

TEACHERS' VOICES

STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

VOL. 2



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FOREWORD





MELTA marks a great year with her second volume of 19 adventures in the classroom. It has been heartfelt to find many teachers and educators who are eager to share their classroom experiences. These stories depict one common setting: teachers and students in a classroom. What is unique about the narratives is that each story unravels a new insight and perspective for readers to reflect upon. Indeed, these stories elicit many emotions; happy and sad that will kindle many hearts. Kudos to the authors who have taken great care to pen their great moments as a teacher. These sharing will open many hearts to connect with and have a moment of reflection on their own teaching experiences in the classroom.

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I WAS THERE, I AM HERE

By Nur Alyani Khairol Anuar

MAKING CHOICES

A path is laid out ahead, It forks before your feet. A decision filled with dread. Uncertain of what you'll meet. A game full of chance, Of many hidden pit falls. To find true romance, Dare you risk losing all? Choices never easy to make, Fog seems to cloud your way. You fear making a mistake, Of gambling and losing the day. But life is full of Hard Choices, And risk is part of the game. Be brave, ignore doubting voices, Make the choice, life won't be the same.

Hard Choices by Jojoba Mansell

I still remember the memory where I chose and decided my path today. It was a normal day where I could hear my mom's voice lecturing me for not waking up earlier. She was making a fuss since it was the day I should be having my interview to become a teacher. She called and called my name again and again to make sure I was up and ready for the interview. And that was the day where I had to make a decision. That morning, I was forced to decide what I wanted to be in this life. If before, I can take it slow and push the thought to the back of my mind that day, I was not permitted to do so. While my mother was trying her best to convince me to wake up, I was lying there on the bed doing the heavy thinking.

"Should I go?"

"Is this really what I want?"

"What will happen if I refuse this offer? Will I get this chance again?"

I remembered my friends saying that those who reject the offer will be blacklisted and will not even pass the first-round application should they get the interview again later. It was suffocating at that moment as I was struggling to make a decision.

Then, I told myself, "You know what you want. So go down that road".

As my mom came to my room again to wake me up, I told her "I am not going to the interview". She was shocked and then replied "Is it okay to reject this interview? Won't you be blacklisted from the application?"

I said, "Maybe. But I don't want to be a school teacher".

My mom calmly replied, "So, what do you want to do after this?"

I told her then, "I'm going to pursue my Master's and become a lecturer". My mom, being the best mom ever, told me, "Okay. If you have decided, then be it". I love you mom! She knows that it is of no use to force me to do something I don't like. After a while, I heard her phone rang and from her conversation, I knew it was my dad on the line. I still remember her words to my father at that time. She said, "She does not want to go. She does not want to be a teacher." I guess my father can only say okay at that time since I have made my decision. So that's how I decided that I am going to be a lecturer.

LESSONS LEARNT

I teach.
Ideas and words are my business.
I toss them into the air
and watch them float
softly
as Autumn leaves
(though with much less color and grace).

They float around your heads, drift in piles on your desktops, glide along your sleeves and whisper – dance around your ears.

Someday
one may catch your attention,
and inspire you with its color –
at least for a season.

A Teaching Fantasy by Margaret Hatcher

I am one who always tries to find something to do during my study break. While I was still an undergraduate, I signed up to be a tuition teacher. That was my first experience tutoring other kids. Even though I was only a tuition teacher, I did notice my passion in teaching. I tried hard to make sure that my students could understand my lesson. I bought books out of my own money for references. Even though my first intention was to earn some pocket money, I eventually spent it for reference and exercise books for my tuition work. Nevertheless, I felt satisfied. I felt empowered when I could do what I wanted with my lesson and gave them the best of me. I guess, the passion has already manifested itself in me at that time. I just did not realize it sooner. I came back to that tuition centre every study break and signed myself up as a tutor. Each time, I taught for about 1 – 2 months, depending on my study break. It was a joyous experience teaching in an informal setting. I get to know lots of people. That was where I learned how some students were very motivated to improve themselves. I felt proud looking at their enthusiasm in learning.

My early teaching experience mostly dealt with young students from primary and secondary schools. However, I remember one opportunity given to me to tutor adult students. The tuition centre opened a new language program for adult learners. They asked me to be the tutor. Me at that time, not having a little bit of experience teaching adults, took up the offer. At that time, I had no worries. I was such a naïve university student who had a thought that there was no big difference in teaching young or adult students. I was very confident when I first entered their class. But my confidence started

to fall apart when I saw them in real life. They were so different from the young kids I used to teach. They seemed to be more matured and rougher. Seeing my awkwardness, they tried to make the class a little bit more cheerful by trying to converse with me. I was so lucky for not being eaten alive by my own adult students. That was when I realised that I should have not taken the matter lightly. I realised that I needed to change the way I treated them. They should not be treated like young kids. I could not remember much of the details, but I remembered how they showed their respect to me even though I was much younger than them. It was one blissful experience, and I am grateful that I took up the offer.

Towards the end of my degree programme, we needed to undergo practicum. I was assigned to a secondary school in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. I was placed in the same school together with my other two course mates. That was my first formal teaching experience in a school. I still remember my mentor's name, Miss Foo. She was immensely helpful and kind. She taught me what I needed to do and what I should anticipate from the students. She was always there whenever I needed her help. I was assigned a form one and a form two classes. My first time stepping into the class, the students looked very bright and active. I started taking over the class from Miss Foo and that was how I learned that teaching is more than telling them and making them understand the lesson. There were students from various backgrounds in the class. Some came from better households; some came from financially struggling families. Teaching them was fun. Apart from their mischievous actions, they were good. I remembered they would come to me and surround me, asking me everything and telling me everything. Everyone wanted to report something. It was fun. The rapport and connection between them and me at that time was priceless. I started to learn about their personal lives and their families. They even asked me about the type of perfume I was using, since I always smelled nice, they said. They wanted to connect through social media and asked for my social media account. Now, I can see most of them have grown up and succeeded in their own choice of life path.

During my practicum, I was also assigned as relief teachers for multiple times. I remembered moments where I was assigned as relief teachers for the weak classes. Those experiences were unforgettable as that was my first time experiencing what I have only seen on television so far. I got to experience the feeling of being ignored and mocked by students! They were nothing like my classes. They were very different. I tried my best to hold a conversation with them, but the majority of them paid no attention to me at all. Some were playing at the back, some were sleeping, some were going in and out of class without permission and some were just daydreaming. I was enraged and felt belittled by their actions. I straight away labelled them as problematic students. I then paid no attention to them and just sat on my chair doing my own work. I talked about this to my other practicum friends as well as other teachers. That was the moment I was told the truth about the weak classes. According to the teachers, most of the students in the weak classes came from low economic families. They worked whenever they were not in school. Some of them had to take care of their little brothers and sisters since their parents were working. They came to school to relax. That was why some of them slept in the classroom. They were tired since they needed to do lots of other things outside of school. I was quite taken aback when I heard the teachers. It never crossed my mind that they might be having a rough life outside. That was an eye-opening moment for me. At that time, I learnt something valuable. To never judge a student. No matter how bad they are, as a teacher, I must always try to learn more about them. Try to understand why they behave the way they are. I remembered one of the teachers told me to just let this one student sleep. He had to work even at night to help his family. He was not interested in studying but he still came to school as school has become his escape place. He could have his rest at school and back to his rough life when he stepped outside of school.

Even now as lecturer, I still encounter these types of students. Those who work whenever they can. With covid pandemic affecting everyone, many students started to find jobs to bring in pocket money. There were several cases where students were in the middle of their job when they joined online live class sessions. It somehow made me proud knowing that they still prioritize their study even when they were working outside. This can be a good experience for them too. They will get to know the real world with real working experience.

PAST, PRESENT

Tell me, tell me, smiling child,
What the past is like to thee?
'An Autumn evening soft and mild
With a wind that sighs mournfully.'
Tell me, what is the present hour?
'A green and flowery spray
Where a young bird sits gathering its power
To mount and fly away.'
And what is the future, happy one?
'A sea beneath a cloudless sun;
A mighty, glorious, dazzling sea
Stretching into infinity.'

Past, Present, Future by Emily Brontë

Once I have become a lecturer, one thing that I noticed is the students' attitude. I could not help but to compare the way they bring themselves with how I used to act. Students nowadays are more matured and braver. They are more verbal in expressing their opinions. That is good since it will make class more productive and livelier. I love when there are some heated discussions in class and students voice out their thoughts on any issues being discussed. I used to be quite shy during my study years and I rarely voiced my opinion. It was not towards the end of my degree year that I started to gain more confidence and started to take part in discussion. Therefore, I feel good seeing students nowadays are more verbal and confident in voicing out their thoughts.

However, I also noticed some apparent differences in terms of students' manners towards their lecturers. This is pretty obvious when communicating through the phone. I remembered back in my days, my friends and I, we would check the text repeatedly, just to make sure it is free from language errors and looked as formal as it should be. Never would we forget to start with greetings and self-introduction. We would also make sure not to text the lecturer outside of office hours or during the weekend unless it was an emergency. However, some students nowadays., did not even hesitate to text their lecturer even at 1 a.m.

Manners and attitudes towards lecturers are something that I believe should be nurtured again in our students' personality. Some have forgotten to show respect and manners when they are communicating with their teachers or lecturers. Oftenly, I come across postings in social media where employers talk about the attitudes and manners of our young fresh graduates. Their lack of professionalism and manners can be seen from the way they constructed their email and even in the way they named their documents to be submitted to potential employers. This is not a simple issue to be put aside. This is one of the reasons why I always stress out the importance of manners and attitudes to my students. It is not about the issue of feeling superior and wanting the students to bow down to us, it is more to the issue of respecting others and acting accordingly.

I always remind my students that they are young adults, and they should behave like one and get treated like one. I always encourage them to speak for themselves and bear responsibility for their own actions. When students enter university, I believe that they should be trained to be proper and responsible adults. Some students may find this challenging since they are not accustomed to this way of learning. However, I can see many students being able to understand and try their best in their studies since they know, once they flop, they must bear the consequences. Some have even thought about their career path from the beginning of their university years. They already know what they want to be and what they need to do to ensure their success. Since they already have the goal, they started to build their way to ensure their success. This is very remarkable to see the students feel encouraged and determined to achieve what they aim for themselves.

STANDING STILL

Be like the willow that bends, shade that it sends, peace that it lends.

During the breeze its leaves will appease and shift with ease.

Enduring, alluring, maturing. Be like the willow that bends.

Note to self by Donna Marie

Being an educator for years, I have learnt a lot and I am expecting to learn a lot more. When I teach, I also learn from my students. I learn as much as I teach. There are lots of things to love when I teach. I love seeing the faces of my students. Looking at their bright faces waiting for their lecturer to teach them is something that I will treasure forever. They make me feel motivated and encouraged to teach them. I also love seeing my students pour their heart and soul when in class. It is amazing to look at them presenting their brilliant ideas and perspectives. And sometimes, their view and opinion can even shake your belief in something! I love to see how my students grow up and improve themselves. The improvement is sometimes so amazing that I couldn't help feeling proud of them. There was a time where I had a student who was very shy. She couldn't even say anything when I asked her to present in front. She would just stand in front looking down to the floor and kept quiet. I purposely called her names many times and asked her to respond to my questions. However, it was very hard to listen to her saying anything. I kept on encouraging her to try and put her insecurities away. It was hard at the beginning. There was a time where she broke down and cried in front of the class! She just felt that she couldn't do it. She believed that she was not good in English, and she felt embarrassed to speak in front of her classmates because of that. Nonetheless, her wonderful classmates were supportive and never did they mock her for not being able to speak. Throughout the semester, I saw her improvement. From a very introverted person, she blossomed to be a wonderful student. She managed to present in front and was able to voice out her opinion on issues being discussed in class. At the end of the semester, she came to see me and told me how grateful she was for being able to overcome her shyness. She said she was so scared and had no confidence in the beginning but managed to finally stand in front of the class and speak in English! How could I not love teaching when I can experience something this wonderful in my life?

Teaching is not just a mere process of delivering knowledge, it is more than that. When we teach, we indirectly involve ourselves in our students' lives. I am proud to be there for my students and help them grow to be the best they can. Even teaching profession was never my first choice during my childhood years, now I cannot see myself other than as an educator.

'A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instil a love of learning'

- Brad Henry-



THE AUTHOR

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FOUR 'SPECIAL' YEARS OF GROWING

by Nur Amalina Mohd Sharif, Nurhidayah Mohd Sharif

First day of Teaching

I remember my first day of being a service teacher in a totally strange place. I was optimistic about carrying myself in the best image. To begin with, I am a socially awkward person who gets really intimidated in a new environment but after some time, I can easily blend myself in. So, on the first day, I came to the school in a blue baju kurung with a floral print on it. I always think that I look best in blue, hence that was the choice I made for a historical day of my life: day 1 of being employed. I remember I was assigned to be a teacher for Language Lab and the bright-eyed principal was explaining to me excitedly about his vision to see me transform this one room into a Language Lab. I was certainly honoured for being given such a role but there was one problem. I was literally alone in that room and was thinking of how to make friends. I was just opening my laptop, seemingly looking for inspiration on how to transform this room but deep down. I was insanely conscious of how I should carry myself today. Once in a while, random teachers came into that room to take some stuff and I was doing my best to return the smile they gave me. As I was too scared to initiate the conversation, I pretended to look busy with my laptop when in reality I was sweating nervously underneath my blue baju kurung.

Around 12.00 p.m. or so, the principal visited me and asked me to have my lunch with other teachers in another building. I replied "Sure, will do. Thanks!" and continued feeling panicked about how I should mingle with other teachers. Wild thoughts started to attack my brain "What if they don't like you?" "What if nobody wants to talk to you?" "What if they just ignore you?" and all the "What ifs..." kept running into my brain as I was walking to the building. After I arrived, I made a pitstop to a washroom, trying to gather some courage to meet with my new friends. As I walked out of the washroom, I finally decided to make a detour and went back to the Language Lab, alone. The school ended at 3.30 p.m. and I joined the dismissal (awkwardly of course) and drove myself home sharp at 4.00 p.m. So there went my first day as a teacher. Awkward. Nervous. Starving.

Looking back, it was so silly of me to be unnecessarily conscious of what people think of me when in reality, people just have no time to think about me as the school is never less than being chaotic, so my first-day presence was literally no one's tiniest affair. So, to all new teachers out there, if you are reading this, please do not be silly like me starving yourself the whole day just because you are scared to make conversation with new people. There is always a beginning to a story, and that was mine, which could have been way better. Today, whenever there is a new teacher in the school, I will be the first one welcoming and entertaining them to make them feel comfortable because I know how it feels to feel awkward, shy and conscious to initiate a conversation.

Special Kid 1

Ali had a habit of wandering around inquisitively. His face is always full of questions that the world might not be able to answer. He did not have many friends because his peers think he was not a nice boy. It was not uncommon for a boy like Ali to be labelled 'problematic'. He did not like to study, he did not listen to his teacher in his class, he sometimes punched his friend, and blurted things people don't like to hear like the 'f' word. But one thing is for sure, I like this boy.

All thanks to Cathy Glass who taught me that there is hope in every child, including those the world perceives as 'problematic' and 'unteachable'. And that is exactly why I signed up to be a teacher. I want to meet these kids and help them manoeuvre their path in life. I believe that the primary schooling stage is critical in giving learners the right mould so that they can grow up to be holistically developed: academically, socially, emotionally, psychologically and physically. I also believe that children are entitled to be happy and carefree by nature because they do not carry the burdens that adults do. Therefore, one of the main reasons I wanted to be a primary teacher is also because I want to be in this happy environment where 'problems' are defined as 'friend cutting the line', 'I do not get to answer the question', 'he took my food', 'he sits at my place' and other first-world problems from the lens of these mini-humans.

With Ali, even though he was sent to the office many times as his offences were usually regarded as more serious ones and had to be resolved with the coordinator's involvement, I always thought he's cute and innocent. My past readings have helped me identify 'special' kids quite easily and once I identified them as 'special', I will automatically connect with them differently.

There was one day I was surprised looking at him drenched in water and was even more surprised to find out that he jumped into the fishpond to 'swim'. He went out of the pond soaking wet and asked for a changed outfit from our teacher assistant. I was there witnessing his 'innocent' behaviour and went asking,

"What happened Ali?"

"I jumped into the pond," innocently.

"Why did you?" I asked, curiously.

"Because... I wanted to feel. I thought it's a swimming pool, but it's not,"

"Right. So, you were curious to find out whether you can swim in the pond like you can do in the swimming pool is it?" I continued asking, trying to put his thinking into words.

"Yea...," he admitted reluctantly while looking down.

"Alright Ali. So, tell me how do you feel about it? Was it nice?" I was leading him to locate his feelings.

"No. I don't like it. It's not nice at all!" he said persistently.

"Okay. So, I know you've been wanting to test the water and now you did, and you learned you don't like it. Would you jump inside the pond again?" That was a metacognitive strategy to make the child think over his action and what he could have done, and what he will do in the future.

"No!" he reaffirmed.

"Ok good, now let's change."

That was how I first connected with Ali and learned that he was an autistic child. There

were a few signs that led to my suspicion such as his poor eye contact, his lack of emotional skills, his language structure which is very simple and often focuses on the same subject of interest. Of course, my suspicion at first was based on my reading on autism, but I have no clinical evidence to confirm that until it was confirmed by his own mother when we first met. When I met his mother the first time, the mother expressed how frustrating it was to raise him alone for the husband had left him after finding out the boy was not normal. It was heart-breaking thinking how adults can be so selfish running away from the problem, thinking it will lead to a problem-free zone. Knowing the fact that he was raised fatherless, I became more sympathetic and empathetic towards him. Whenever I got the chance to see him, especially during recess or dismissal, we often had a talk and I truly enjoyed his random honest expressions.

I remember one day when Ali came to my room growling in anger and said he needed to be here for a while. I asked him,

"What's the matter, Ali?"

"Ray doesn't wanna be my friend?"

"How do you know?"

"He doesn't wanna work with me!"

"Okay, Ali. Listen to me. We all have choices. We can do what we like, work with who we like, and that does not mean we do not want to be friends with those we don't work with," I explained to him slowly.

"No! He doesn't wanna be my friend."

"No honey, that's what you said. I believe he did not say that, did he?"

"He just wants to work with Syaiful!"

"Okay, Ali. Let him be. You can work with another friend too. Okay, Ali come on. Let's take a break."



I took him to the fishpond and let him sit on the bridge. The bridge was over the pond, right in the middle of the pond. It was the kids' favourite spot during recess and dismissal time, observing the fishes swim around and little turtles revealing and hiding their heads, enjoying being the kids' show. I asked Ali to dip his legs in the pond, close his eves and take a deep breath. I asked him to repeat that 3 times while I took a glass of water for him. After that, I passed him the water and let him drink. I then checked on him again, asking,

"How are you feeling now, better?" "Yes."

"Great!" I learned that a lot of autistic kids find peace with water. Water calms them down. After he was calm, I continued making him feel comfortable, talking about other things and if he had jokes to share with me. We chatted and after around 5 minutes, I asked him to go back to his class. He did.

With autistic children, one should restore patience in dealing with them and know the right strategies. Most importantly, be their friend. Once they see us as their friend and are able to relate to us, they will trust us and be more accepting of our advice. The concept applies across all humans where we listen to those we trust. Therefore, adults need to earn the children's trust alike.



In a few years in the school, Ali had improved, especially in the emotional aspects. He could better relate himself with his friends and was no longer using physical language to get what he wants. In fact, his report card also mentioned all the social and academic improvements he had made that brought the mother to tears. However, one day, I received news that Ali could not continue his study with us anymore due to the financial issues the family was having. Honestly, I was really worried about Ali's future. A kid like Ali needs a supportive and accepting environment for him to grow. I know how the outside world can be mean to special kids like Ali, but I know there was little I could do to help Ali but continued praying for his well-being.

Early this year, I received even more heart-breaking news of Ali. His mother passed away. All this while, he was raised by the gentle mother alone, without a father figure. He never met nor knew who his father was. The moment I read the message in my WhatsApp, I immediately wept. I cannot imagine how he is doing now. Until today, I have no single idea how Ali is doing, but I pray he is always protected and taken care of because he is such a sweet boy.

