mentioned; sincerity, patience, love, creativity, innovativeness, energy and enthusiasm follow suit.

Dr David: How much of what you believe about passion and other drivers of learning are injected into FEL’s academic programmes? In other words, how do you, as Dean, ensure that the tutors we hire are able to ‘infect’ learners so that they too may learn with passion?

Prof Widad: Because OUM is an ODL institution, I must admit that it is not easy to inject passion into our academic programmes as the inculcation of such traits heavily depends on human interaction. So our tutors and e-tutors must play a major role in this aspect. To ensure quality of tutors/e-tutors, we try to hire those with ample teaching experience and who are already in the teaching profession. This is based on the assumption that those who are already excelling at their day jobs are likely to be good tutors too. These are the ones who will be able to inject the passion for learning into learners. However, such tutors are rare and sometimes we do come across certain ‘black sheep’ that we will weed out from the system.

Dr David: If the passion for teaching can be inculcated, how would you advise our tutors who want to inculcate the same?

Prof Widad: Show your passion first; teach by doing because you are the role model – just as parents are role models to children. I believe passion and enthusiasm have the ability to spread. So tutors should come prepared to tutorials – do extra reading, provide your learners with supporting resources, and prepare your own presentation slides; don’t just read from the module.

“My own philosophy is based on the acronym ‘HATI’, which stands for ‘Hikmah, Amanah, Taqwa and Ikhlas’.”

The most effective approach for teaching and learning is to come prepared to share your knowledge.

Dr David: Can you tell us something about FEL’s future plans?

Prof Widad: For the immediate future, FEL has a few plans. These include ensuring that the quality of our programmes are on par with the offerings of other well-established institutions; enhancing modules for programmes that have reached their four- or five-year cycles; enhancing the quality of our assignments and examinations; providing better support services; improving our contribution to the Ministry of Education’s teacher training programme (Program Pensiswazahan Guru); and finally, offering more language-based programmes.

Dr David: Any last words for OUM tutors?

Prof Widad: Although OUM tutors serve on a part-time basis, I would like to consider them as part of the faculty. As such, they must share our shared values and aim for similar objectives. For tutors involved with the training of in-service teachers, I hope they will strive to develop them to become better teachers as these teachers are the ‘developers’ of our future.

I always encourage my learners to develop their own foundation/philosophy as teachers; so I am encouraging tutors to do the same too. My own philosophy is based on the acronym ‘HATI’, which stands for ‘Hikmah, Amanah, Taqwa and Ikhlas’.

Finally, I would like to thank all tutors for serving OUM, and FEL specifically. Please keep up the good work! **TCX**

*** Dr David CL Lim is the Programme Coordinator of OUM’s Bachelor of English Studies, Master of English Studies and the forthcoming Diploma in English for Professional Development.**

ARE YOU A CARROT, AN EGG OR A COFFEE BEAN?

A young woman was grumbling to her mother about life and how things were so hard. It seemed that, as one problem was solved, a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. When the water came to a boil, she placed carrots in the first pot, some eggs in the second, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. After twenty minutes, she turned off the burners. She removed the carrots and placed them in a bowl. She placed the eggs in another bowl and ladled the coffee into another. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me, what do you see?"

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," the young woman matter-of-factly replied. The mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After peeling off the shell, she observed that it had become a hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, "What does this all mean, mother?"

Her mother explained that each object had faced the same adversity – boiling water – but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the heat, it softened and became weak.

The egg had been fragile and delicate, with a thin outer shell to protect its liquid interior. But after twenty minutes of boiling, it turned hard inside!

However, the ground coffee beans were unique. They had, in fact, transformed the water into something else.

"Which are you?" the mother asked. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

Think: which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong but, come difficulties, do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable



One who is like the bean can learn to overcome challenges, get better and change the situation when things are at their worst.

heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit but, after some kind of hardship, does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart? Or am I like the coffee bean? One who is like the bean can learn to overcome challenges, get better and change the situation when things are at their worst.

When the hours are the darkest and trials are greatest, do you elevate to another level? How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean? TCX

*Adapted from <http://www.rogerdarlington.co.uk/stories.html#Story12>
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