Special Kid 2

Amanda was a cheerful 12-year-old girl who was obsessed with dragons and Greek mythology. Wherever she went, she would leave a dragon footprint (her signature) which made it obvious that she 'had been' to that place. For example, if she read a book in an aisle in the library, she would literally leave a piece of paper with a dragon drawing to indicate that she was there. I have no idea why she'd do that but with autistic children, their mind is programmed differently, and routine is something that they are good at. With that being said, I am totally prepared for what it would take if we try to change their routine, and that explains why a lot of autistic children out there would throw tantrums when they are asked to do something that is out of their routines.

Amanda hated Mathematics and she would always find a way to 'escape' from the Maths class and when she did that, she would be hanging out in my room, reading Percy Jackson on the floor with her legs dancing in the air. That was her in a relaxed state. I just let her be because she did not disturb other teachers except that when she took a break from her Percy Jackson, she would come and ask me how I am doing and some random, curious questions she felt like asking. And I would usually just entertain her questions, taking that as my break from the work I was engrossed in too. We used to force her to stay in the class during Mathematics and all she did was making a lot of noise and comments that ended up disrupting the class. So, we accepted that she did not like Maths and would not force her for that. Even though Amanda was not good at Maths, she had exceptional general knowledge. When asked about other things around the world in general, she could really tell you all the facts that you never knew. When she reads, her brain absorbs the information like a sponge, yet with numbers, there was some sort of a blockage that stopped her from accepting it. Yet, she excelled in her own way.

She was also a funny person naturally, and quite sneaky too. There was one time I remember when we had our morning assembly routine and Amanda was out of my sight. Usually, if she wasn't standing in the line, she would roam around that area and came to me asking when will the assembly finish, indicating that she is bored, and I would just tell her "in a bit" and she would go back to her spot agreeably. But that day,

I was not sure where she was and just assumed, she didn't want to join the assembly and could be in her classroom. After we finished the assembly, we dismissed, and I went to my office. Suddenly my office mate muttered, "Eh, how come my wrap is half-eaten? I haven't opened it."

I immediately turned and saw her half-eaten KFC wrap. There were four of us in the room as our teacher's office were all small rooms consisting of 4-6 teachers. We were all curious and amused at the same time. Like, who could have a heart to eat somebody's food and just leave the evidence there ruthlessly. Then I found a shred of evidence. A crystal-clear evidence of the culprit. The dragon. No wonder she disappeared during the assembly. She was busy eating the KFC wrap. We all laughed amusingly thinking how unexpected Amanda can be. But to me, a mistake is a mistake, and that action is morally unacceptable, and therefore I needed to talk to her nicely. Of course, my colleague didn't mind at all that her KFC wrap was half-eaten by a 'special' student who knew little of empathy but that doesn't mean she can get away with it. She needed to be explained what is right and what is wrong, and this is what I personally think society should understand. There should be a balance in educating the special children, especially when it comes to behaviour. It doesn't mean that we have to always give them a free pass, yet behavioural issues should be tackled with careful and deliberate actions so that we resolve the issue, rather than react to their behaviour.

I went upstairs to her class and found her in her usual state at her desk, engrossed in her Percy Jackson and audibly chuckled at times. I called her and asked her for a chat outside the class. Honestly, she knew why I was there. I could tell from her unhidden smiles telling me 'Ups I did it again' non-verbally.

So, I asked her, "Amanda, is there anything you wanna tell me?

"Nope!" she answered in an instant.

"Hmm, are you sure?" I tried to 'fish' her with my I-know-what-you-did-last-assembly expression.

"Nope!" she asserted. This time, her smile was even more obvious.

"Okay then maybe I have something to tell you. Well, you know what? This morning, Teacher Ayra's KFC was eaten by somebody. Pity her. She found it already half-eaten. Maybe you could tell me who ate that." I narrated, trying to trap her.

"Fine! I'm hungry," she admitted not innocently.

"Well, Amanda. Maybe next time if you are really hungry, it's best if you could ask permission. I'm sure Teacher Ayra would love to give the whole KFC to you," I advised.

"I'm sorry teacher," she said admittingly.

"Well, I'm not the one who you should say sorry to. You have to say sorry to Teacher Ayra and tell her you are so hungry, and you will never do that again to her or anyone else. Can you do that?" I asked.

"Okay. I'll do that."



And we both went downstairs, and she apologised to my colleague and Ayra pretended like it was a serious business and advised her accordingly. When she left our room, we all laughed our hearts out. It was funny thinking how cute the crime was, especially the dragon part.

Amanda is 15 today. She is now in a new school, pursuing her passion for digital art. The last time we met was during our school event, and she is still that same old sweet, smart girl I always enjoy talking to.

My fourth year of teaching

Today, I am four years old in my teaching career and four years is still considered a novice teacher. There are so many ways ahead that I have yet to pave and explore. However, throughout these four years of teaching, I learned that teaching is truly a combination of 'hard' and 'heart' work. You can't choose one at the expense of the other. It takes passion to make you steadfast in doing your teaching job because let's face it, education is never a lucrative business, to begin with. If you choose to be a teacher to be rich, you have entered the wrong field. I must say, teaching is like gardening. The act of seeding, watering, fertilising and grooming the children and see them grow and flourish will fill your heart and that is the most rewarding payment for teachers. Especially with the special kids who need a different set of 'tools' to grow, their presence throughout my teaching journey has put more weight and honour to my title as a teacher. Flashback to my first, nerve-wracking day of teaching, I must say, as I grow my students, I grow myself even more.



THE AUTHORS

Nur Amalina Mohd Sharif holds a Bachelor Degree in TESOL from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is currently working as the Head of Language Department in IDRISSI International School, Iskandar Puteri while studying in her third semester of TESL Master's degree in UiTM Puncak Alam. She has been teaching primary learners for five years now and she loves reading and vlogging during her free time. She always believes that a little bit of kindness goes a long way.



Nurhidayah Mohd Sharif holds both her Bachelor and Master Degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). She is now pursuing her Doctoral Degree in Language and Communication in Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Teknologi Malaysia. She enjoys listening to music, travelling and cooking as much as teaching. She loves learning about arts and culture. She believes that learning comes from unexpected places, and one should not underestimate the little things in life.

'CIKGU KEPALA HIJAU'

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aminabibi Bte Saidalvi

Amina, are you a dedicated teacher? Have you imparted sufficient knowledge to your students? Have you inspired your students to become better and more successful people in whatever they do? Will you live on forever in the minds and hearts of your students? These questions keep lingering in my mind daily, although I have been in this profession for almost 29 years.

My passion for teaching as a profession started when I was assisting my neighbour's children in studies. The wisdom statement from my beloved late father — "You will become a teacher one day" kept me more motivated to pursue my passion. However, when my application to join a teacher training college was rejected twice, I lost hope of becoming a teacher. I started working in a bank, where I found myself an alien in the glamorous banking world. I was in charge of the credit department and was always praised for my friendly and excellent customer service. But deep in my heart, I know this is not what I want, this is not where I should belong, but half-heartedly I continued the routine of a bank staff until the magic spell of my father came in the form of an offer letter to join a teacher training college. A primary school English teacher was where I started this noble profession.



A dedicated Pacific Bank staff though my heart was longing to be a teacher

After 30 months of learning the ropes of teaching, I proudly graduated from the teaching proudly, receiving the best student award. The very special audience for me, besides my loving parents and caring husband at the moment of receiving the award, was the little lady inside me sharing the joy of standing on stage as I was eight months pregnant.



Receiving the best teacher trainee award in 1993

Unfortunately, my hopes, motivation, and aspirations crumbled and shattered in front of the headmaster of the school I was posted to when he directed me to teach Mathematics and Bahasa Melayu. "I am equipped with all the English language teaching skills and techniques, but you are giving me subjects I hated even when I was a school student, Sir. Please, oh please allow me to teach English". I was screaming in my heart. However, I didn't give up, and I approached him many times until finally, he was fed up with my appeal and allowed me to teach all the Year 1 classes. I had fun and joy teaching the small kids though daily, I returned home exhausted.

After six months of teaching Year 1, the headmaster dropped the bomb that he wanted me to teach Year 6. It was a significant jump from fun to exam-oriented classes, Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR). I diverted my full attention to ensuring students scored good marks in the examination though I knew I was trying to murder The National Education Philosophy (Falsafah Pendidikan Negara). It was drilled into my mind that I must holistically develop my students' potential with high moral standards so that they will be responsible and contribute to the harmony and betterment of the nation. But here I am, drilling the exam papers and techniques of scoring A for English language paper. I felt horrible for a few months until I reverted to making my class fun and exciting for students. I played games, sang self-created songs, went around the school compound running and jumping for treasure hunt activities, and connected students with the school community like the cleaner, security guard, other subject teachers, and the headmaster. Little did I know that these fun activities boosted my students' interest in learning English. Not much effort was needed to drill them for examination. If the students are happy, they understand better and score high marks in the exam. If the exam results are excellent, the headmaster and I will be happy, which was what I learnt.





Students enjoyed outings and fun activities

After three years of teaching only Year 6, I felt I needed some fresh air, new challenges, and new energy. I needed to progress and share my knowledge with a broader audience. So, I decided to pursue my first degree at Universiti Malaya with a scholarship from the government. It wasn't a bed full of red roses as I had to travel to Kuala Lumpur when I already had two toddlers at home. For three years, commuting between Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur was a weekend routine. It was the most challenging time for my husband and me, but I graduated with flying colours, making my family proud of me. I was then posted to a secondary school, where I transformed into a 'monster'. I was appointed as a discipline teacher in a new school, and most of the students were the notorious bunch who were 'parcelled' to us from the nearby schools. Bullying and gangsterism were the everyday challenges I faced, and it was more common to see police officers than parents visiting the school. The hilarious part was when my name became famous in the girls' and boys' toilets. "Cikgu Amina Kepala Hijau", "Nyah Kau Cikgu Amina, "Pergi kau dari sini" and lots of other uncensored phrases were written on the toilet walls as the stress escapism of the students who exceedingly hated the discipline teacher. But, I was cool about it and elected some of them to become the prefects and student leaders. Many of my colleagues doubted my idea but, it worked. The students felt proud and started to follow the rules and gave ideas for the betterment of the school.

Later after two years, I joined the tertiary education system. This is where God has planned for me to pursue my Master's degree, and immediately after, I embarked on my doctorate study at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Teaching university students were also quite challenging for me initially, especially teaching international students. Sometimes, their expectations from you will cripple your nerves until you feel you cannot function as an educator. But, I stayed positive and only saw opportunities to learn from my challenges. The most important thing is confidence. I will never forget to put on a pleasant smile and cheerful voice every time I entered a class, even if I was not in a good mood or felt depressed. I believe that the first impression you make when you walk into the classroom each day has a significant impact on the success of the lesson that day. But, of course, I have to master my stuff before walking confidently into the room.



A photo session is a must at the end of every semester

I have gathered sufficient life experiences in teaching, and I must admit that teaching is sometimes sickening and sometimes horrible, but there are always heart-touching moments that make you feel alive again. Believe me when I say that teaching is not for those who want to make money but rather for those who enjoy seeing the glitter in the eyes of the students when they have grasped the lesson of the day or the challenges they need to solve with your guidance. The phrase 'Thank you, teacher' is the greatest compliment that a student can give to a teacher. In fact, when a student (whom you have taught long ago) contacts you via social media or approaches you in the supermarket or restaurant, will make you feel appreciated and honoured.

As I grew wiser and older in the profession, I realised that teachers are agents of change in the education system. We are responsible for moulding our children for the future challenging world and sharing ideas and knowledge with other teachers. The pandemic Covid-19 has caused tremendous improvement in the approaches to teaching. Sharing knowledge between teachers from all over the world became the new norm in education. Technology helped me connect with teachers from other parts of the world, and I started English language teaching webinars to fellow teachers from all over the world. I have since spent time teaching, reflecting on my teaching, training teachers, and writing. Becoming a connected teacher through social media and online platforms allowed me to become more involved with teaching English and education in general and more open-minded to the latest teaching trends. Most importantly, I have learnt to embrace changes for the progress of the education system.

Teaching English is my passion and cup of tea. I am proud to say that I will be celebrating my pearl anniversary as a teacher on 1 December 2023, and I have no regrets about the profession God has planned for me. Actually, I cannot possibly see myself doing anything else besides teaching! This is the most rewarding profession for me and for many teachers out there. You will always have challenges and opportunities to explore, connect and share. I hope I have enticed you, readers, to love teaching and be a life influencer to the centennials out there.



THE AUTHOR

Dr. Aminabibi Bte Saidalvi is an Associate Professor from the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor (UiTM), Pasir Gudang Campus. She has first-hand experience moving students from the unknown to experts in the field of English language education. Her mission is to share her vast knowledge and expertise to help students be successful in standing out from the crowd and build strong self-confidence in using the English language when facing the world, especially in the era of the Industrial Revolution (IR). She believes education is the most powerful weapon to transform the world, and a teacher can start from the classroom.

ELYSIAN

by Nur Sherina Binti Zainal Abidin

In the middle of a warm Monday morning, I was driving down a lengthy street, with sun rays gently caressing against my skin, my mind began to wander. Hundreds of possibilities in my head were playing like film carriers, the voices echoing my brain. Is this it?

I wondered.

As I drove down the road that would take me to my destination, I tried to distract my mind by turning on the radio and listening to some music. It worked a little. The announcer's speech, followed by a few tunes blaring through the car's roof, was meant to distract me, but as I am nearing my destination, I can hear my heartbeat thumping through my chest, and cold sweat begins to form around my brow. I ultimately made it to the location where I wanted to go. I hurriedly grabbed my belongings and left my car.

"Good morning, teacher!"

The path was greeted by a high-pitched voice that had a tinge of excitement in it as I made my way through it. The moment she began to grin, displaying her beautiful smile and looked up in my direction, her eyes sparkled brilliantly with excitement. Nothing I could say could adequately describe the warmth that enveloped me as soon as she smiled at me, and all of my concerns and problems vanished at the sight of her beaming face. I remained there for a few moments, allowing my thoughts to collect around me.

"Hello and good morning! Good morning!" I responded with the greatest of delight.

Once more, she smiled at me and flashed her stunning set of teeth before skipping away to join her companions. I could not help but smile my heart out with a wide grin on my face.

It's finally here: my first day of school. The memory of my first day as an educator is still so fresh in my mind, lingering at the back of my head.

We are referred to as an educator, a teacher, a speaker, and a facilitator, among other titles. Each word has a significant amount of responsibility, given its same goal and intensity. I am overjoyed to be able to share my experiences as an educator as part of this initiative.

When we hear the word "educator" mentioned, what is the first thing that springs to mind for most people? What kind of pictures or scenarios do you think your mind would flash through? We are referred to a variety of titles such as educator, teacher, professor, and facilitator, each of which carries a significant responsibility, as well as a common purpose and enthusiasm.

This question took me back to a time when a teacher inspired me to pursue a career as an educator, which is now my current full time passion. With the brightest eyes and the

most enchanting smile, she was the loveliest soul you had ever laid your eyes on. She reminds me of a rainbow after a rainy day in almost every way possible.

You could have a bad experience if it's your first time at a school full of shouting children where everything seems strange and noisy. There I was standing in the middle of a big gathering of children, trying to make sense of what was going on and wondering why my parents weren't present. I was in the middle of a sea of strangers when one specific angel moved up and took my hand in hers. While she knew I was on the verge of tears, she held my hands in a calming manner and told me that everything would be okay. The small gesture she made had a significant impression on me, and I still think about it whenever I recall this incident. As it should have been, she has been assigned to my class as an English instructor, which is exactly what I wanted. Classes felt like a fresh air breeze with her. She infused every class with enthusiasm, ensuring that everyone felt comfortable, and we had a great time while studying. The learning experience, which she provided me with, assisted me in gaining knowledge and understanding of the subject. She has no idea how she has sparked a drive in me to become who I am today, instilling a desire in my spirit to pursue a career in education, and molding me to try to be a better version of myself for the rest of my life.

Throughout my teaching career, I've realized that there is no single best way to complete any task, no matter how simple it may seem, such as marking an essay or teaching the ABCs. My previous belief that everything had to be rigorous and up to date has been dispelled, but it is critical to recognize that flexibility is the key to becoming a creative teacher. Getting to know your audience is critical, and this can be accomplished by identifying the different types of pupils who are present in the classroom. Many different types of students are classified primarily into seven different categories, including auditory and musical learners, visual and spatial learners, verbal learners, logical and mathematical learners, physical and kinaesthetic learners, social and interpersonal teachers, and finally the solo and intrapersonal students. When it comes to understanding the topic, there are tremendous differences in every student's emotions and learning. To be an effective teacher, we must adopt a technique that will work best for the entire class, while also acknowledging that we all have different world perspectives, which might lead to differences in our preferred methods of learning. A thorough understanding of the many various types of learning styles can have a significant impact on how teachers manage students, organize group work, and adjust to individual learning styles in the classroom. If we do not understand and accommodate the diverse learning styles of our pupils, we may eventually cause a small percentage of them to fall behind, which could be the worst nightmare an educator could imagine.

Being an educator comes with a lot of perks. We have our good days and bad days. Sometimes it feels like a blessing in disguise, sometimes you would feel that you need to take a step back, take a break, have a KitKat while lying on the floor staring into the eternal bliss of endless possibilities wondering if you choose the right profession. With hundreds of papers to mark and examine, in the meantime trying to balance out your personal life and social life could be seen as impossible at times while trying to build a good rapport with your students. However, at the end of the day, teaching for me personally is a rewarding profession. Teaching is a fascinating field of study. There are a plethora of lessons to be learned from it. Inspiring students is a wonderful source of motivation for all teachers I must say. They bring with them fresh knowledge, new views, and new points of view to share with the group. If you believe that you have everything figured out, teaching will quickly disprove your assumptions. You will never know everything, and you will undoubtedly gain new information regularly. One does not teach for money, but rather for the satisfaction when you can genuinely see the sparkle or the twinkle in a student's eyes when he or she has grasped a concept that you have taught them or discovered for themselves how to solve a problem as a result of your teaching.

a role as the facilitator to help ease any stress or anxiety the students are experiencing when the teaching and learning process took place. The greatest compliment we can get is when a student whom you may have taught comes up to you randomly then says something like: "I enjoyed your class". This was one of the golden memories that I could not get enough of hearing the whisper of these magical words that could make me feel like I'm floating on cloud nine! "There's nothing more fulfilling than seeing pupils exclaimed with delight when something finally clicks into place and they grasp a concept you've been trying to teach them for a long time. Those "aha!" moments can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Students have no idea how much those simple thoughtful words would have meant the world to an educator. It certainly felt like a good pat on the back after showering our effort in making sure the classroom is conducive for learning to maintain a smooth flow in the delivery of knowledge.



My sweethearts

We, teachers, are constantly referred to as parental figures and role models, and we are expected to be flawless in our performance of our duties and responsibilities in educating the young of today. However, as the adage goes, "nobody is perfect," and this is true of educators as well. When you take on the obligations of an educator, it is not all sunshine and rainbows. It is safe to say that a reasonable amount of blood, sweat, and tears are involved in the process. Taking a step back, for example, and thinking about the worst memory linked with the greatest nightmare any teacher might have had, truth be told, it has absolutely nothing to do with examinations or tests. The fear of not doing enough haunts me at times and the voice in the back of my head that echoes in my mind, like a reminder that perhaps, just perhaps, I am not cut out to be a teacher This was something I encountered frequently during my first year of teaching. I've felt confused and helpless at times, not knowing what to do when chores become too burdensome, students were not as responsive, and I have done everything I possibly could to give it my all. However, I consider myself extremely fortunate to be surrounded by a pleasant and positive environment in which my co-workers were essentially angels masquerading as human beings. It has been quite beneficial for me to receive regular support and words of encouragement to determine what would work best for me as an educator. Having a positive work environment where everyone is celebrated helped to alleviate all the anxiety and negative thinking that I had been harboring for a long period. It is critical to remember that it is acceptable to not be okay at times and that you do not need to figure out everything all at once. Instead, being a teacher is a continuous learning curve, a journey that should be embraced not alone, but with a strong support system in place.

Being in this field of education has taught me many things that shaped me into who I am today. In addition to being a fantastic teacher, being a great communicator is also a required skill. We must engage effectively with their students to effectively impart new material. Of course, not every single teacher on the face of the planet was born to be a gifted communicator. We are all terrified of public speaking, and every single one

of us has suffered from some degree of social anxiety at some point in our lives. Learning to be an educator teaches you how to become a more communicative individual. It demonstrates intrinsic characteristics that were previously unknown. Teaching necessitates the development of interpersonal skills, and developing interpersonal skills necessitates the release of inhibitions. The latter is, without a question, the epitome of a less-than-stressful way of life. You will inevitably lose your patience as a teacher. Adults are prone to have pet peeves and moments of spontaneous aggravation and displeasure and trust me, you are not alone in this. Taking one of my pet peeves as an instance, I greatly despised the pounding and scraping of chairs on the classroom floor during class. It sounded like nails on a chalkboard, and I couldn't stand the sound! I used to be impatient in everything that I'm doing. I could not even spend one second waiting for the advertisement on YouTube to play so I usually ended up smashing my fingers on the skip button to spare me the misery of what seemed to be an eternity of despair. Miraculously, being in a classroom full of raging hormones teenagers stepping in their adolescent stage of life had changed me from being a grumpy walking volcano rebirthing into bubbles and exuberance of positive energy. I learned that empathy is one of the most crucial elements in being a competent educator. You need to be able to walk a mile in your student's shoes to grasp who they are as a person. You also need to show the students that their voices, thoughts, perspectives, and ideas are valid and they all mattered. Our students are most capable of learning and excelling when surrounded by positive interactions. Modeling classroom empathy promotes a stable and healthy relationship between a teacher and a learner. We need to bear in mind that school acts as a sort of heaven and escape for some students that may arrive in the school environment with a wide range of concerns and challenges. To counterbalance that, an empathic teacher promotes encouragement and support and sets suitable parameters for how pupils interact, so that everyone may work safely and overcome cultural, racial, social, and personal challenges.

This brings me to my question: would you consider teaching to be as gratifying as other professions if you were offered the opportunity to quit your job as a teacher in return for the opportunity to keep one million dollars as compensation? Allow that to soak in for a moment, and don't worry, I will not pass judgment on your response because each person is entitled to their own opinion and this is a safe space. As for me, in a heartbeat, I'd say no! Fret not, I am no angel, and trust me, I love money as any sane human being would but the satisfaction I get from going to class and seeing the bright sparkling eyes with wide smiles looking at me while I am settling in, or the "Aha!" moments when my students finally grasped the lesson, or the messages and lovely words of support that I receive at a random time from my ever so affectionate students, I would not trade it for anything else in this world. The fact that I will be able to make a difference in someone's life or memories, will always be my safety net, allowing me to know that I am doing the right thing no matter how difficult the road ahead may seem. There is one particular Chinese proverb that acts as a source of motivation which I would like to include and share at the end of my writing to all the readers, "If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people."



THE AUTHOR

Nur Sherina Binti Zainal Abidin joined UiTM Segamat in November 2020 as an English Lecturer in the Academy of Language Studies. Her area of interest is focused on psychology development of students. Teaching brings the uttermost satisfaction to her and her passion lies in educating the students by implementing different alternative and methodical approaches to ensure a conducive and interactive learning environment. Her personal and favourite quote is from Mark Van Doren, "The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

MS. MYA

by Nurizah binti Md. Ngadiran

When I was young, I was inspired to become an English teacher myself due to the way my English teachers, be it primary, secondary, or tertiary level, carry themselves 'with class'. They seemed to have a very high level of confidence when speaking to their colleagues or students, as they always looked straight in the eye of the other person. At the same time, based on my observation, they're quite attractive! They had the capability in commanding attention from most of their students, including me.

Eventually, I managed to become an English teacher trainee in one of the public universities located in the south of peninsular Malaysia. However, I had none of the characteristics of the English teachers whom I admire. I had no self-confidence. I fidgeted a lot and I would avoid eye-contact during face-to-face communication. My low self-esteem was due to some personal struggles and financial problems.

You see, I had these problems because my then-life partner suggested that I invest a large sum of money on one particular project that he felt might benefit our future financially. To be specific, it was a mobile phone shop located in the heart of Johor Bahru. The initial idea was to, beside selling mobile phones, offer numerous services in relation to telecommunication. It all seemed assuring, as the location of the shop was strategic. I invested on that project using my savings and scholarship arrears. Just like that. I was not afraid to take the risk because I figured, well, how bad can it be... and things might be OK. Well, it did not... And so was our relationship...

It's too late to lock the stable door after the horse has been stolen...

I kept the issues to myself. I didn't inform my parents because at that time, I was so scared that they might lose hope on me. My course mates didn't want to mingle around with me. Some of them were somehow scared that I might borrow their money and would take some time to pay them back. And perhaps, some of them didn't want to be affected by my gloomy mood.

March 31st, 2001 was the day I had a conversation with a person who had managed to change my perception towards life and lift my self-esteem. And thanks to her, I am able to become a better version of myself. This is definitely a story of how an educator had changed the life of a student and changed the perception of how a teacher should be.

On that particular day, I was having another rough day. According to the timetable, I had a class that morning. I literally dragged my feet to the class, and, as always, attended the class just for the sake of attending. I swear that I was day-dreaming most of the time and just couldn't wait for the session to end.

After the class had ended, when I was just about to leave the class, my teacher trainer approached me. "Last week, you didn't attend my class, am I right?" Yes, I skipped the class because I went for an interview for a part time job. I had to do something to cover my expenses here. I just couldn't survive by just borrowing money from random friends

anymore. "I'd given a tutorial task. Would you like me to assist you?" I was touched by the way she approached me and displayed interest in helping me out. "You may come over to my office later, and I'll explain further." I said 'Yes'. Maybe, that time, I felt overwhelmed with complications, that the thought of having a conversation with a lecturer seemed to be a better option.

As promised, I came to her office that afternoon. She greeted me with a huge smile on her face. I rarely asked questions to my lecturers, let alone coming to their office. Ms. Mya, my lecturer, who was also my academic advisor, started to give some explanation pertaining to the task. Suddenly, she asked me a question, "Do you have anything to share with me?" I didn't know how to react to that particular question. And typical me, I clenched my teeth and avoided any possible eye contact.

Bad news travels fast.

"The reason for me asking this is that some trainers had raised their concerns towards your academic performance. Do you have any problems that you would like to share?" I had to admit. I let my personal struggles affect my academic performance. I had to take up a number of part time jobs as I have to settle my debts. Some of my course mates whom I borrowed money from started to share my struggles and problems with other people. It had somehow tarnished my image. I didn't want to be in this position forever.

Ms. Mya listened attentively to my story, and after my last sentence, she uttered, "This is definitely not the worst story that I've ever heard," and she smiled. "I would like to help you out. But you have to promise. Bring me back the 'old' you. The enthusiastic version of you. You, with the ambition to become the best English teacher she can ever be. Just live up to your fullest potential... Remember your promise during your admission interview session? I was one of the interviewers. I still remember every bit of your words... "

I was so shocked with her offer. I took some time to think whether I should accept her help, or politely decline her suggestion. I asked her for some time to think. A few days later, as I was walking past one of my course mates' room, I overheard her talking about me with her roommate. My issues. And how I was taking some time to repay my debts towards her. And the words were quite harsh... and broke my heart... There and then, I had decided to take up Ms. Mya's proposal.

I met Ms. Mya that afternoon. I expressed my agreement, as well as my concerns towards her assistance, as it will involve a sum of money. Ms. Mya suggested that I take a part time job at the university's cafeteria, and I can repay her monthly in the duration of 3 years. And I must be honest with her. I must.

Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

I discovered that it is crucial to have empathy. Ms. Mya had displayed her empathy towards my situation, which I, now, feel is an important characteristic for a teacher. I was facing issues outside the classroom, and Ms. Mya took her time to empathise with my struggles. A person needs to have their struggles being validated. It is crucial for a teacher to become emphatic, as teachers who are not empathetic will be struggling in assisting the students to overcome their trivialities. One of the things that I have learned from Ms. Mya is, as a teacher, it's imperative to be thoughtful towards your students' issues to ensure the students feel that they are in a sheltered atmosphere.

Ms. Mya has also taught me to always be the best version of ourselves. She also always highlighted the importance of hard work. As I grew closer to her, I found that she would not let struggles in her life affect her mood. CHEERFUL is definitely her middle name. I also discovered that she is a good academic advisor as well. She was able to demonstrate

thoughtfulness and patience to her advice. These are among few personality traits that I have improved upon, influenced by her. At the same time, she had also taught me that I shouldn't self-doubt myself. I guess, when an inspiring teacher has faith in you, indirectly, you have the passion to become a better version of you, and always strive for success. Not a day has passed that I pray, I can establish the same personae that she possesses.

Another trait that I think is important as a teacher is being dependable. Since that incident, whenever I felt the need to have a heart-to-heart conversation with someone, I would always find time to see her. I would also seek her advice whenever I was confused in making decisions. I was at ease, because at that time, I knew that Ms. Mya would always be there, and lend her ears. As 20-year-old female students, of course I was dealing with low assessment marks, friendship fuss, and emotional struggles that I felt not everyone can totally relate to. I can definitely trust her when it comes to personal issues. She also shared her stories with me, and the obstacles that he had faced and currently facing in her life.

Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

I also realised that Ms. Mya would also allocate some of her time to go through personal and records of her advisees. Whenever students are facing difficulties, be it academic or personal, she would try to figure out ways to assist the students to overcome the hurdles that they faced. Hence, I felt, as a teacher, it is important for me to be patient. We have to come to a realization that each and every individual has their personal struggles. Every student will have their own unique struggles. I discovered that through patience, Ms. Mya has managed to help me overcome my struggles in understanding topics that were not easy to grasp. Patience is definitely one of the keys in assisting students coping with their struggles. And, I really look up to her, as she was able to demonstrate patience in dealing with students' issues.

Ms. Mya was also a creative teacher trainer. She exposed her students to a variety of teaching methodologies and because for her, each student is unique. Sometimes, she asked me to assist her in class. I was able to learn a number of tips and tricks in assisting struggling students. Ms. Mya has made me realise that, as a good teacher, we have to work hard to figure out what is best for each person in her class. This has made me recognize that each person has their own individuality, and that they should be respected for who they are.

Indirectly, I have acquired a number of valuable lessons on how to be a good teacher, apart from being 'classy', from Ms. Mya. The messages that were imposed to be by her, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have strengthened the pillar of my life. I was also able to plan my future. Ms. Mya has been a good role model and has imparted to me a number of dazzling qualities of a good teacher. I realised that I should be responsible and hard-working. I have to also never forget to be the best version of myself. She has greatly impacted my life in the most positive ways ever.

I definitely feel that she is more than a good teacher. She is a GREAT teacher. I will never forget her for my entire life. She is like a big sister to me. She has definitely inspired me to become a great teacher myself. She helped to shape my personality, and indirectly, my dreams. She had taught me the meaning of dependence and being dependable. A great teacher has to also acknowledge his or her student as an inimitable person. And, come to think of it, I felt lucky to face initial obstacles that had led me to discover all of these traits in my teacher trainer, Ms. Mya...



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TO ERR IS HUMAN

by Nurul Hijah Jasman

'If a teacher teaches me one single word, he has made me his servant for a lifetime,' (Hazrat Ali (RA)). This famous quote shows how a great vocation teaching profession is. The gleam in a student's eye when he has comprehended a concept the teacher taught him or learned how to tackle an issue on his own with the support of the teacher is what motivates one to enter teaching. Teachers are facilitators who help things happen in and out of the classroom and the highest praise is when a student (whom you may have previously taught) approaches you outside of the school or university like in the market place and says something to the effect of, "You truly helped me learn..." or "You are the reason for who I am today.." or "You have changed me.." . For me teaching transcends impartation of knowledge. It includes bonding and forming affinity with leaders of tomorrow who are in my class today.

As a teacher, you are equipping students with the skills they will need to succeed in the real world. It doesn't matter when this happens in a child's life; whether you're teaching five-year-old letter sounds or high schoolers on writing skills, you're providing them the tools they need to go on to achieve larger and better things with those talents. This is what I like the most about my profession; imparting knowledge to people. However, it is without doubt that sometimes teaching may be a taxing occupation. Students can appear disinterested in learning and disturb the classroom environment at times. There are numerous studies and instructional initiatives available to help students improve their conduct. But personal experience may be the most effective approach to demonstrate how to transform a tough student into a dedicated student. I had one such situation, in which I was able to assist in the transformation of a student with significant behavioural challenges into a learning success story. This is how the plot unfolds.

Almost a decade ago, on the first day of my teaching, I sat and stared nervously at a group of university students who were cheerfully conversing beside my class at a gazebo. I had a lesson plan on my desk that I had worked on for weeks. It had to be flawless, right? After all, this was my first teaching experience, and at the youthful age

of 23, I had to teach and deal with teenagers and young adults who were roughly my age. So, my very first lesson had to be immaculate and flawless! Around thirty kids entered the room as I was still staring down at the ostensibly "excellent" lesson plan, and they exchanged hushed glances, giving me the adolescent side-eye. I returned the smile, knowing how important the first few moments were. They took their seats, and I realised it was time for the show!

All of my preparation, enthusiasm, and nervousness had led up to this point. However, I quickly felt as if every Piaget and Vygotsky reading had failed me. On my first day as a lecturer, all the educational theory in the world had not prepared me for the pressure of staring at a circle of urban kids. I gazed down at the faceless names on the attendance sheet and then up at the eager faces of my students. "There's been a mistake," I realised suddenly. I can't possibly be in charge of all of these teenagers at this time. Isn't someone keeping an eye on me? No one is watching over my shoulder to make sure I don't make a mistake? So, I am just supposed to be a lecturer now? Suddenly I felt very nervous realising that I was now officially an educator and it was time for me, like a million other educators before me, to jump in and start making magic, and that's exactly what I did.

The first class went quite well despite the fact that I had butterflies dancing vigorously inside my tummy for two hours, non-stop! But there was one particular girl whom I named Z who appeared to be quite distant and obviously did not pay any attention to my lesson. Anyone could tell that she was on her own la-la land but I was too preoccupied with adjusting to my first day as a teacher, lecturer, or educator; well, these are just labels for the same job of transmitting knowledge, that I completely ignored her that day. The next classes went better because I was able to acclimatise to the new environment, workload, and educator responsibilities. As a new lecturer, I was assigned a lecturer mentor to assist me in adjusting to everything that was new to me and I will be eternally grateful and blessed for that opportunity, as my mentor, Mr Johari Othman, was important in shaping me into the person I am today. He was the one who kept my whining from turning into permanent smog, and the one who would always come up with a last-minute lesson plan when I had no idea what to teach and he was the first person I called when I had a minor victory or a humiliating defeat in my classes. He is more than just a mentor. To me, he is like a parent.

As the weeks passed, I realised that the girl had become even more aloof, that she had begun to disobey my orders, and that she would occasionally simply remark to my face, "No miss, I do not want to do this task!" or "No, I am not interested. You can simply disregard my presence here." And indeed, I mostly ignored her because I did not want her negative vibes to affect my mood. Well, I was in a phase of adjusting to the job myself. Little did I know, that was a decision I would come to regret later.

One day, while I was lecturing, I realised that she was talking on the phone and I suggested in the middle of the lecture "Z, why don't you join our discussion and activity instead of having one of your own?" With that, she sprang up, pushed her chair over and yelled something. I don't recall what she said, but it had multiple swear terms and that was when I lost my tolerance. I sent her out of the class and ended my class early that day. Remember, ten years ago, I had zero experience dealing with difficult children. But of course, I did not feel good about it too and brought the matter to my then mentor, Mr Johari. I could still recall his wise words to this day. "Hijah, every day is a new lesson to learn and grow from. You need to be patient with yourself and don't try to be a perfect teacher as not even the most vigilant and expert are immune to error. Students want to know you care and they want you to be honest with them. As a new lecturer, it is very important for you to prioritise developing ties with the students because they can make your life so much easier and certainly more pleasant. Always remember that you are not the only one who is scared. There are thirty or forty scared teenagers too who are completely unaware of what is going on around them." So, he suggested that I see Z

during our next session and politely inquire if she was having any issues or difficulties.

During the next session with Z's class, I stood at the door awaiting her. I asked Z to speak with me for a bit as soon as I saw her, and she accepted despite her displeasure. I told her that I wanted to meet her after class. She was unusually quiet that day, and we spoke shortly after the lesson ended, as agreed. I told her that I wanted to start over with her and that if she had any issues, she could come and see me if she needed someone to talk to. I also expressed my sincere regret if any of my words or actions had offended her. To my surprise, Z burst into tears and started to share her problems. Apparently, she was going through difficult times with her parents as they were in the process of separation and she thought the problems that her parents were dealing with were her fault. It made her insecure and felt bad about herself thus affecting her studies and friendships. I tried my very best to give her some advice and more importantly to make her understand that whatever happened between her parents was not her fault although I was unsure how to deal with the situation as I had been raised in a fairly harmonious household with parents who had never quarrelled or raised their voices in front of the children. So, what I did was try to recall all of the dialogues from movies about divorced parents that I had previously watched like Mrs Doubtfire, The Parent Trap and Matilda and try to utilise the same dialogues to make Z feel better, or maybe it was actually me who needed to feel good about the whole situation during that point of time. Maybe what I did back then was not to reassure Z only but myself too. Well, I believe it is crucial for children to understand that adults' love for each other might change over time, forcing them to live apart, nevertheless parents remain bound together by birth for the rest of their lives. I told Z that her parents will not stop loving her and her siblings even after the separation. It was an assurance that Z needed the most and she was just afraid of being abandoned by her parents. After all, divorce is difficult for all family members, isn't it? Children may get distracted and confused as they try to comprehend the changing dynamics of the household.

From that point on, Z was a changed student and her relationship with her friends and other lecturers started to improve. She was a bright student and a good kid by nature, and our lecturer-student relationship did not end after the semester ended. She often came to my office to check her English exercises and practise speaking in English over her Diploma years. Z graduated with first class honour after two and a half years and I could not be any prouder when she showed me her final Cumulative Grade Point Average. Well, this story of Z may seem ordinary to many people, but for me it was my first ever experience dealing with a teenager's emotional turmoil. Mr Jo was one of the people who was clearly pleased when I was able to handle the situation and assist Z through one of the most difficult periods of her life, and it is still fresh in my memory when he remarked that I will always remember Z's tale throughout my journey as a lecturer, and he was right indeed! I am also thankful to him as I know I wouldn't have been able to deal with the problem if it hadn't been for his wisdom and insight.

As a lecturer, this incident had a profound impact on me. I began to see that students are simply a group of teenagers who do not want to be cornered. They want to learn, but they also want to feel in charge of their lives. I never made any assumptions about my students before they entered my class again. Every kid is unique, and no two students have the same reaction. As teachers, it is our responsibility to determine not only what inspires each kid to study, but also what causes them to misbehave. We can go a long way toward attaining more effective classroom management and a better learning environment if we can meet them at that time and remove their reason(s) for misbehaving.

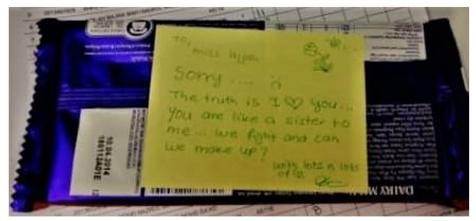
Another experience that I will always cherish when I was first starting out lecturing was when one of my students was actually a dyslexic whom I named A. He was only able to gather his strength to meet me and inform me of his condition after over a month of classes. It was mainly because of the many interactive activities that I embedded in my

English classes that A finally decided to let me know that he was having difficult times adjusting to the in-class tasks. Since I incorporated interactive learning for his group, the students were required to practice speed reading and moved around the class to complete the tasks I assigned. The problems occurred when A could not follow the instructions, which for others seem easy. He also had difficulties understanding the instructions or the notes which I wrote on the board as they were written in paragraphs form and contain many units of information. Well, A can opt to just ignore the activities and tasks I assigned but he claimed that English sessions were the only time he could have fun, and he cherished my classes so much that he did not want to miss anything from the lessons. Hence, he asked if I could speak a little slower and write notes or instructions in point form rather than paragraphs so that he could better grasp and digest the information. Back in school, he had a difficult time because many people were still unaware of dyslexia and the symptoms that came with it. He felt ashamed and embarrassed whenever his teachers asked him to read aloud in class, which frequently resulted in bullying. But it was his parents and grandmother who always stood up for him and paid for him to attend special lessons for dyslexic youngsters, which helped him regain his self-confidence.

Of course, I was taken aback at first because A speaks English fluently and always contributed good ideas to the activities conducted in class but I couldn't be prouder of this young man, knowing the milestone he had reached simply to be where he was on that particular day. So, I did my own research about dyslexic and learned some of the effective ways to help dyslexic children do well in classes. Despite the fact that I was unprepared for this, I did the best I could with the resources I had at the time to guarantee A could stand tall among his peers and each time A expressed his gratitude and how happy he was to be in my class, my heart never failed to skip a beat for I knew that I had made the right decision by becoming an educator.

My encounter with Z and A and many other great kids in my teaching journey made me appreciate life better. Well, if we know how to live, life is going to be a magnificent trip. While some people enjoy doing the same thing over and over, others may find it repetitive and uninteresting. If you're one of the latter, you're well aware that venturing out of our comfort zones is the only way to genuinely experience life. However, there are also drawbacks to doing so, such as difficulty adapting to the new. Teaching teaches you how to deal with unexpected developments. That's because there's no way you'll let yourself fail when you're teaching. You must be there for your students, as they need and some of them even depend on your presence. You have no choice but to adapt since you are not left with any other options, are you?

When I felt like quitting, my mentor always pushed me to think about all of the students I've taught and the opportunities I've had to affect so many lives. Certainly, after a decade of teaching, I can't think of a job that would be a greater fit for me. The priceless joys of observing my kids' improvement are constantly a source of amazement for me. They gain new knowledge, a deeper interest in the subject, and a better understanding of what ignites their enthusiasm. For me, teaching is undeniably a rewarding and admirable profession. There will be days when I am frustrated and upset, but the rewards always exceed them in the end. I believe I will find many more students like Z and A in my teaching career and I can proudly say now that I am ready to face any challenges and hurdles that might get in the way. To be fair, almost every work provides opportunity to learn and progress over time, but teaching is one of the few occupations that provides opportunities to learn on a daily basis. This is why I honestly feel that teaching is still the best job in the world. Plus, people do not ever forget a meaningful teacher who had an impact on their life, do they?



This was the chocolate given by Z after the incident.





Among the gifts from the precious kids



THE AUTHOR

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THE PATH TO BECOMING A TEACHER: A STORY FROM A WAR-TORN COUNTRY

by Rahmatullah Katawazai

To become interested in any profession requires some internal and external motivating factors in order to be able to successfully join and follow that particular field. I was born in a rural area, and I started my studies with traditional religious books in my village. For 40 years, the overall conditions of my country have been thrown to uncertainty and instability in all aspects, particularly in education, from that time until the new democratic government of Afghanistan established in 2001. After studying some traditional religious books, I enrolled in a public school and started my primary education near our village. I was the only boy in our family enrolled in school, and my family members were really happy for me to see me as an educated person in our family. As a result, my father and mother were encouraging me to do my best in my classes. We were a middle-income family, but my parents prepared all the facilities (at that time) for me to get an education. Their persuasion always influenced me, and as a child, I was dreaming an unknown dream about a bright future, not only for my own but for the hopes of my family members as well, who were always telling me that getting education, I would be able to have a bright future. They were, indeed, uneducated. I mean all of my family members.

But they really realized the potential significance of getting education for the development of our war-affected country. After passing some classes, I really tried my best in lessons, and even my teachers were calling me "a hard-working boy." One day, I was sitting in a part-time traditional class in our village when my father came in to observe me and my academic performance. My father asked my teacher about my performance/achievement in the class. My teacher assured my father that "I believe your son will have a bright future because of his efforts and his capabilities in his class." Then, my father requested my teacher to ask me some questions in front of the whole class, and he accepted. The teacher called me to go in front of the class to answer some questions. He asked me some questions about all of my books, and luckily, I answered all of them correctly. While I was answering the questions, I noticed how proud my father was of me. This moment once again grabbed my attention towards "the bright future." Actually, the "bright future" was something that I saw so many things hidden in this phrase. But I was always taking steps to finally reach that kind of "bright future" that not only my family members were hoping for, but my teachers and I also hoped for such a future.

This good performance brought joy to my home and family. As I mentioned earlier, I was the only one in my family who was getting education, so my uncles and other relatives were looking only at me in school and education-related matters. For example, our people were not developed and connected with one another to use modern telecommunication tools and facilities. So, people who were living in some neighboring countries, most of them for jobs, were sending letters to their family members in order to communicate and to share new updates about themselves. When any of my family members receive such letters from distant relatives, they eagerly call me to read the letters for them in order to stay up-to-date on their relatives. My relatives, while observing such moments, were really proud of me and they were always persuading me to continue getting education, which I really enjoyed. With the hope of a "bright future", I completed my primary education with good performance in my classes. I started

my secondary education at the same public school because there were not many schools in our area. This was the only school where students from around four villages came to study. In the process of my secondary education, I behaved in the same persuasive manner that I did in primary education. It means that my family members and my teachers hoped for my well-being regarding education. After completing secondary education, the Afghan system wants all students to take a national entry test called the Kankor Exam. I was hesitant about whether I would pass the Kankor Exam or not. But anyway, I took the exam with the hope of studying education faculty. My schoolmates and my close friends forced me to try other fields of study, for example, medical, engineering, computer sciences, and other STEM education fields, but I followed my wish of studying education faculty and becoming an educator rather than an engineer or a doctor.

I think my way of getting into the teaching profession started at that time, and after the announcement of the final results of the national exam, where I passed to my intended faculty, the education faculty of Kandahar University. I do not have the words to write about my feelings of happiness in that special moment that I was when I heard about the results. I called my brother, who was in Saudi Arabia, and shared with him the results of my success. He congratulated me and persuaded me to think about getting further higher education. With that, I decided to go on the path of the dreams that not only me, but my family members and other relatives were also wishing for me. I started higher education in my intended field. The university environment really impressed me, and I started thinking differently about myself as not only the achiever of the dreams of myself and my family members, but I started dreaming about the nation that they have for their educated group of people. The dreams of re-building our country, the dreams of increasing the public awareness regarding education and about national values, and the dreams of the "bright future" of not only mine but of their children as well. I completed my first semester, and luckily, I was at the top of my class. It was really amazing to me that an individual from a faraway village would take the second position in the class among students from the cities who studied in good private and public schools.

This further increased my motivation towards my goals, my capabilities, and my dreams. With that, I completed my higher education in 2014 at Kandahar University, Faculty of Education, English Department. In the same year, I was accepted as an academic member of Kandahar University, and I finally began my dream career as a teacher in the Faculty of Languages and Literature, English Department. I taught for four years and was also selected as the head of the English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Kandahar University. After the new regulations from higher education, which stated that all university teachers must hold a master's degree, I started to pursue my further studies at master's level.



First from right, the First Year of My Undergraduate, the Main Library of Kandahar University, 2010.



Second from right, the Main Library of Kandahar University, 2010



Setting in the classroom with my classmates, first year, second semester, 2010



First from right, standing with our teacher and classmates, 2011

In the year 2018, the ministry of higher education announced scholarships funded by the World Bank and the project was organized by the Higher Education Development Program of Afghanistan and students who pass the exam and fulfill the requirements will study abroad in Germany, Thailand, India or Malaysia. . So, I was lucky that I was accepted into one of the Malaysian top universities, UTM, where I dreamt in 2016 while one of the Malaysian experts was giving us a lecture regarding OBE and SCL and showing us pictures of UTM. I was among those lucky ones who joined the TESL program of UTM, faculty of social sciences and humanities. This new and modern environment further increased my interest in my profession, "teaching". The friendly and cooperative manner of my lecturers at UTM made me more interested in working as an educator. In this new stage of my profession, I realized that being a teacher is not a simple task. Being a teacher means building individuals and providing them to society. A good teacher can provide good individuals to his or her society and a bad teacher provides bad individuals to his or her society. This shows us the greatness of this profession, "education." A nation is made up of individuals, and a society is made up of a nation. This profession is directly linked with nation building. I am proud of having the honor of being a teacher.



During a speech at Chancellery Building Hall, UTM, 2018

The interesting point is that while I am going to my birthplace, all the elderly and youths respect me a lot because they call me "teacher" and I really feel proud when I hear that. This reminds me of the phrase "bright future" that my family members and my school teachers were repeatedly mentioning to me that I will have a bright future. A bright future is not only dependent on materialistic things like money and materialistic wealth. However, it is dependent on your personality's role in society, how you are accepted by the group of people living with you and around you, how they treat you, and how much they respect you. This clearly defines the role of a teacher, even in a war-affected society like Afghanistan. It means that we, as educators, have a lot of honorable things on our side. This shows the greatness of the profession that not only your students respect you, but the family members of the students, as well as other members of society respect you as a respected individual. Although Afghanistan is a war-affected country, and the public awareness towards education is not that high, this is a true story about an educator.

This certainly gives you the motivations of a very typical person in a society where people are respecting you in a particular way. Teachers' educators really play an important role in society. As people respect you in a greater way, they have much greater expectations of you as an agent of social change in their society as well. It means that, as a teacher, your actions, the way of behaving, and even your way of thinking are deeply impacting all the people in your society, particularly those who respect you as a typical individual. I am committed to positively influencing my students, my family members, and all of those who have greater expectations of me. I will never ignore their best wishes, their hopes, and the great expectations that they have of me, as an educator of their children and their beloved ones. In the end, being an educator is a great proud moment for me that I will always enjoy!



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LEARNED THE HARD WAY

by Salmiza Ghazali

At first, when someone asked me to write, I said that I did not know what to write. "Write about your experiences. You have a lot of experience teaching in schools. Don't you have any to be shared or to be pondered upon when you retire? Don't you have any that will be a lesson for the new teachers?" She exclaimed. Well, of course, I do. With age and experience, I hope I am now a mature woman with wisdom.

I started teaching at this primary school in December 1993. It was strange because most of my friends were not sent back to their villages during the first posting of my teaching career. But I was fortunate to serve in my state, in my district. The journey from home to school was also not that far. It was only 8.5 kilometres. Only fifteen minutes away. Some would say that I was a frog under a coconut shell. It didn't matter as long as I was close to my parents during those days.

When I reached the school, two other new teachers had also just registered for their new placement in the school. We have been very close friends till now. The total number of teachers was eleven compared to 100 students. Yes, it was a small school, but I faced new challenges after two and a half years in teaching training college.

There were two main basic facilities in the school. The first one was the public telephone. The second one was a good, conducive road in front of the school. Since the school was in front of the Straits of Melaka, the beach has been famous for its scenery. Well, where there are no swamps, there are no frogs. Many tourists got attracted to this place for its scenic beauty, so the road was quite busy. The more, not the merrier. The heavier was the traffic; the prettier was the beach, and the more it ended with tragedy. And, the story begins......

Tragedy 1

It was my first year of teaching and I was required to teach English in the only one Year 3 class. There were only twenty-six pupils in the classroom and I was glad to meet these

cute, little munchkins. I could see varieties of characters from these pupils, and as time went by, I learned a lot from them as they learned English from me. Some were talkative, some needed full attention and some had big hearts, altruistic, and willing to help. Among those kids, I was attracted to one young, quiet kid. With his introvert characteristic, he never paid attention to English language subject nor did his homework. All he did in the classroom was play with papers and make a lot of origami boats. As a young teacher with a lack of experience, I did not know how to manage him. A lot of time, I was annoyed as much as disappointed with his behaviour. I kept thinking of him when I had a sudden brainwave one day. Maybe this kid needed my attention, or perhaps he craved my attention. I called him to ask why he refused to complete all the school work I gave. He didn't even respond to me or say anything except put his hand in his pocket. I was displeased with his attitude and forced him to take out the things he had in his pocket. Well, as usual, it was an origami boat. Just like what he always did. I told him if he could do his homework and listen attentively in my lessons. I would give him a present. Surprisingly, he was excited with the word 'present'. So at that moment, I knew I had applied the educational theory that I learned in the teacher training college. He promised that he would do his homework and send it to me the next day.

I was glad to hear his promise and kept thinking of a suitable present for him. I went to town on that afternoon and bought him a pencil case since I noticed that he never used any to put his stationeries. I returned home and did my daily routine chores while preparing for the next day's lesson.

It was fifteen minutes past seven when I reached school. I realised a few teachers were gathering at the office when I came in. I began to wonder when I heard one of the teachers mention this pupil's name.

"What! He was drowned? But... how? and, why? I just bought him a new pencil case," I told my colleague.

A senior teacher who lived near his parents' house told us that the student went out of his house late in the evening and crossed the road to the mosque. Since his home was quite near the mosque, his father allowed him to go alone as he thought he wanted to perform his prayer there. His father didn't know that there was a boat behind the mosque owned by one of the villagers. This boy had got into the boat and paddled to the middle of the sea. There was one small hole in the boat, and the water leaked inside.

Finally, this poor kid was drowned and only to be found by his father when he did not return home after a few hours. A few weeks later, his father came to school to return all his textbooks to the teacher-in-charge of the textbook (SPBT). After that, the teacher approached me and gave me an exercise book. It was the poor boy's book. I hardly understood what he wrote, but he had done his homework. He kept to his promise, but I could not give him the present. Rest in peace, my dear child. May Allah grant you Jannah. Aamiin...

Tragedy 2

It was a busy day for my colleagues and me since our school hosted a meeting. The meeting was held in the afternoon after all the pupils went home. We were expecting about ten cars to enter the school that afternoon, so there was a briefing with the security guards by the headmistress and the first senior assistant to ensure the traffic would be smooth with no difficulties.

After that, the headmistress and the senior assistants headed to the meeting room with some documents. As for me, I was in charge of welcoming the teachers at the

main gate, so I decided to wait for the cars to enter the school gate before greeting the teachers.

A few teachers' cars queued to enter the main school gate. The security guard made a signal to turn to the right side with his hand. Most of the teachers drove the cars themselves, and only a few were sent by their husbands or relatives. The vehicles turned right one by one before entering the school when suddenly I heard a loud bump outside the gate. The security guard who was standing outside rushed to the last car behind. I also dashed outside the entrance to see what had happened. A motorcyclist was lying on the roadside after being hit by a school teacher's car. The traumatic teacher came out of the car and was stunned. A few minutes later, she grabbed her courage and told us that the motorcyclist had tried to overtake her vehicle when turning right towards the main school gate. Luckily, the motorcyclist was not severely injured, so he was sent to the hospital after the ambulance arrived. What a tragedy! No one could expect what could happen at any time.

Tragedy 3

The tragedy happened in the year 2000. I was the teacher on duty for a whole week. Since the enrolment of the school was about two hundred students, there were usually only two teachers who would be in charge as teachers on duty at a particular time. The school starts at 7.45 every day, and the duty teachers need to arrive earlier than the pupils.

I had mild diarrhoea one tragic morning, so I was slightly late to school. We didn't have any social media or smartphones during those days, so I didn't inform the other duty teachers about my problem. I thought that the teacher could take over my duty.

When I reached school, I saw a few teachers were in front of the school gate. They were discussing something when they saw me. Then, the headmaster approached me and told me that I was late. He said to me that two pupils were involved in an accident that morning and he was not pleased with my punctuality. Calmly, I told him apologetically that I had diarrhoea and needed to go to the clinic. I didn't inform him earlier because my house telephone was out of order.

The headmaster was not pleased with my reason and reminded me about punctuality. I was informed that the two boys were hospitalised. It was found later that one of the boys came to school earlier and realised that his English exercise book was left at home. He asked his friend to accompany him home and both of them sneaked out of the school without anyone noticing. As his bicycle had only one seat, his friend stood behind him. On the way back to the school, they were hit by a car and were seriously injured. He was afraid of being scolded for not bringing the book. The book was found in blood near him when he was hit by the car. As the teachers on duty, my friend and I were entirely responsible for the pupils' safety.

Both of us were called by the headmaster and he was furious because of the incident. As a young teacher at that time, I could not bear listening to the headmaster's words. I explained and told him about my sick condition, but he refused to listen to me. The headmaster commanded both of us to visit the pupils in the hospital. So we went to the hospital to find out about their condition that evening, but sadly one of the boys passed away while his friend was in a critical condition in the ICU ward.

I was distraught and regretful as it was my fault for not being punctual. Although I was not feeling well on that day, I should have come early because it was my duty to guard students' safety. Unfortunately, the other teacher on duty was also late that

morning, and he thought I had come earlier. Making things worst was the boy who was involved in the accident was the teacher's brother-in-law. For the other boy, he was recovered after a few months in the ICU ward

I learned my lesson that day, although in a tragic way. At a young age, I realized that I was so strict and inconsiderate to the young pupils. This poor boy was afraid of being scolded by an inconsiderate teacher, and it was me. It was the saddest day and the most regretful incident that happened in my life, and I wished that it would not happen again to me.,



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Salmiza Ghazali obtained her teaching certificate in Teachers Training College in Johor Bahru before getting a Bachelor of Education in Teaching English in Primary Education (BTPE) from the Open University of Malaysia. She is currently a Co-curricular Senior Assistant Teacher in SK Lubok Redan, Melaka. Before this, she taught in SK Sungai Tuang, Melaka as an English teacher and had vast experience with primary school pupils. She has interests in music, art, and creative writing and this is her first attempt at writing. She can be contacted through salmiza71@gmail.com.

LESSONS THAT I REMEMBER

by Siti Aishah Taib

I was on a bus, going to Johor Bahru with my aunt and her granddaughter. I was ten years old, and the granddaughter was a few years younger than me. We sat next to each other, and I figured out that she had trouble adding numbers larger than 10. So, I taught her to keep the enormous number in her head and add the smaller number using her fingers. To my surprise, it worked. "Maybe I can be a teacher," I thought.

To this day, that story is my first success story in teaching another person. My classmates told me when I was in Standard 3 that I could not be a teacher because of my bad handwriting on the blackboard. I took it to my heart and agreed with them. "Maybe I could be a lecturer, giving lectures and no writing on the blackboard," I thought this was an excellent idea. While all my best friends wanted to be a doctor that year, I wanted to be a lecturer; well, I could not be a teacher as my students would not understand my handwriting on the blackboard; I was awful at using chalks. So, becoming a lecturer made more sense at that time.

To the readers of this book, my story is a collection of significant events that I remember about my teaching and learning experience. They may be plain and straightforward, but they have somehow shaped how I teach my students now.

Garang vs. Relevant

When I was in primary school, my siblings and I always prepared ketupat for Hari Raya Aidilfitri. I learned how to weave ketupat from my eldest brother, Along. Although I think I knew how to weave a kite-shaped ketupat, I would end up with a satay ketupat that everybody dislikes for Raya. "It's not beautiful", "It's a waste of daun kelapa (coconut leaves), you know," my older siblings used to tell me. During that year, I could remember when my Along, the most fierce (garang in Malay) among my siblings, successfully taught me how to weave ketupat, with three different weaving styles, which amazed everyone. "So, in a way, being garang while teaching works!" I could feel that everyone in the family thought that.



I used to teach my nieces and nephew when I was pursuing my degree in TESL. Mustaal, the eldest among them, was a quick learner but needed supervision to stay focused on completing his homework. Ain, the second child, was a little slower in grasping mathematical concepts compared to Mustaal but hardworking as ever. The youngest among them, Huda, was the most challenging student I had to teach. She would not listen to instructions and go around the house doing activities that fancy her. Being garang while teaching

had worked on me, so I thought it would work on her. Well, it backfired. She didn't care about being yelled at and would retaliate. Every teaching session was torture for me as she would not sit still and concentrate on finishing her homework.

But everything changed when she was six years old. She was desperate to learn how to read in Malay. After a few tests, I realised that she had problems combining the sounds for 3-alphabet syllables. So, I took the effort to find the correct storybooks with different colours for different syllables and taught her how to read. She could confidently read storybooks to her parents and siblings when it worked, which somehow made me proud. After that, she became a different person and treated me kindly and respectfully. I learnt that no matter how young my students were if the learning objectives were relevant, they would try their best to be engaged in the studies and master them.

Respect and Keep Your Goals Realistic

When I was serving my 3-month practicum, I learned that not all teachers are perfect. I was assigned to teach two classes: the second-best class, 2 Bestari, and the last class, 2 Dinamik. Each class had its unique problems.

The 2 Bestari were above average; some were very polite, and some were mischievous. One day, an embarrassing incident happened to me in the class. It was a pop quiz session, and the students were excited to answer the questions. Unfortunately, they made some noise in the session, which alerted an ustazah on duty that day. She stormed into the classroom and told my students off without even addressing me, the teacher, in the class. She shouted and attacked one male student that I believed she did not like, to the point where his eyes began to wet with tears. When she'd had her fill, she went out of class as if I did not even exist. I felt humiliated and lost my respect for that ustazah. Did I deserve such a humiliating act just because I was not a permanent teacher like her? Was I not a teacher? Why did she humiliate that male student who did nothing wrong but tried to answer some pop quiz questions? On the other hand, a male discipline teacher who was known as strict and fierce among the students once came to my class to warn some students. He politely addressed me as I was in the class and thanked me before taking his leave. I learned from this incident that I do not want to appear unprofessional in front of my students and my fellow educators. Therefore, whenever I felt a surge of negative emotion in me, I'd stop the lesson and go somewhere quiet to recompose myself.

2 Dinamik, the other class is the opposite as they were below-average students; most of them did know how to read. How could they enjoy short stories and novels in the class when they could not even read? So, I introduced a storytelling session during each lesson to help them understand the novel, Phantom of the Opera. Unfortunately, it took too much time, and could not finishing the syllabus. I asked for advice from my supervisor after her first observation of my teaching. She said that I was too ambitious and should keep the lessons simple for the students. Her main suggestion was to introduce words in English as most of them could not read. Since then, I tried to keep the lessons fun and straightforward. I taught them colours by writing the spelling of the words on ice-cream sticks and coloured them. To my surprise, they enjoyed these simple lessons. So, make lessons simple and keep realistic goals that can attract the students' attention to English language.

Dress Up like an Adult

After I graduated with a degree in TESL in 2011, I worked as a part-time, full-time lecturer (PTFT) in one of the public universities. My friends and I looked like students

so we applied makeup on our faces and wore high heels to appear older. Administrative staff kept mistaking us as students, and to some extent, this created funny incidents to be laughed at when we reminisced about our time there. We rented a house and went to work together. However, my friend once drove alone to work as she had a different class schedule on that day. She called us, asking for help to clarify her situation to the security guard at the university gate. The officers mistook her as astudent and accused her of buying an illegal car sticker to park her car in the staff parking lot. She finally solved the problem by showing her staff identification card to the officers. A similar incident happened when I entered the library with my handbag. The librarian angrily shouted at me because all students had to put their bags in the lockers. This scene made the students around the counter look at me, and I felt embarrassed of that situation. When I showed my staff identification card to the librarian, she did not apologise for her behaviour. These two incidents taught me to dress up like an adult to avoid future embarrassing moments.



Taking a Walk in Someone's Shoes & Adapting to Change

Everybody was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic when the government announced the first Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020. The lecturers weren't allowed by the university to assign any academic work to students as everyone had to stay at home and follow the SOPs if they needed to go out. However, after some weeks, the lecturers must resume lessons online, hence, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) sessions. Things were difficult for both the lecturers and students. Problems such as poor internet connection, lack of proper electronic devices, and financial constraints became serious concerns. Books became less relevant, and the lecturers must quickly learn how to prepare lecture videos and online teaching materials.

At the onset of the ODL, I conducted online lessons by trial and error. Both the students and I burned the midnight oil to catch up on work. Many students could not afford a stable and fast internet connection; thus, I needed to compress videos to reduce the file size, which could take some time. I conducted the online classes either synchronously or asynchronously, so, for asynchronous tasks, I needed to trust my students in their ability to complete work before the deadlines. But if they could not do so, I had to learn and understand their reasons. Some of them must work during the day to help their family get more income during MCO as many parents lost their jobs, while some had to help babysit their younger siblings while attending the online lectures. Compassion and empathy for one another were essential in making the ODL work.

I gave birth to my second child in March 2021. After my confinement leave ended, I learned the hard way of juggling work, housework, and care for my newborn baby girl. Life became more challenging when my nanny and family members became infected with the Covid-19 virus. As a result, I could not send my baby and thus began the emotional roller coaster journey of caring for a baby and finishing work before deadlines. I broke down many times and often felt like I was slowing my colleagues down in our group project as I was often the last one to finish my part. I took turns taking care of my baby with my husband because he also had to work from home. We were both exhausted, but there was no other way to ensure the safety of children; my 4-year-old daughter also had her lessons conducted online by her teacher. I tried to seek help from a professional therapist, but it was too expensive. However, it was not an excuse to be miserable and depressed. I sought help and comfort from my family and friends. Changes were the only way forward.

I learned many lessons from the people around me regarding the right ways to teach children and students. But I believe that there is no one right way of doing things; we must consider the many different contexts and apply the best approach that we have at hand. Therefore, I want to end my story with a piece of advice given by my lecturer on the last day that I spent at my faculty. These words have since stuck with me: "Always remember that your students are also human."



THE AUTHOR

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DIARY OF A TEACHER

by Wan Farah Wani Wan Fakhruddin

Life is a bumpy ride. While we always wish for a smooth journey, sometimes there will be unexpected corners along the way. But come to think of it, if you always drive in straight lines, you'll be missing all the adventures - the overtaking, the drive up the hills and the stops at petrol stations to refuel and get some food for you to munch while driving. As a working mom with young children, I secretly wish that I could raise my children and work simultaneously. In my mind, I always wondered, 'Wouldn't it be great if I didn't have to go to the office and that I could stay at home like all the other housewives?' I want to earn my own money and take care of my children. This was me before COVID-19 hits the globe. And, of course, my wish did finally come true. Days turned to weeks; weeks turned to months; months turned into years now. And for the life of me, I swore even in my wildest dreams, I couldn't imagine getting stuck at home for years. All thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was born in the 80s. 1983 to be exact. If you are about the same age as me, you would know and perhaps could still remember those days in school when you were asked to imagine and bring to life futuristic designs of monorails, double-decker buses and flying cars that could portray the millennium. To this day, I still remember every line of the song Wawasan 2020 (Bendera berkibar di angkasa, lambang negara gagah, rakyat sepakat, sehati sejiwa, tekad berbakti dengan megah – You are singing to the tune, caught you!). Fast forward to 2020 (actually, we had to go back a bit to December 2019, sorry!), who in the world could have imagined that what is coming in 2020 is a virus so deadly it changed the human's way of life, perhaps for the next few more years to come.

Okay, back to my story (I tend to side-track sometimes, forgive me!). I teach at a public university in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. I have been teaching at the university since I was 23 years old. It has always been my father's dream that one of his children would be an educator. As the only girl in the family, I wasn't going to let him down, of course. So, I followed his request, and it turned out that I liked it too (although at first, I hadn't the slightest idea what kind of a teacher I aspire to be). As an educator working at the university, the core job is still to teach, no matter if you hold any administrative position.

As you know, a lecturer juggles many other things apart from teaching. We supervise students, conduct research, seek research fundings, generate income for the university, participate in social works and welfare, the list goes on. The normal routine for me would be going to class, doing my administrative, research and consultation jobs, and other mundane things that all lecturers do. Though it gets hectic sometimes juggling between work and family duties, I always seek solace in meeting my students in the class. Here are some of my most memorable moments (last day of class, of course!)



With my aspiring architects (Can you spot me?)



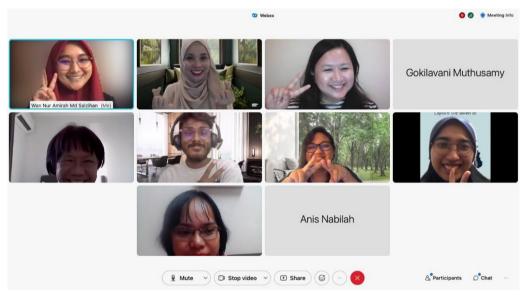
With my future mechanical

At the university, we teach following the semester terms. So that would mean you get to teach a group of students for about 14-15 weeks. Since I teach the general English university subjects at varying English proficiency classes. I get to meet students from all faculties ranging from all age groups. After 15 years of teaching, I can tell you with a high degree of certainty that students from the same programme tend to have similar characteristics in terms of how they carry themselves, their behaviours and their reactions in your class. It's like they have been programmed to have the same DNA, I kid you not! This works to my advantage, too, since I could adjust to different teaching styles and approaches when meeting different groups of students. This made me a versatile teacher (self-proclaimed!). Even though I teach the same subject(s) every semester, I will always tweak my teaching styles to suit my students' needs. For me, what matters most is that my students will get the most out of the lessons I teach to them. I treat my students with respect so that, in return, they will appreciate what little time we shared during those weeks we were together. Praying for the best for each student who has crossed your path could be the best way to get the same kind of prayer for us too, in this life and hereafter. It's a bit melodramatic, but this is the best part of being a teacher, don't you agree?

Now, back again to the point I made earlier (side-tracked again, sorry!). What happened before COVID-19, and how is my life now? Boy, where should I start? To begin with, I don't go to classes anymore. I don't meet my students physically anymore. The campus is like a ghost town. Can you ever imagine being in a university without any students on sight? It's like visiting the Louvre without seeing the portrait of Mona Lisa. I didn't even set foot on other blocks apart from my room. That's what is different. You feel somewhat hollow inside. I have been teaching virtually for over three semesters now, and I have no clue who these people are in real life (sigh!). Now all my pictures with my students are only on virtual screens, with some you won't even know how they look like (because the camera was not turned on and there's nothing much you can do about it).



Virtual ice-breaking session with my students



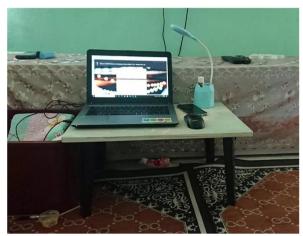
My Master's Class

If people ask me whether there is a difference between virtual and face-to-face teaching, of course there are. It is like comparing apples and oranges. Both have their pros and cons, I would say. In a physical class, you can see the students' reactions (verbal and non-verbal) to the lesson. And you can engage with them individually, prompting them when necessary and shifting your (teaching) gear to suit their pace. Unlike the physical class, where you get the sense of connectivity to your teacher and friends, the online class creates a sense of isolation among students. More often than not, they will feel lost – either they overthink about what they are missing, or their mind would wander off to other places thinking of other things (for all you know, they could be eating or comfortably lying down on their bed while you are teaching, pfttt!). In this trying time, now, more than ever, as teachers, we need to empathise with our students, no matter how young or mature they are. We have to engrave in our minds that this has never happened before, not even during our time. I cannot imagine how I would react or perform in my studies if I had to study from home throughout my university days. They are being robbed of crafting unforgettable college life and socialising with friends. I keep reminding myself not to scold my students just because they did not turn on their camera or think negatively towards those who always come in and out of the online class. For all you know, they may have a very crappy internet connection. It simply means they keep trying to get into the class anyway and not go MIA (That is commitment and perseverance, people!).



In the first few months when we were forced to conduct our classes entirely online. I thought of a way of understanding my students' welfare without actually asking directly about their economic and social backgrounds. It would be weird and somewhat offensive (to me, at least) to ask about their family's economic background out of the blue. Instead, I asked them to describe their struggles of studying from home and requested them to upload pictures of their study space at home. By doing this, I got a glimpse of how conducive their study space really is. While some are fortunate to have their own room, others may share space with their siblings or have to study at the dining table, living room, or other nooks and crannies of their homes. Here are some of my students' study spaces; some look super neat and much nicer than mine, for sure!





Gamer's Study Space for sure! (His microphone is studio quality, I bet you!)

Typical Students' Study Space (You make the space to make it work. Kudos to you!)



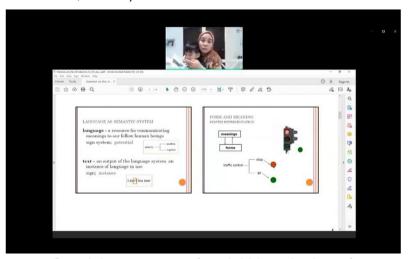
Teaching from my dining table

Do teachers struggle to work from home? Remember I said my wish finally came true? When the government announced the lockdown, I was ecstatic! Despite the fear of the virus spreading further, I told myself that I was glad that I could work from home. The first week was chaotic, of course. The day before the MCO 1.0 started, I packed all my books and teaching materials I would use to teach from home. My trunk was almost full. And I set up a little corner in my bedroom (I didn't have a home office. Sometimes I teach from my dining table. Thank goodness for virtual backgrounds). My bedroom has now turned into a store full of books and tonnes of papers. Oh my!

I struggled to adjust to the fully online class at first. Because my laptop was quite dated (my lappy was already turning six) and it doesn't have a good camera and audio too (this is bad because we would look AND sound awful, haha!). I had to invest in buying additional gadgets to conduct a more conducive teaching and learning environment for my class. And my kids need to use it for their online classes too. After some time, my laptop's performance started to deteriorate. I had to save up some money for a few months to buy a new laptop. To avoid quarrelling over the laptop, we had to invest more in the children's devices too. It was challenging financially as well. I couldn't imagine those who can't afford a decent device to help them cope with the online class demands. And for this, I am truly grateful for what minor setbacks I face compared to others.

As much as I dream of how wonderful life would be to do your work in the comforts of your home, it was dreadful too. How can you focus solely on your work when you have a family to feed, clothes and dishes to wash, and a house to clean? It's almost impossible to ignore the motherly or wifely duties when you are at home. People become restless because they can't go out. And since everyone is trapped indoors, what more can we do other than binge eating? For the first time in my adult life, I can tell you that I have never cooked that many dishes in the span of one month. Four meals a day (minus snacking) for 30 days. Heck, I even baked cakes and made kuih that I have never done before (have you tried making nagasari? I did!). After spending what felt like an eternity at home (it was just over a few months, I am being dramatic), I now have massive respect for the housewives who have the energy to do the things they do day in and day out for as long as they serve and entertain their family (every day should be a mother's day!). I also wondered if this is how retirement life will be like, I am not looking forward to it. Maybe not just yet.

Do I struggle to conduct my own class? I sure did. I have three young kids at home, two of which are attending primary school, and I also have an active, cheeky, but oh-so-adorable two-year-old son. He craves attention whenever and wherever he feels he deserves it. Now that he's getting bigger, he understands if his ibu is working and won't pester me as much. You have to just feed him well and make sure he is emotionally okay. Back then, I had to ask my two elder daughters (they are still quite small, both aged 10 and 9) to entertain him while I was conducting online classes. Of course, sometimes they can't handle him (I can't blame them, they tried). There will be days when I had to switch off my camera because I had to hold him on my lap, or I would have to apologise to my students because of his cries and persistent attention-seeking antiques. I had to take a 5-min break a few times during some of my live classes and told my students to go for a coffee break so that I could attend to my son's diaper business (if you know what I mean, *wink*).



Special appearance (read: kid on the loose)

There will also be those days when I will have to record my lecture at the wee hours of the morning when everyone else is asleep. This is to make sure that I can deliver the best lesson to my students. Asynchronous teaching can play to your advantage as well as your students. However, the preparation time for a recorded lecture often doubles compared to if you do it synchronously. Either way, our teaching styles will have to be adjusted to suit the current needs of both teachers and students. I opted to do asynchronous classes when I knew I could not juggle my own class and my children's online classes. I have to cater to their needs too, since they are not independent enough to watch after themselves. Sometimes I too, have trouble keeping track of my kids' homework. I have to be honest in saying that I don't have time to look at my kids' timetable because I was busy juggling with my own. I felt terrible that I sacrificed my time with my kids so that my own students will not be left unattended.

Though it makes me sad to see some students didn't even view my lecture that I worked so hard to prepare and stayed up all night to record at 2:30am in the morning (just so that there won't be any noise in the background), I feel that I have tried my best as a teacher. Sometimes I felt like I was the only cheerful one to attend the class (I said a cheery hello, and there wasn't any response *sob*). When I asked questions, nobody would answer me back (*double sob*). How would you feel if you were in my shoes? Would I quit being a good teacher because of these hiccups? No! There's no point in being sour and feeling defeated. You just soldier on and try your best again and again and again. I reassured myself that whatever things that come after are beyond my control and that I had already tried my best. I hope that the world will be as it once was, though I know that change is the only constant in life. While teachers' struggles are often not being voiced publicly, we need to be heard once in a while. Because, after all, teachers are humans who have feelings and affection. We bleed, too, though we bear the pain in silence. And most often, the strongest ones bleed in silence. We are the torchbearers of the nation amidst these dark days. And if we still keep to our oath of making the world a better place (through imparting knowledge and making a difference in our students' lives), despite all the adversities, the world is changing for the better for sure. Teachers, unite!



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Dr Wan Farah Wani Wan Fakhruddin has been teaching at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) since 2006. She is currently the postgraduate programme coordinator at Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (UTM Kuala Lumpur). She enjoys teaching as much as travelling. She believes that the world can be a better place if everyone plays their part. To her, teachers are continuous learners. And the learning cycle should never stop as it knows no boundaries. We learn a lot from our own experience and from others, including our students. So keep moving forward, learn new things and just do YOU.

WHAT IS CROOKED CANNOT BE STRAIGHTENED

by Yee Bee Choo

His eyes looked into emptiness.

Sitting at a dark corner, with an uncombed hair and tucked out shirt with yellowish socks, I saw the dishevelled boy for the first time. He seldom spoke a word in class and did not mix around with others. No child liked to be with him as his body disseminated a kind of bad odour. I asked him if he took his bath daily, he mumbled 'yes' and glanced away. Holding my breath when standing next to him, I wondered if he told me the truth.

This was my second-year teaching in primary school. I was assigned as a class teacher for Year 1B. The seven-year-old children were innocent but 'busybody'. They loved to complain about every single little thing to me. "Teacher, Hau did not do his homework.", "Hau scribbled his table and chair", "Hau played with the water in the toilet", "Hau did not go to the field for physical education". All their complaints were about Hau, the bad impressions of him dwelt deep rooted in me.

In my school, it's a common practice for the same teacher to be the class teacher from Year 1 to Year 6. This meant I would teach the same class for six years. Normally, teachers at a Chinese national-typed school did not specialise only in one subject but taught all types of subjects. I taught the pupils English, Mandarin and Arts Education. As a new and energetic teacher, I tried my best to master these subjects to teach the pupils. I have not gone through any training in the institute of teacher education yet, so I taught the pupils according to my understanding of how my teachers taught me when I was a student at school. My teachers often caned pupils for not submitting their work on time, so I thought this was the most effective way in maintaining class discipline.

Hau often didn't submit his homework, I not only caned him for that but also retained him during the recess, forcing him to complete it. While all students went to the canteen, he sat alone in the class copying his friends' answers in his book. I asked if he understood what he was copying, he shook his head. I wondered why I forced him to do something he didn't understand, but my rationale told me it's a student's responsibility to complete the homework and this blind reasoning had forsaken the purpose of education.

As most of my classes were before the recess, I had stayed alone with Hau in the class most of the time. I often sat in front of the class and shouted at him to hurry finishing his homework as I did not want to go near him because of his odor. By the time he finished his homework, the bell rang and he did not have the time to go to the canteen. He looked sad, but I had no mercy. I marked his book with a big red tick and then put the word 'Late!' very big in his book and gave him back. "Go back to your seat, your next teacher is coming to the class now." He was disappointed, and went back to his seat with an empty stomach. I felt victorious as I could punish him for not doing my homework. I think I was being mean towards Hau that time. What I wanted the most from him was his homework, I did not shower him with any love and care as a teacher.

Very soon, the Year 1 had ended, and the students were in their second year. Hau had never changed, he still did not submit his homework. Sometimes, he came late to school and entered the class through the back door. When I saw him coming late, I would shout at him. I often raised my voice at him, but he was indifferent. I couldn't remember how many times I caned him every day. The harder I hit on his palm, the more numb his feelings were for those strokes.

I'd never met his parents on Open Day, Hau was the last person to receive his report card last year. This year, the parents had come to school eagerly to know about their children's results. We discussed their children's academic performance and discipline problems. These parents wanted their children to achieve good grades and later their children went back with their parents after our discussion. Occasionally, I took a glance at him while talking to the parents. Hau sat quietly in the corner, he looked outside of the window aimlessly. When all the students had gone back, his parents still did not appear. I asked Hau if he had told his parents about the Open Day, he just shrugged his shoulders. This time, I think I must visit his parents to inform them about their son's behaviours in school. So, I told Hau that I would go to his house with him.

After school, I took Hau in my old Datsun car, and he told me the directions to his house. When we arrived there, I was surprised to find that his house was a mechanic workshop where there were some cars parked outside. In his singlet, his father was smoking and talking to a customer, he saw me coming with his son. We then entered his office which was messy with spare parts boxes on the floor, papers loaded on the table, and some liquor bottles and cigarette butts in the corner. Wiping away some boxes from the sofa, his father made a space for me to sit down. I told him my purpose of visit, with the cigarette in his hand, he pressed it angrily on Hau's arm. Hau yelled in pain, he cried and ran into the room which was attached beside the office. I could hear a baby crying from it and his mother was trying to soothe the baby.

After listening to my complaints about Hau's behaviours in school, his father drew a deep sigh and spoke nonchalantly, "Teacher, you know what, I only studied till Year 6, I did not study so high but now I own this shop, I have so many customers coming here to repair their cars, and I earn a lot of money. You see, people with not much education can be successful one. We do not need to study so hard one. I'm so busy with my work and where got time to look at Hau's studies. To me, it doesn't matter if Hau can study or not. In the end, he'll help me in this shop."

"But don't you worry about your son's future?" I asked politely.

"Future? Is this the end of the world? Who cares!" He raised his voice. When Hau came out from the room, his father shouted, "Hurry, go eat your lunch now!" Then, he took a durian husk from the floor and threw it at Hau but Hau avoided it.

I was speechless. This was the first time I heard from a parent who didn't care about his son's education and I saw how he treated his son at home. To me, he was being apathetic towards his son's future. We don't know what will happen in future but this does not mean we don't care about it. Now, I know why the father did not come for Open Day. Later, I found out from my colleagues that Hau's mother was depressed after giving birth to his sister. She was on medicine and had the habit of gambling to release her depression. She always went to the town for gambling and came back home late at night or even the next day.

After the home visit, I felt so bad for Hau and started to feel empathy for him. His parents did not care for him. His father was too busy at work and mother was depressed that she neglected her children. So, he had to take care of his younger sister. Living in this kind of home environment, he was lacking the love from his parents. I think I might be too

strict with him, I shouldn't focus too much on asking him to complete his homework, I should try to help him to cultivate good habits and attitudes. Since then, I have tried to slow talk with him and be good to him. However, this didn't change him.

Many years had passed, Hau was in Year 5 now. He was still the same person who did not do his homework and remained silent in class. The pupils had complained to me that they saw him smoking outside the school. I was very angry when I heard that, so I told him to come to the office immediately and demanded him to tell me why he did that. His eyes were as dark as the dungeon when he stood before me. As usual, he bit his lips, did not speak a word.

"Where did you get the cigarette, Hau? Did you buy it?" I demanded. He shook his head.

"So you steal it?" I asked again.

He only shook his head. His eyes looked at his shoes.

"As a pupil, you should not smoke!" I frowned.

Then I remembered my first meeting with his father that he was smoking during our talk, I softened my voice. "Do you smoke because of your father?"

Now he nodded. I sighed. If a father does not set a good example, how can I blame a child for going astray due to the bad influence of his father.

"Do you know it's not good to smoke? You will get lung disease and heart attack. You will also affect others who inhale second-hand smoke from you." I advised.

Hau was quiet, nothing came out from his lips. I doubted if I had advised him successfully or my words just went past his ears, but I had tried my best as a teacher.

Not long after that, my pupils complained that their money was lost in the class and their first suspect was him. At first, I chose to ignore their claims as I hope it's not Hau who stole it. But after repeated cases of money theft in the class, I had to investigate it. I called Hau to the office and the pupils brought his school bag to me. I threw everything out from his school bag on the table and found nothing. I fumbled his pockets but found none. I tried to coerce and persuaded him to tell me the truth, but his mouth was tightly shut. After talking to him for a long time and it was in vain, I sent him to the headmistress. Miss Leow was a stern person and many students were afraid of her. Standing before Miss Leow, Hau was as silent as the grave. She scolded Hau and threatened him that she was going to report to the police. After hearing the word "Police", Hau slowly took out the crumpled notes from his shoes. We found the money and returned it to the pupils. Now, I had completely lost my trust and confidence in Hau and I knew I could never change him into a better person after so many years.

Year 6 was the last year for Hau to study in primary school. We had organised a school trip to Kuala Lumpur at the end of the year. Everyone was so excited about the trip except Hau. I called him aside and asked, "Don't you want to join the trip? This will be a good memory for you as a pupil in primary school."

He shook his head.

"You don't want to go?" I asked again.

He nodded his head. His mouth was still weighty, very hard to open.

"So you want to go?" I changed my question.

"Your father did not want you to go?" I interrogated further.

He nodded his head.

"I'll help you to talk to your father if you want to go." I persuaded him.

He shook his head hard and mumbled, "No".

I felt pity for him that he couldn't join us. When we came back from the trip and watched the photos excitedly. He sat quietly in his corner looking outside of the window, staring at emptiness. On the last day of the graduation at school, every pupil shook hands and waved goodbye to one another, feeling sad to leave the school as they were going to depart to different destinations in life. Hau was still sitting at the corner, his eyes looked even emptier this time.

Throughout the six years of teaching him, I did not notice a change in Hau's studies and behaviour. He was still slow in learning and did not submit his homework. He never memorised the words for spelling and dictation. He always topped the last place in his class. His body still had an unbearable odour that he had no good friends for the six years of schooling. Though he did not fight in class, he was as quiet as before and reluctant to talk to anyone. He never improved on his studies. His parents never came for Open Day, showing no care for his studies at all.

After he entered secondary school, I lost the news of him. I still got in contact with his classmates except him. They also told me that they lost contact with him. What I heard was that he quit school when he was in Form 2 and worked for his father.

From all the pupils I had taught in primary school, I felt I was a failure when it came to Hau. Throughout the six years, no matter how hard I tried to mould Hau into a good character, my effort was futile. I felt hopeless just like the first time I met Hau.



A verse in the Bible stated, "What is crooked cannot be straightened". It's true a tree that grows bent for 30 years cannot be straightened in one year, but it is still possible to straighten it when the tree is young. The same goes to a child, if we mould him into cultivating good habits when he is young, he will walk on the right path. However, bad habits learned early in life are hard to get rid of later. Since it is not easy to straighten the tree after many years, it's also not easy to make the path straight for a child who is not grown in a proper environment. Though education can change a person, Hau's parents did not provide the right attitudes and values for their child. Even if a teacher tries hard to provide the best for the pupils, without the support from the parents, the effort is futile. Therefore, it is not easy for a teacher to correct deep and crooked flaws in a child when the family does not practice good values. Let's pray that all parents shower their children with love and care and become a role model for them, so that the young ones grow up into self-assured adults!



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A SEEMINGLY ORDINARY JOURNEY FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY

by Yomana Chandran

I'Oh gosh!'
'What ?'
A teacher? Why?
Didn't you get any other profession?
Of all the other things in the world, why did you choose teaching?

These were what I had heard from people around me when I said that I was going to become a teacher. Too much denial, though. I had endured more than this and it was never pleasant. I couldn't fathom why people were looking down on this profession as I was always taught that a teacher is the core reason for creating many other professions. To my surprise, these were said by people of the same entity. Can you believe that? I was baffled as I did not know whether they were against the career or rather, me for personal reasons. The dilemma continued.

Well, as a matter of reality, I would like to make a truthful confession. All of these humiliations that I faced had added salt to my injury. Yes! I'm talking about my wounded heart because being a teacher was never my choice. What choice? Nay, never had one too. There was never a light at the end of the tunnel. With absolute vacuumed determination in heart, I took the route that came forcibly on my way. What misery I thought!

Never once has it struck me that I will have to leave my childhood dream behind and accept something that was never on my wish list. The hopelessness that I had upon holding onto the teaching application form can't be described in words. I felt devastated. Since I was young, I was asked to study hard as much as I could in order to achieve

my dream but why was it that after growing up, I had to let it go? The question lingered in my mind for quite some time but I had to move on. Well, not that I had any choice to do something else, though. There was nothing but a dead end.

After a series of applications, attending an interview and written test, finally the offer letter had arrived via email. I felt as if I was swimming in aimless water at that moment. Without any expectation, I had to put up a fake smile to my parents who felt relieved that their daughter had finally gone to further her studies and that she would have a promising career in the future. Looking at their blissful faces, I didn't want to turn down the offer or go against them. It was as if thousands of swords pierced through my heart at one time. The pain was unbearable but I could not speak out.

That particular day, it was hot and the sun shone brighter than usual. I guess it was because of my post traumatic experience of handling the fact that I had finally arrived at the teachers' training college for my foundation studies. New faces in black and white attire everywhere. Filling up forms and carrying luggage bags here and there. It was as if we (teacher trainees) were refugees and were struggling to survive on a new land. With a blurry and sulky face which I could not hide anymore, tears started rolling down the cheeks with tangled thoughts in my mind.

Well, to my surprise, I adapted to the environment and slowly started to embrace reality. As people always say, it was absolutely easier said than done. Only the one who had gone through the pain of burying her desire just to make the others happy fathoms this indescribable emotion. Year after year, I slowly regained myself and started to follow the flow of my life. Self-motivation was the key to nip the pain off the bud and transform all those hurdles into drive for success. The best lesson that I had understood was when something gets away from us, it is not about the loss but it implies that we ought to receive something better from the universe.

It was the journey of many sleepless nights that I had encountered that made me who I'm today. Countless cries through the self-discovery path carved me to become stronger, braver and more determined. The fight that I had put up to fight off the invisible opponent was not easy but it was never impossible. I didn't succumb to the pain of failure and envisioned myself winning the battle for the next four years of my first Degree after a year and a half of foundation studies. That spark in me lifted my soul to love myself more. I began questioning if not me, who else will work on me? The constant drawback of 'why should I do this?' changed to an affirmative 'I am doing this right!

I started designing my own life according to my own accord. It was never a smooth sail. A bed of roses? Not even close. Constant falling and rising became my companion. The worst pain that I had faced throughout 5 years and a half of my studies was when people whom I had treated as friends discarded me because they felt that they were right without understanding my real intention of wanting the best for all of us together and it became the greatest scar in my heart till date. I have always wanted to share what I had known and help to lift everyone else when I'm in a team but not everyone was able to understand that. A few used to think as if I was trying to empower them and keep them in control.

I wondered why they were unable to see the real intention of a key player in the team who was striving for the best of the team as well. When they became overwhelmingly happy after obtaining outstanding grades, they forgot who was the core reason to lift them up. How ironic? I used to watch this from far and smile on my own thinking that at least, I had done something good for them and not become the reason for any of their downfall which might cause even worse repercussions and not to forget, I felt grateful too for their presence in the team as that was another reason of obtaining the best grades too. After all, it was our teamwork which made us excel. But, do they think

think the same ? No. They did not. Was I able to let it go? No. I would have forgiven them thinking that they were immature for what they had done but I will never forget as it taught me about people and how they can change easily.

At last, the unexpected journey in life ended and I graduated! After a long journey of studies and roller coaster life experiences, it ended tremendously better than expected. I emerged as one of the first class honours graduates in the Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) course. I could remember my mother's tears of joy and my father's grin from ear to ear during that blissful moment. They were jumping in joy as they believed that their responsibility in providing me with proper education which comes with a promising career has succeeded. So, what's next?

The new phase of life was about to start. It was a matter of days. The real question was; Will it be a Boon or Bane? It was as if a gender reveal occasion as I was waiting to know if I will be appointed as a teacher at the place of my choice and when it will be? The wait was extremely long. It took nearly 8 months. I kept checking with my friends if they had gotten any news. In one way, I was glad to be at home the whole time and on another side, I was curious, nervous and anxious about what was about to happen in my career. The past phase still haunted me, I should say.

Another strike in my heart had hit me hard after getting the letter of appointment and looking at the word, JOHOR on the letter, I almost fainted. What ?? The southern region ? Once again, another storm of emotions engulfed me. Of all the other places that I had applied for, why on earth was it written as Johor?!?! The rage mounted in me. It was as if the bad luck out of nowhere had pounced on me again and decided to reside like an unwanted guest. A mess. I didn't know how to get rid of that messiness. I wished I had a time machine to delete all the unwanted and undesirable scenes in my life.

My eyes looked for choices but is there any? Sigh. Never. Choices are never meant to be in my life. It is always either Do or Don't situation which lies in front of me and guess what, I always 'choose' Do or shall I say, I'm always forced to 'Do' it. After the first nightmare of 5 and a half years, another nightmare was already waiting at the doorstep. I wondered if God had mistaken me for someone else or if my fate had miscalculated what was destined for me in reality. My heart shattered into thousands of pieces that I could not pick them up to rebuild. Once again, I was hanging at the edge of a cliff. I mustn't say no because it was the only job opportunity that I had.

The Day has arrived and as everyone else, I went to the district education office in the morning to join the rest of the newly appointed teachers. We were asked to gather and meet our respective principals before heading to our schools. After bidding farewell to some of my newly met friends, I saw the senior assistant of administration of my school. I introduced myself and followed her to the school. I tried to keep calm and met the principal. Upon seeing him, I was dumbstruck as he commented saying that he was expecting a male teacher and not me. My heart sank. What's wrong if I'm a female? Why am I not treated the same as the other person (male teacher) who had stepped into the school on the same day as I did?

Thousands of muted thoughts were running in my mind. I was devising an escape plan from the school. I hated the thought of not being welcomed to the school. Plus, the school ended at 4.10pm which was more frustrating. I didn't want to get glued to the chair. I walked around the school to get familiarised with the places, classes and pupils. I met some teachers and they were friendly with genuine

smiles in welcoming me to the school. Some even volunteered to introduce themselves before I did. Not bad, I thought. Till date, these are the beautiful things that I could still reminisce about on the first day at work.

It is true what I've always heard about people saying that life is a roller-coaster. Sometimes, you tend to touch the peak and other times, you tend to touch the ground. At least, touching is much better than hitting hard onto the ground. Things started to unfold one after another. To keep it short, I should say my escape plan flopped even before I tried to execute it. Hilarious? Not at all. I started to follow the principle of 'Follow the flow' and 'Stop making things complicated'. A wise person has shared with me that 'Everything that happens for a reason and you shall find it soon with patience and continuous determination'.

I started my teaching journey at that school by planting positive seeds of progressive thoughts into my mind. I had the best companion, my motivational books written by Andrew Mathews and Rhonda Byrne. I started to visualise all those inspirational thoughts. I carved my path without looking at the others. I accepted reality and decided to venture it on my way. Everything that I had learned in the university was not applicable in the school because the curriculum had gone through transformation. So, it was not only something new to me as a new teacher but it was entirely new to the whole lot of teachers in the system.

I started to develop a good rapport with my school community and at the same time, I got myself comfortable in the environment. I got to know the administration and how things work there. I didn't want to be someone who is tied to a fixed routine of going to school in the morning, coming back in the evening and be happy with the salary that I get at the end of the month. In the following years, my profession took a leap. I started to step out of the school to be active in the English panel for district level. I owe a lot to my dearest friend, Mr. Elle (I call him as) as he was the reason that I was able to widen my social circle. I got new friends from the other schools, started to venture into seminars, answering techniques workshops and another milestone was becoming the SPM examiner.



All of these happenings had taught me about more things in the profession. I started to realise that every theory and information that I had learned from the books throughout my varsity years were just a drop in the vast ocean but in reality, there are many unmentioned things that come on our way through the lens of our own real life experience. One such experience is related to pupils' behaviour towards the reception of English language in their lives which many do not magnify. Let me begin my story. There was a year that I was destined to teach a group of boys, aged 13 [form 1]. Not to forget, the form 1 boys were footballers [a special recruit of JDT],

hence they were placed in my school for training purposes as well as for academics too. However, they came from different states with different backgrounds.

Different dialects of mother tongue, different personalities, different attitudes, different perceptions about academics. Their sole aim was to become the greatest football players. They were conditioned in the way that they need to have a training schedule and to strive and show their skills on the field in order to be selected as the footballers. When it comes to English, the pupils did not even know how to spell the days and the months. Their English was equivalent to pre-school level by which I had to conduct

lessons on days, months, spellings, word class, vocabulary and et cetera. My school is a cluster school where the main aim is academic excellence. Can you imagine how contradicting it could have been? Talking about school assessment, examination, format, syllabus, KSSM and what not were of no use as the pupils were unable to fathom them.

Days became weeks as I had continuously cracked my head on how to make them learn English at ease. I took this as a challenge or I'd rather say it as an 'orientation' for myself. Being the lone ranger, I started sailing on my own, trying to pick myself up in teaching them. It was not easy on my side. I cried for many days as I used to prepare extravagant lessons but they ended up in the drain without an ounce of success. You name it, use of realia, music, movie, games, puppet, art and craft, videos and the list goes on. Nothing worked. I thought I had reached my patience limit and almost surrendered when I found out that I had missed the whole point of not assessing them to identify the type of learners they were. I had a hunch that it might work out. So, what else, I tried.

As the saying goes 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. I realised that I mustn't have this situation in my class anymore. With tears, disappointments, frustrations and urge to give up, I started from scratch once again. I found out that they were kinesthetic learners and they can't sit still on the chairs for a long time. So, I started learning about track and field activities that they like. I incorporated them into my English lessons. The pupils were not allowed to sit during my lessons. They had to be constantly on the move. There were less sitting and listening sessions. There were more havoc scenes in the class and outside the classroom as well. I would say that I was both their English and Physical Exercise teacher. We learned English while playing sports.



Following this, there was once, my assistant of administration senior questioned me on why my class was noisy. Should I be afraid of what I had done? No! I explained to her from A to Z and that was the end of our conversation. I did no harm and I'm the person in charge for them. Even if someone has anything to comment, my reply would be 'If you have nothing good to say, don't say'. My aim was not their excellent A's at the end of the assessment or examination but it was about their progress of from being a zero into becoming a hero. As the outcome,

during the year-end assessment, all the boys in the class passed. The ones who had gotten single digit grade in the previous examination managed to pass the paper. When I had listed their marks, there was no red-ink. Hurray! I can't seem to find a proper word to describe how I had felt at that moment but the satisfaction to see their progress was more than anything.

That was the day I had realised as a teacher that producing A or A+ is not everything in teaching but the real bliss is when the pupils progress because of a teacher's hard work, effort and self-determination. If only I had given up on that day, I wouldn't have come this far, I wouldn't have known how much I could work for my pupils' improvement. Imagine if nothing was done on that day, do you feel the pupils' grades would have changed from red-ink to blue ink? I don't think so. It would have been a huge loss for me. Thanks to the Almighty for this opportunity. The following year was another memorable year with another group of boys. Shall I say another experience? Again, it had proven

that the theories and practices that I learned in my Bachelor of Education were compact in books but not practical in reality. This experience was about how a group of boys from different walks of lives were clustered and confined to a classroom and it was not only the English language that switched them off but it was the entire education system in their eyes.

Even after years, each detail in the classroom is fresh in my mind and I'm not sure if they could recollect everything but I can, in my writing. On the first day of my encounter in the classroom, the boys were uninterested. As I started the lesson, they were diverting me by asking me things that they were not supposed to, I should say. They started asking me about the size of my inner clothes and if I had any boyfriend. I never saw that coming. I made myself brave despite the insecurities that had sipped into me, so that it could end the day well without being emotional or trigger any other unwanted scenario. Well, being an unmarried person back then, having pupils asking such unreasonable questions in the class had put me off. I had to do what it takes. I met my principal and told him the story. When the principal had offered a change of class for safety purposes, I refused as I remembered what I did a year ago and giving up was never an option on my list. I was ready to face them again in the next few days.

I took it as a challenge and walked into the class again. To be frank, it was not a challenge but it was ego that I didn't want to run away from the class and be labelled as a coward. I was able to imagine what they would react if I ought to stop teaching them. I was pretty sure that they would laugh at me cynically which I did not want. Do you want to know what happened during the next lesson? I miscalculated. I thought that they would be perplexed after seeing me standing with courage in front of them but they became even worse. As I was walking around while invigilating them during the examination, one of the boys attempted to pull one of my sandals off from my feet. I nearly tripped. I turned to look at him but as expected, he pretended as if nothing happened. To add fuel to the fire, he even had the audacity to comment 'Jaga-jaga, teacher. Kalau jatuh, saya yang kena angkat.'

I fumed with rage. How dare he attempt such a thing towards me, I walked out of the class with devastation. It was totally a different issue that I had to deal with. I still considered myself as a new teacher, though. Being in my third year in the profession with such a group of bullies, this was unacceptable. That was only my second lesson with them and I felt I made the wrong decision by facing them again. I doubt whether my courage and ego as not to portray the coward 'me' would serve any purpose. I decided to accept the offer of changing the class. I approached my head of panel and she was positive but when I had approached my head of department, she was reluctant since we had a teacher who had resigned and there was a lack of teachers. I didn't know how to be persuasive, so I walked away in a dilemma.

When I approached the other teachers prior, they advised me to just enter the class and ignore the pupils. They told me that the pupils were problematic. The pupils were labelled as last class pupils who won't excel. Hence, rather than trying this and that, they asked me to get into the class and carry on with the syllabus. 'Biar mereka, yang nak belajar akan belajar, yang tak nak, abaikan'. The feeling of dismay was unbearable. Again, the dark days were trapping me. I felt discouraged to get into the classroom again but remember, I never had any other option than to deal with this. So, what else was I able to do? Without any idea, I walked into the class again. I looked prepared but I kept quiet. No instructions were given. It was a silent lesson day.

I sat on the chair and watched them closely. I stared straight into their eyes. I focused on each of them as if I was an investigating officer. During the first half an hour,

they disregarded my presence as if I was invisible. They kept chattering and laughing out loud. Right after the 30th minute, they quietened themselves, stopped chatting and started whispering by signaling their eyes towards me. One of them stood and asked if I was going to teach but I turned a deaf ear. That made him feel ashamed and he sat down silently, ignoring his friends' giggles. I took out a novel and they were curious what I was about to do next. I started reading it while keeping an eye on them. After the bell rang, I took a whiteboard marker and wrote 'Thank you' and left the class without uttering any word on that day. Alas, after that day, I noticed the light blinking at the end of the tunnel.

On that day, my silent treatment and the bravery that I had put up forcefully in front of them paid off because they were puzzled to see me again, behaving absolutely nothing was wrong even when they were trying to cast me away from their class. The whole week was gone and I had many other weeks to face them. Left alone in the seemingly endless ocean of thoughts, I couldn't think of any other ideas on how to tackle them. I couldn't follow the advice of the other teachers by ignoring them. How could I just enter the class, mutter whatever words that come out from my mouth during the lesson and leave the lesson like a puppet. Without realising, I was being observed by my boss. He had been watching over my back during my English lesson and I did not know that until he called me into the office the following week to disclose this matter.

I rolled my eyes in disbelief and he asked me to carry on with what I was doing on my own way. So, I knew I was being monitored. I took it positively, perhaps for safety purposes. I grinned and started my own battle. In the next few weeks, my first battle was 'Focus'. I had to shift their focus on me, not elsewhere. The silent treatment worked its magic on them. The communication between us was not done verbally but it was the nonverbal communication tricks through eye movement, body language and writings on the whiteboard no matter what they had asked me. It was hilarious but on a positive note, I was able to keep them engaged during the lessons. Since it was nonverbal, they had no choice but to stay focused on me throughout the lesson, awaiting instructions. Gradually, the pupils made the effort to listen to what I've got to share.

The second part was 'Change'. It started with their so-called invisible books that made their grand entrance into the classroom and followed by the determination of not letting go anything in vain on purpose for their future. I spoke to them about how useful the language would be for them. Most of them admitted that it was an eye-opener for them. Hence, it made me realise too that most of our students are blindfolded in the system as they don't know the real purpose of learning a myriad of subjects. All they know is their timetable has many subjects and there are many teachers to teach them and they need to follow the same routine for years. This truth had enlightened me back then too and since then, I started to share with my pupils the importance of learning the English language subject on the first day of my lesson. They deserve to know the purpose of their learning.

The final part of the battle was 'Success'. After a series of everything mentioned above, I did not lose. The pupils had managed to show interest in their learning and also started to progress in the English language subject too. On the other hand, it was not about learning the subject in the classroom only, but the boys who had inferiority complex and thought that the pupils from the other classes are better off than them were proven wrong when I had to force them to participate in the district level scrabble competition to prove their buried talents. In order to make them realise their worth, I struck a deal with them. I told them if they won the inter-class competition, they would participate in the district-level competition. So were they left with any choice? No!



As expected, that was the ticket to represent the school and get to the next level. The pupils who opposed me earlier, saying that they might end up putting me in shame and not wanting to participate in the inter-school competition as they were worried, managed to get third place in the district-level! Impressive, I should say! The boys were awestruck and expressed that it was their first time that their talent was being acknowledged and they thanked me for being the reason. And, the rest was history. Now, the pupils have completed their Diploma in the local universities and are on their paths to become successful in their respective careers. They have taught me and become the epitome of 'When there is a will, There is a way' in my life. Previously, I used to

After such encounters, I started sensing that I am where I should be. Nobody promises a smooth journey on our life journey, it is us who should carve the path. I started seeing and going through my new belief of 'There must be a fall, then there will be a rise'. Only a fall will teach us to rise and fly or else, we will never see any progress or rather, be static at where we had started until the ending. All in all, teaching is not about studying, learning from books or from other people but it is about experiencing, experimenting and progressing. Once a teacher, forever a teacher. Even after one retires from the profession, the word 'TEACHER' follows until the end of the breath, not as a word but as a lifetime happiest emotion!



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CREATE PASSION IN TEACHING

by Thahira Bibi Bt Tkm Thangal

Prologue

Teaching is not my JOB; it is my Passion. I have never imagined making teaching my profession. I was in my career as a human resource practitioner before making my path to education. Am I passionate?

When I first started teaching, I believed that I could share my experiences, I thought I could share my knowledge, and I felt I could create students' enthusiasm for learning. But I was wrong. The truth is that I need to realign my beliefs in educating students. It took me a while to understand the word PASSION. How can I manifest my passion for teaching? I know teachers with passion will inspire students. Let me share three personal experiences of creating a passion for teaching and a passion for learning with the students

The first experience of creating the passion for learning in my students is through Paul, a cheeky and notorious student in the class. Paul likes to sit at the back of the class. In every class, teachers will complain about how he sits in the class. He likes to wear a cap and always slouches against the chair when he sits. I need to confess that I am susceptible to seeing my students dress improperly or indecently. For me, students need to project their identity of students. So, back to the story of Paul. He was sitting with his circle of friends, and as I entered the class. Paul and his friends had this naughty look on their faces. They observed my gestures from the moment I entered the class until I called their names. Paul was the first in my mind to be called and answer questions. As a teacher who believes discipline is vital in the class, I slowly and firmly addressed his posture as not acceptable. I instructed him to sit straight, and immediately the whole group of his friends also sat straight, although they were hesitant initially. I told them my principle even from day one of my meeting with them. As teachers, we need to scan and recognise the body language of all students in the class. It sounds weird to scan your students, but it is true; you must look at each student in the class. Paul will always catch my attention every time I enter the class. As time passed, he learned that I meant business and needed to abide by my rules.

My second encounter to enhance my passion for teaching was through Jenny, a timid girl with a nervous breakdown. She always avoided eye contact with me in the class and was not giving her best to focus in class. I was unsure of the reasons, but she refused to look at my face during the first few days of my presence in the class. So, I kept calling her name to do classroom chores like collecting and returning students' exercise books. Finally, after a week of practice, she got used to my approaches, and since then, she participated moderately in the class. Imagine a weak of hard work transformed a timid student into a moderate active student, and maybe today, as I am typing this story, she could be a very active student or worker somewhere in the world.

In the subsequent encounter, Shaina was doing her first-degree thesis, and I was her supervisor. Like all students, Shaina also had difficulties understanding her research area. She kept ignoring me and gave many reasons for not completing the targeted

progress of her research. One day, I invited her to a coffee session, where the change in Shaina was noticed. Positively, after that discussion over coffee, she became braver to meet and ask relevant questions about her study. Her strong perseverance and commitment to exploring the research outcome triggered my soft spot to push her forward. She was very optimistic even though I kept rejecting her drafts. Finally, she did well in her viva-voca and received compliments from the examiners. By observing her character, I managed to change her to be more proactive in life, and in return, her efforts to keep asking and finding ways to finish the task not only helped in completing the thesis on time but also enhanced my passion for teaching.

Those were the three personal experiences showing the importance of scanning and observing your students. You might be asking for how long should a teacher observe and scan students in the process of bringing positive changes in the students? For newbies, you need to scan and observe your students in each of your lessons, but the most crucial moment will be the first day of your encounter with your student. Once they know that you are observing and paying attention to them, you will slowly realise that students focused more on your lessons. You need to be very quick in observing their reactions to your lesson. Notice your students' body language, tone, excitement, and eye contact. Observation involves a complete focus on your students. You will then give your best to cater to each learner's ability to adapt to the learning process. I will observe the way students discuss during lessons, especially during the ice-breaking session. Observe how they discuss with each other and watch how they react towards each other. These will provide insights for you to be more proactive for the next class.

As teachers, we are the catalyst to move students from the unknown to the known in course content knowledge. Besides, we, the teachers, are also the initiator of positively transforming students' behaviour, beliefs, and character. Students need our guidance. They need to be informed at each step in doing things. There could be students who feel neglected, and maybe some feel rejected. Scan and observe them at every moment of the lesson. If you need, you can always do some background checks on students' family backgrounds to show you care, which builds your students' trust and confidence.



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A TEACHER APPA...???

By Yugeswari Arumugam

"A teacher? Seriously Appa, you want me to become a teacher?" That was the first question I asked my Appa when he showed me the newspaper advertisement by the Institute of Teacher Education, Malaysia in 2007. I still remember his reply, "Without teachers, you won't be here". I stood still; my mind wondered. Half-heartedly I agreed. Back then, I was one of the best students in SPM who scored 9As. Yet, like a bolt from the blue, I didn't get any promising offers to further my studies under scholarship. When my hopes were vanishing into thin air; one day, a letter from the Institute of Teacher Education, Malaysia came as the saviour for my future. I was offered a UK-Malaysia based twinning programme on TESL for the secondary school. It was a full scholarship programme by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. Hence, I took the offer and the silver lining was to go to the UK.

In 2015, I got my posting to SMK Air Kuning, Perak. This school is in the same district as where I am staying, thus I can commute daily. Yet, 'Mambang Di Awan? Where is this place?' my thoughts lingered. 19th January 2015, my first day to step into a school surrounded by lush greeneries and oil palm estates. I was full of energy to channel everything I have learnt all these years to the students. I was assigned two Form 3 classes, two Form 2 classes and 1 Form 5 class. Three levels for a beginner, indeed a challenge. I was told a new broom should sweep well. With much acceptance, I stepped into my memorable Form 5 class, 5EA. I was greeted in English. It was a 'Yeay!'. Then...a student said, "teacher, kami tak faham ahhh Inggeris, kami budak kampong". I was in a state of shock. I told them that they have been learning English since they were young. However, not much interest was given to what I have said. I had to switch to Malay and the lesson for that day was bilingual. My hopes and dreams were carried away with the reality of most schools facing especially in rural areas, English is an 'enemy'. So, back to basic, that was my motto.

Day by day, I was drained. My 5EA students particularly could barely construct a proper sentence. It was also a big class with 40 students, which means the highest number of contributors for the SPM 2015. My only aim was to get them to pass the English paper. As the dilemma was haunting me, one day I was called by the principal. In his room, he handed me a letter, and my heart skipped a beat as I read the header. It was the district level English drama competition. I was asked to lead and train a team for the school. I dragged my feet to 5EA and the 40 faces; stared at me blankly that day. After two days, I decided to persuade my 5EA to participate in the competition as I believed it could be a huge help for them in improving their English. As expected, none agreed, I had no choice but to prepare the script and hand it out personally during the class. I asked the students to read it out aloud. Then, I elicited what they understood from the content. Surprisingly, some of them could give me responses although in Malay. Then, slowly I asked them to read the script with expressions and actions. I gave reward stickers and sweets to those students who can pronounce difficult vocabulary correctly. It took me almost three weeks to get them to read the script flawlessly. During the process, they were in a state of acceptance to participate in the drama competition. Although the guilt of not following the syllabus strictly was there, I braced myself because I knew learning

Time was running out, so I baited the 5EA students for an audition by explaining the competition could contribute to their English Paper 3 (ULBS) in SPM.

The luck was on my side, most of them stayed back after school. With the help from my head of the English panel, we could choose the characters and roles promptly. The training was held for almost two months. We spent most of our afternoons and weekends at school practising. In the blink of an eye, it was the day of the competition. There were 22 students in the drama team, each with fear and insecurities. While waiting for our turn, I told the students, "All this battle is not about winning, but trying and proving ourselves that we can do better." At the end of the competition, the results were announced, we got fourth place. Without a doubt, it was an embodiment of frustration. Thus, to fix the situation, I exemplified Rudyard Kipling's quote to my students, "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, treat those two impostors just the same". Deep down, I was content and proud of their effort.

After some time, my 5EA had more confidence in using the English language. In SPM 2015, we managed to get 76.7% passes in the English language. Trip down the memory lane, 34 out of 40 students of 5EA passed the paper, which thrilled me. I was at the top of the world and the moment was engraved in my heart forever. This experience taught me learning is meant to be fun and does not happen inside the four walls only. Since then, I practice fun and outdoor learning. It has been 7 years of my teaching journey and I still carry out some of my English lessons outdoor with a variety of activities. I know I might not be the best teacher with 100% passes in the English language, but what matters most to me; my students are not afraid of "English". Now, I can proudly say, 'Yes Appa! I am a teacher!'.











THE AUTHOR

Ms. Yugeswari Arumugam is currently teaching in SMK Air Kuning, Perak. She has been teaching for 7 years and currently pursuing her M. ED TESL in UPSI. She was also a district level Master Trainer for CEFR Form 4 and Form 5 in 2019 and 2020. Besides, she received her Excellent Service Award (APC) in 2020. Teaching has become her passion over the years.

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SUCCESS AND SIGNIFICANCE

By Yap Yoke Chin

Sitting here in front of my computer as my retirement day approaches, many thoughts swirled around my head as I reminisce the experiences of 33 years in government service – first as a primary school teacher, then as a secondary teacher and now finishing as an education officer in the district education office. I have had my taste of successes and fair share of triumphs in every phase of my career. I have seen myself grown from being a timid, insecure young teacher sent to a remote traditional village to teach English to become a subject matter expert trained by experience to coach and affect teachers to become effective educators in our institutions of learning.

Many would acknowledge that I have reached the pinnacle of success, having made a name for myself in the education circle, with achievements and accolades that many would be proud to have besides having reached the highest grade in a teacher's pay scheme before retirement. Well, that is how most of us would measure success. All of us would want to strive to be successful. We would go to great lengths to make sure we succeed but after having gone through all that, I realised that far more valuable than success is the impact we have on others. On that road to achieving that success we yearn for, how do we relate to people we come in contact with? How do we impact or affect them? Are we of significance to them? Do we bring meaning to their lives?

My thoughts on this have been greatly influenced by management guru Ken Blanchard and CEO S.Tryent Cathy's contrast on the ideas of success and significance and their views have helped me to reorder my thinking of which is more important – success or significance? According to them, the successful person has learned how to make money, but the significant person has learned to give it away – how to be generous, to share blessings of money with those who are in need or those who help meet a variety of social and humanitarian needs.

The successful person has achieved great things – sadly sometimes at the expense of others. He is proud of what has already been accomplished. The significant person understands that the greatest thing anyone can accomplish is to serve others and to help them achieve their goals.

Finally, successful people have attained a measure of status. Others look up to them and maybe see them as role models. We often discover that that those who have become our role models let us down. In direct contrast, the significant person is one who values relationship. They become trusted friends and invaluable mentors, and they invest their time on others rather than in striving to build status.

I see the meaning and value in the differences they have pointed out and they have help me to understand that real success comes only when we are not self-seeking but instead seek to put others before self, and that is when we will become significant people. Acknowledgement for significant people does not come in the form of awards, accolades or public recognition that we so often see in the media or on the stage. The significant person is the one that work quietly behind the scenes, the one who takes a back seat, the unsung hero/heroine that is a pillar of strength and encouragement to those placed under his/her care. The tribute that comes is in the form of an unexpected Whats App messages or a short note of appreciation or a grateful acknowledgement from someone whose life you have touched. When someone comes up to you and call you "Teacher!" from out of the blue and you have to blink a few times and searched your memory to recall who they are. When they tell you that your birthday is an important date in their calendars and that you will always have a special place in their hearts. When they will drop by whenever they are back in town to say "hi". These are actions that will tell you that you have been significant in their lives. They remembered you for the things you have done for them when you cannot recall what you did because it comes naturally from the heart of someone who truly cares.

In life, recognition of success comes and goes, and as time passes by the euphoria of those triumphant moments will fade into oblivion but the lives that we have touched and affect will be living monuments of the work we have done. Those significant moments when lives are touched and affected will be deeply etched in the hearts of the recipients even though we may have long forgotten our deeds because these are treasures that we have unknowingly lay up where moth and rust cannot destroy and where time cannot steal.

Yes, as I end my career, the question begs to be asked, "AM I A SUCCESSFUL PERSON OR A SIGNIFICANT PERSON?

As I look back to the many people that I have had the privilege to teach, mould, nurture and share their lives with – pupils from the remote kampungs, teenagers from the towns and cities, teachers from both primary and secondary divide, colleagues who work in the same offices, friends who share the same vocation, parents whose children I have the privilege to teach – I realised that only they can be the judge, only they can give a valid assessment that will be the answer to the question. Their testimony of their experiences with me will be my report card.

As I take my bow, I can confidently say that I have given my best using my gifts and talents for God's good purposes as it is written in the Bible – "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesian 2:10). Doing my best in the vocation which God has called me into is my way of honouring the God I love and worship.



THE AUTHOR

Ms Yap Yoke Chin was an English Language School Improvement Specialist Coach Plus (SISC+) for primary schools in the district of Temerloh, Pahang Darul Makmur. She has been both a primary and secondary school English Language teacher. She also served as State English Language Key Personnel and has been involved in various teacher training programmes and teaching/learning material development at national, state and district levels.

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THE BOYS WHO STOLE MY HEART

By Divya Arumugam

When I left my lucrative job as a Global Support Executive for an international bank and decided to join the teaching fraternity, I only had one thing on my mind. It was to be a wholesome educator and conceive students who are not just academically inclined but more to an individual who is smart, compassionate, talented, loving, kind and generous.

Life is not all about scoring straight A's but to be able to survive in the rat race society and stand tall in facing the adversities and swim against the tide that they are bound to face. Which is why, compared to intelligent students, I pay more attention to the naughty, weak, poor and troublesome students. The backbenchers, passive and quiet students always never fail to amaze me with their hidden talent.

In my 12 years of being a teacher, I have worked in more than 3 schools and have come across many unforgettable memories with my pupils but compared to all of them, one boy stole my heart and will always remain as the most unforgettable gem that I have unearthed in my teaching profession.

Tinagaran or fondly known as Tina, was my 12 year old Year 6 student. He was a special child. Tina was born with many health complications. He had a hole in the heart and was not allowed to participate in Physical Education lesson. It broke my heart to see him sitting on the bench at the canteen while his classmates ran and played happily in the field. He had a sad and lifeless expression in his eyes and I could sense how he longed to play with his friends.

We did inform his classmates not to make him run around due to his health condition but once in a while we caught him chasing his friends around the canteen during recess and it made my heart skip a beat. Every time he pants and has breathing difficulty, I get panic and will lash out at him and his mischievous friends and warn them of the consequences.

Actually, Tina did not attend school till he was 10 years old. The normal national school refused to enrol him because apart from his heart condition, he also had ear, nose and throat complications and cleft. As a result, he could not speak and had hearing difficulties. The previous administration advised his parents to send him to a school for children with special needs but his mother was not too keen. As a result, Tina had no basic education.

At the age of 10, however, when the new headmaster took charge, he accepted Tina and encouraged all the teachers to give him special attention and guide him so that he can at least read, write and speak with basic knowledge and thus the challenge started.

Since he could not speak, I had a tough time in evaluating him especially in the listening, speaking and reading task. Even though he was in Year 4, I gave him pre-school books and basic writing activities. Tina was gifted in writing though. His handwriting was beautiful. He could see and write simple sentences neatly and clearly. Every time I

gave him a star or an A, his eyes would sparkle.

By the time he came to Year 6, he was often hospitalised and was absent from school almost the whole year. He was scheduled to undergo an operation for his heart and throat to enable him to speak just like any other normal child.

On one hand, I was happy that he was going to be able to lead a normal life, just like the other children of his age. But on the other hand, I constantly worried about him and his future. I kept thinking about him and how he is going survive in the outside world with his health condition and lack of basic education.

I spoke about him to a few organisations and NGO's so that after his UPSR exams, he can enrol in some vocational school or basic skills and training institute. As the UPSR exams drew closer, teachers were worried about his studies. Tina was the only boy who fails in the exams and if he sits for the exam, his results will have an effect on the school's UPSR passing percentage. We tried our level best to guide him so that he can at least pass the exam but due to his constant hospitalisation, there was nothing much we could do. In fact, although he did not attend school that year, he sat for all the papers during UPSR. Just before the English paper, I went and sat beside Tina. I held his fragile hand and told him, "Tina, I believe in you. I know you will do your best". I taught him the basic punctuation, sentence construction and few tips on how to answer both the papers. I hugged him and sent him off to the exam hall. As usual he just stared into my eyes and gave me the silent treatment. He looked visibly weak but clean and smart. Meanwhile, since I was very much concerned about his future, I tried collecting information on which skills he can learn to upgrade himself.

Unfortunately, Tina passed away a month later due to breathing complications. I received the shocking news when I was away attending a course and could not attend his funeral.

When the UPSR results were announced, to everyone's surprise, the school scored 100% passes, which means all the pupils passed at least 1 paper. We were curious to know which paper Tina passed. My HM went through his result slip, looked up and announced..."Tina passed English Paper 1.

I broke down in tears and said a silent prayer for him. I knew then that the love and care I showered upon him was not in vain. He did listen to me. Rest in Peace my dear Tinagaran. I will always miss you.



THE AUTHOR

I am Divya Arumugam, a primary school teacher from Ipoh, Perak. I am currently teaching at SJKT Kampar. I am an English Language teacher and the Head of the English Panel in my school. I am a mass communication graduate from University Putra Malaysia. I did KPLI in TESL and became a teacher in 2009. Prior to this school, I have taught in SJKT Kuala Kubu Bharu and SJKT Lenggeng. My hobbies are reading and writing and I used to be a freelance writer for a local daily.

FROM PAGE TO THE VIRTUAL STAGE

By Christopher Tan Yu Han

Technology, when used effectively, increases students' learning, understanding and achievement. It also intensifies their motivation to learn, encourages collaborative learning and supports the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills. Technological skills are necessary to provide students with what they need to succeed in the 21st century.

For our TSLB3233E Drama course, one of the Course Learning Outcomes required students to produce an adapted stage performance of a musical drama of their choice. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the closing of many Institutes of Teacher Education. Digitalisation had become inevitable and teacher trainers had to adapt and to do the best they could to keep learners engaged online. The Coronavirus inadvertently cancelled plans for in-person performances. It forced the craft of performing to move from page to the 'virtual' stage.

Being stuck at home, student teachers had the option to either perform their drama using the Google Meet platform or to produce a video recording of their performance. To address major issues such as lack of Internet connectivity and unstable telecommunication lines that would hinder a 'live' performance, student teachers opted to perform adaptations of their musical drama presentations using video recordings. A video recording, furthermore, would also provide a more authentic resemblance of a theatrical performance.

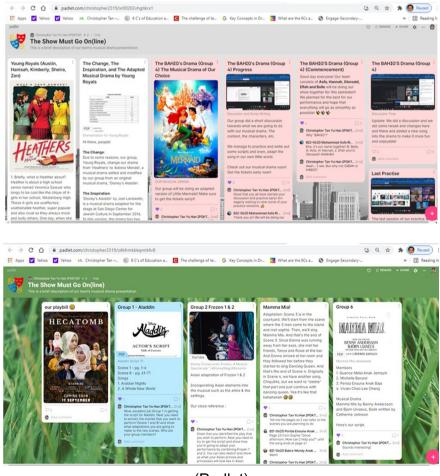
This paper takes a closer look at the pivotal role of digital tools, used to scaffold and support student teachers' deep learning in completing their task for the course. Also shared in this paper are student teachers' reflections of little success stories and some of the obstacles they faced during the course. Digital tools are programs, websites or online resources that can be used to make the teaching and learning process fun and meaningful; they can be used to support the educator deliver lessons as well as to help students manage and complete challenging tasks. Many these tools can be accessed in web browsers from home. Nevertheless, equally as important as the digital tools is the educator's mastery of the course content and experience in managing students' learning.

By participating in online drama play-acting activities using Google Meet such as "Let's play mime" and "Let's play mirrors," (shown in the pictures below) student teachers learned to express a range of emotions and similar feelings they may be experiencing. In these two activities, student teachers learned to release aggression and tension in a safe and controlled environment. The use of gestures and facial expression to express themselves made students more aware of their bodies and helped them work better in a team. These activities were often followed by a period of reflection afterwards.



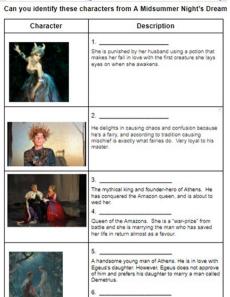
(Let's Play Mime & Let's Play Mirrors activity on Google Meet)

Padlet (shown in the pictures below) is an interactive online tool that is used with student teachers to collaborate, discuss and share links and pictures with each other in a common shared space. These tools are updated in real-time, making it perfect for collaborative group work, such as keeping track and updating teams' progress for our drama projects.

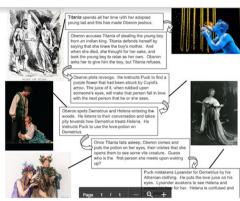


(Padlet)

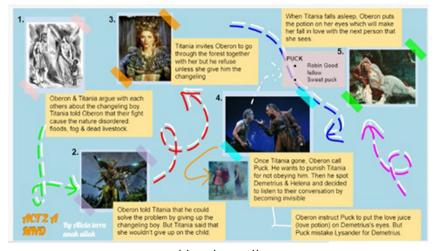
Digital tools such as Google Docs and Jamboard (shown in the pictures below) were used by teacher trainers to enhance the written communication skills of student teachers. Firstly, it allows teacher trainers to demonstrate and model good writing to student teachers. When a teacher trainer models writing, he or she can think aloud and verbalise the thoughts and actions that go into creating a text. This demonstration of writing by the teacher trainer is an opportunity for student teachers to observe the process of putting ideas and words into written form.







(Google Docs)



(Jamboard)

YouTube was used to trigger student teachers' interest and curiosity in performing an adaptation of a musical drama of their choice. Student teachers were asked to view a theatrical performance of "Disney's Aladdin - A Musical Spectacular" (shown in the picture below) and to analyse how drama techniques and technology was used effectively to enhance stage performance. (https://youtu.be/o-gLbgpzCc8)



(Aladdin on YouTube)

In the drama course student teachers explored the use of different digital tools and software applications in producing their own performance videos. Integrating digital tools into teaching and learning via the virtual classroom can improve student teachers' interest and engagement in lessons. It provides a change from the traditional lecture environment; it provides student teachers with different ways to learn. At the same time, it creates new teaching opportunities for teacher trainers in teaching the same things in new ways. There are online learning resources that teacher trainers can use; one for example, is bringing students to experience an online theatrical performance.

Features in Google Classroom allows for asynchronous lessons to be implemented. Recording features that allow input and discussion sessions to be saved and viewed at student teachers' own convenience support learning, especially those who lack Internet connectivity and face unstable telecommunication lines. A flipped classroom model of learning can also be conducted using Google Classroom. Student teachers may be asked to view a presentation online, prior to the in-class discussion of the material. By being exposed to material beforehand, student teachers can learn the concepts at their own pace and thus be able to focus better on participating in class discussion during the actual lesson.

Student teachers had to take the initiative to learn new technology on their own (digital tools and software applications). Basically, each student teacher recorded his or her own individual segment using phone cameras and laptops. These segments were then sent to a team member who compiled them before the videos are edited. The digital tools and software applications that were used to record and edit the performance videos include Capcut, Kinemaster, Filmora, Davinci Resolve 17, Dolby On, BandLab, InShot, Windows Video editor and Canva. Student teachers worked with various tools and apps depending on availability and convenience.

As many of the student teachers were unfamiliar with the tools and apps, they had to learn to use them through the help of YouTube and TikTok tutorials. Sometimes it required the further explanation of another team member to better understand. Luckily the tools and apps were relatively easy to learn and were free-of-charge. Thus student teachers were able to produce the videos on a minimal budget.

Poor internet connectivity and unstable telecommunication lines were the biggest challenges that student teachers faced. Other obstacles endured were in producing the video recording of their performance: eliminating noise/ distraction from the surrounding environment, a great amount of time was spent on planning, editing and processing the videos, difficulty in technical issues in video editing (inserting background sound – for example people talking at the marketplace, aligning individual singing with instrumental music, ensuring quality of the audio, etc.), and limited storage space in mobile phones due to the size of the videos causing the mobile phones to lag.

Student teachers also worried about not being able to complete the task on time as they had to juggle with doing other assignments as well. It must be said that not everyone is naturally talented when it comes to acting. Some may find it more difficult than others to express himself or herself verbally in front of the camera. However, many of the student teachers unanimously agreed that play-acting in drama definitely lessened the fear of making mistakes while speaking in public. Play-acting allowed a window for spontaneity and errors while delivering their dialogues and as a result of this, boosted student teachers' confidence in speaking with clarity and conviction in front of an audience.

Student teachers discovered that working in small teams can have various benefits, such as making better decisions, reducing stress, and avoiding internal competition. Hence, when every member is working towards achieving a common goal, the best

decision can be made while avoiding conflict because no one is competing against each other in the group. Student teachers were able to share little success stories they experienced. Movement restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic taught student teachers to be resourceful when it came to preparing costumes and props. They had to be creative and to adapt the use of household items and clothes for this purpose.

Student teachers threw their support behind their team-mates during play-acting practices and learned to laugh "with" one another despite slip-ups and shortcomings. Asynchronous learning catered to student teachers with different learning needs and styles and especially for those with poor internet connectivity. It ensured that no student teacher was left behind in the pursuit of education. Asynchronous learning allowed for student teachers to have flexible learning time. Some chose to record and edit their videos from 2 to 5 o'clock in the morning as the surrounding environment was quieter and more conducive for working. On the whole, student teachers heaved a big sigh of relief when their video performances were completed. The Covid-19 global crisis provided for a truly unique and interesting experience in the teaching and learning of drama; one we would never have imagined.









The student teachers managed to produce an adaptation of 9 video recordings of musical drama performances of their choice (shown in the pictures below).















The pictures below were scenes from student teachers' adaptation of their musical drama.



THE AUTHOR

Christopher Tan Yu Han has been a teacher trainer at the Institute of Teacher Education, Tun Abdul Razak Campus, Sarawak for 23 years. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota and his Master's degree from University Malaysia Sarawak. His area of professional interest is Language Arts.

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ROLES OF EDTECH & FLEXIBILITY

By Lim See Yin

The greatest success of a teacher can be evaluated by the growth of learners when they achieve the learning goals effectively. The crisis of Covid-19 has forced education system worldwide to resort to alternatives for face-to-face education to support the continuity of learning amid the lockdowns in many countries. The distinctive rise of EdTech (Educational Technology) becomes a must-integral tool for online education. This article focuses on how teachers can encourage flexibility with the assistance of digital tools which leads to successful online learning experience.

Introduction

The pace of integrating EdTech is accelerated by years due to the untimely outbreak of pandemic. In order to engage learners effectively, various approaches need to be consolidated to produce better learning outcome. Most schools in Malaysia have to undergo an emergent transition from face-to-face to online since March 2020. The rapid surge of demand for online educational activities and tools help to establish a more adaptive learning platform for the learners.

Challenges

The availability of teachers to get extensive exposure to explore new applications and EdTech innovations which could be integrated and customized for the target learners' needs becomes the biggest challenge as the focus is mainly placed on migrating face-to-face to online platform besides familiarizing oneself with learning management systems as well as basic presentation and office tools. Nevertheless, integration of EdTech is essential to engage learners actively during lesson time and provide them with flexibilities to complete the tasks assigned.

Integrating EdTech

The rising of pandemic crisis creates new opportunities to experiment new digital tools. The use of digital tools in place of books and whiteboard can be meaningful when EdTech and multimedia are used appropriately based on learners' needs to achieve the learning goals. This leads to more successful core competencies of 21st century learning for the learners. Lessons created can be further enriched with images, animations or videos for more interactive experiences. A large range of applications can be used to replace whiteboard or Smartboard such as ActivInspire, Gynzy and so on.

Leverage learning activities are made easy with built-in tools such as the timer, spinner, magic ink, revealer and spotlight which result in shorter preparation time but longer instructional time for better learning experience. STEM (Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics) learning becomes more practical and can be visualized at finger tips for learners to practise with the help of tools like dice roller, clock, compass, protractor, equation editor and so on. Some applications like KAMI has optical character recognition tool to transform scanned documents into fully digitally recognizable content with just a click away and read aloud tool to help learners who need assistance in reading.

It also provides more immersive learning interaction for learners. For instance, virtual reality classroom experience is made possible with applications like Nearpod to create

virtual tours or field trips. This helps to inspire the learners to investigate borderless possibilities and broaden their horizons. Gamification elements add fun to learning for learners to stay connected and spark their interest in lessons. Quizzes can be turned into thematic games with competitive scoreboard or leadership board. It carries the same educational value but with more learning excitements. Live participation of some web or cloud applications fosters collaboration at class or group level for learners to work collaboratively. Different values such as teamwork and respect differences can be cultivated via group collaboration.

Integration of EdTech also enables appreciation of talents and effective feedback for individuals. This could be done with built-in features. After each activity, some applications can generate statistics such as block or pie charts by class or individual results. This helps to keep track of the learners' performance and enable teachers to improvise lesson planning from time to time. Learners can also be rewarded with virtual stickers, animated gif icons or even receive audio comments to motivate the learners for their accomplishments.

Flexibility

Flexibility for online learning can be examined from different perspectives. Teachers can customize learning materials for learners based on their interest and abilities in a flexible manner. Materials can be duplicated easily and cater for learners of different abilities to allow them to progress individually. Besides enabling learners of mixed abilities to cope with the content at their own pace, giving learners a choice to produce output such as tasks assigned is equally important. Learners can be encouraged to choose what suits one best according to their learning styles, learning environment and existing resources such as accessibility to printers or devices. For example, learners can choose to work on physical books and upload or work on digital files and submit. This will help to boost their confidence level and promote self-directed learning.

Conclusion

All in all, use of EdTech tools for better adaptability in online learning helps to promote a more flexible, effective, meaningful and deep learning experience for the learners. Integration of EdTech has started drastically and is here to stay even for blended learning later. It is incumbent upon us to further exploit, explore and maximize its full potential to highly engage the learners and further stimulate their learning experience.







THE AUTHOR

Lim See Yin is currently an English teacher at Sri Kuala Lumpur International School. She obtained her Master in English as a Second Language at University of Malaya in 2014. Her areas of interests are phonetics and language varieties. She also received her Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching at Open University Malaysia in 2018.

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THE BULLY

by Kangga Manogaran

One of the most satisfying things about being a teacher is you have the power to put an end to any bullying that goes on at your school. As a teacher, I can never accept it when bullying happens and teachers either do not realize what is happening, or they brush it off as a normal part of growing up among teenagers. This is especially infuriating once you consider the suicide rate among teenagers these days.

If it isn't obvious yet, I was bullied when I was in primary school. The main instigator was a boy named Alex and he picked on many students who were weaker than him, and I was one of them. That experience affected my self-esteem right up to secondary school. I only overcame it during my last few years at the university. When I became a teacher, I vowed that I would never let any student under my watch get bullied.

About five years ago, I was assigned to teach a boy named Alex. Naturally, his name sent chills down my spine. Not unlike the Alex from my childhood, this one was also a bully. He and his gang set his eyes on the assistant monitor of his class – a very reserved boy named Zee. I noticed how Alex and his gang would always say something at him and then proceed to laugh loudly. I did not understand what was going on since they were all talking in Chinese, but it was clear to me that they were all teasing him.

While driving home later that day after work, I remembered reading an article in a magazine at the university and wishing I had read it during my primary school days. I managed to find it online. The article was written by a high school bully and his former victim who have reconciled as adults. What is particularly interesting about this article is the point of view alternates between that of the bully and the victim. Perhaps getting Alex's class to read this might have some impact on them. Nevertheless, I had some doubts since Alex has a very short attention span and he dislikes reading.

Later that week, I was watching an amazing web series on Netflix. As I was taking a short break in between episodes, I suddenly had a thought. If this series was being shown on regular television, I would have to wait an entire week to find out what happens in the next episode. The suspense would have killed me, but still, that is what makes regular TV watching special – you have the time to process and predict what characters would do or what fate might fall upon them. This gave me an idea. What if I made my class read the article in parts to keep them hooked? I was still not entirely sure if it would work but I decided to give it a try.

The following day, I made all the students read the first paragraph of the story which ends with the line, "I decided to end my life." I read it out loud for them as dramatically as possible. Some of Alex's gang members giggled at my theatrics but as we dwelled deeper into the extract, they quieted down. As I spoke that haunting last line, they all looked up at me with intrigue in their eyes. I knew they were hooked.

Later that evening, I joined my mom who was watching a 2004 Indian movie called Virumandi on TV. The story utilizes the Rashomon effect by narrating two different

versions of the same incidents through the points of view of two different characters. That got me thinking; the short story the class was currently reading is also in a way a Rashomon story. What if I got Alex and his gang to read the excerpts with the bully victim's point of view and the rest of the class can read those from the bully's perspective? It was a long shot, but I really wanted to try it out.

In the next lesson, the class settled down faster than usual. The students were eager to know what happens next in the story. I explained that I wanted different groups to read different parts of the story. Despite a few of them not being very fluent in English, they all read their excerpts diligently. During the second period, I made them sit with a classmate who had read a different part of the story to answer a set of questions based on the others' excerpt. I purposefully made Alex sit with his victim and recount everything he had read from his excerpt. He did not seem particularly moved by what he had read unlike some of his gang members, but he was talking rather softly with his victim – something that I had not seen in months.

From that day on, I would not say the bullying had completely stopped, but Alex had certainly learned to take it easy. Apart from some occasional teasing, I never really witnessed anything extreme.

A few months later, during report card day, I was told that both Alex's and Zee's parents were summoned to the administrators' office. As it turns out, Alex had stopped taunting Zee openly in class, but he had now resorted to cyberbullying. Zee's parents realized something was wrong through his social media and was forced to intervene. Our administrators arranged for a mediation between both Zee and Alex's parents. All the teachers who taught their class was invited. As we were heading for the principal's office, the discipline teacher revealed to me the reason Alex was picking on Zee. As it turns out, Zee's father is also named Alex and their classmates often teased Alex for this. Instead of confronting them, Alex would often lash out at Zee.

Once we were inside the office, the principal introduced Zee's father to us. There he was – the adult Alex. It was the very same Alex who tormented me throughout primary school. Now here he was – the father of a tormented son – standing before me to ask the teaching staff to do something about his own son's situation. Was it fair that all this time, poor Zee was facing the consequences of his father's actions all this time? Of course not and I did not take any satisfaction from seeing the defeated look on the adult Alex's face. If I have learned anything at all from this experience, it is there is always a way to address any issue that students are facing outside the classroom within the English language class. And also Karma has a wicked sense of humour.



THE AUTHOR

Kangga Manogaran is an English Language teacher who is passionate about creative writing. He believes teaching and learning English will be much more fun by incorporating stories-telling in not just reading but also writing. He is most actively seen conducting writing workshops after every SPM trial examination for students around the Kerian district in Perak. His story on training his school's debate team — "Mutual love, respect and happiness in training the debate team" - was published in the previous volume of 'Teachers' Voices'.

Teachers' Voices STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM

This is a collection of stories from teachers illustrating genuine classroom experiences. The nineteen stories in this collection have only one common setting: teachers and students in a classroom. However, given that the authors (teachers) take us through their teaching experiences in these many classrooms, these anecdotes are diverse in nature. Each story reveals a new insight and perspective. All in all, the stories subtly convey helpful teaching methods and helps readers to realise that the teaching — learning challenges are merely opportunities to achieve success. A must read for teachers and future teachers alike.





