




TEACHERS' VOICES

STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOMS

Volume 4
2024



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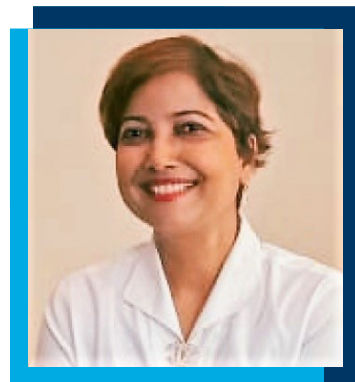
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FOREWORD

DATIN DR THUSHA RANI RAJENDRA



In the vast and diverse tapestry of human experiences, few threads are as vibrant and influential as those woven by teachers. These teachers of different institutions (be it schools, colleges, universities etc.) shape lives, inspire dreams, and ignite passions, often without realising the profound and lasting impact they have on their students. It is with great pleasure that we present this anthology of stories, each a testament to the extraordinary power of teaching and the remarkable individuals who dedicate their lives to this noble profession.

This book is more than a mere anthology; it is a celebration of the human spirit and the enduring connections forged within the classroom. Each story within these pages offers a unique glimpse into the world of teachers, revealing moments of triumph, challenge, humour, and heartache. Through the voices of teachers, we explore the myriad ways in which teaching transforms not only minds but also souls.

In an era where the role of education is continually evolving, and the pressures on teachers are greater than ever, it is essential to remember the essence of what it means to teach. These narratives serve as a reminder that education is essentially about human connection, regardless of curricula and standardised testing. It is about the bonds that form between teachers and learners, about the epiphanies and moments of empathy, about the growth and discovery that is experienced together.

As you delve into these stories, you will come across teachers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, who have recognised potential where others saw none, and who have fostered a lifelong love of learning. You will also witness the selflessness and commitment that characterise teaching, along with the sometimes-unnoticed personal sacrifices.

To the teachers who may read this book, we hope these stories resonate with your own experiences and renew your passion for the pertinent and selfless work you do. To the students and parents, we hope this anthology provides an insight into the world of those who educate and inspires a greater appreciation for the pivotal and important role teachers play in our lives.

Above all, this book is a tribute to the teachers who have left indelible marks on their students' hearts and minds. It is a recognition of their unwavering commitment and a celebration of the profound difference they make every day. May these stories inspire, uplift, and remind us all of the extraordinary power of teaching.

"When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts."-
Dalai Lama

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“The great teacher is not the man who supplies the most facts, but the one in whose presence we become different people.”- Ralph Waldo Emerson



ESTHER VOON S. H.

Esther has taught language and communication at tertiary institutions since 2009; she has also taught drama to secondary school students and workplace communication to working adults. She hopes her students realise that good grades aren't as important as good values, and that learning extends beyond the classroom into the real world, for a very long time.

PROFESSIONAL SQUABBLING 101

by Esther Voon S. H.

I was just a teacher trainee and I was inexperienced, idealistic, and immature. I was on my 2-month teaching practicum and had been placed in a boys' secondary school together with two course mates. When the supervising teacher gave us our class allocations, I was warned about my two groups of students. This recollection focuses on one of these groups, the one known as the 'gangster' class of their year, but let's not refer to them as that. Let's call them 4B.

The 4B boys were bright, confident and unruly; they were also disliked by most of the teachers in school, as evidenced by the visible recoil and unmasked expressions of horror when discussing the recent antics of these boys. All acknowledged their potential and intelligence, if only they would behave or take more interest and initiative in their work (this is euphemistic teacher speaking for 'slim chance of success, don't get your hopes up'). They had a penchant for chaos and violence and I can't remember the minutiae now, but I think there was an incident of broken glass during my first lesson with them. It was a horrible first lesson. The boys challenged every instruction, complicated each task, and almost seemed to be competing among themselves to see who would be the first to make me cry. I did cry, but only in the comfort and privacy of my home. At this age, students are like wild beasts, they smell fear and will pounce at the first sight of weakness in their teachers. I tried my hardest to stay strong in front of them. Steely gaze, firm voice, and confident body language, as I had learnt in university. In secret, I feared I would fail my teaching practicum.

I struggled for many lessons with these boys until by chance I discovered their intense rivalry with their peers next door. What can I say about Form 4A? These were the golden boys of the school, a majority of whom were school prefects with excellent academic scores and record-breaking extracurricular achievements, the ones forecast to one day greet you from the centrefold of the local newspapers, and it showed in the markedly different treatment they received. I saw the jealousy in the eyes of the 4B boys, and sadly, the resigned sense of defeat knowing they would never measure up. As cliché as it sounds, I started to wonder if their acting out in class was really a call for help and attention. They did not want to put any effort into anything because their imminent failure had already been ingrained into their psyches. This, I couldn't help thinking, was the self-fulfilling prophecy we had learnt about in educational psychology classes. These boys were not taking an interest in their studies because they thought their efforts would result in zilch, when really, they were every bit as clever as their 4A rivals.

An opportunity to change their mindsets came with the interclass debate. There are two types of English teachers in every school: the one who hates student debates with every fibre of their being and finds all sorts of valid reasons to pass the buck to the

next unsuspecting teacher, and the other who genuinely enjoys the adrenaline rush of debating and willingly stays back after school to train students in the art of professional squabbling. I was a university debater, so I can unabashedly say I fell into the latter category, much to the chagrin (and relief) of many colleagues. Secondary school debates are a formal, rigid performance of set rules and memorised scripts. University debating is a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants spontaneous expression of spitfire ideas, and this was what the 4B boys were naturals at. When I first broached the idea of debating, the 4B boys hooted with laughter and incredulity. They told me that the school debaters were all from 4A, and that it would be an unnecessary waste of time and energy invested in what would be a sure-lose scenario.

I told them to give it a go and gave them the kind of motivational spiel adapted from watching one too many movies; you know the kind, picture the fearless warrior/rogue soldier/prince hyping up his reluctant band of rag tags before the final battle. I must have been quite convincing because a few boys took up the challenge, and voilà, we had Team 4B! The day of the debate dawned. To cut a potentially long story short, it was the rowdiest debate I had ever witnessed, with plenty of insults hurled and tables banged. Despite only a week or so of coaching, and with very little understanding of the rules and structure of debates, the 4B boys relished this opportunity to 'fight'; their eyes, usually flat with malaise and boredom, glinted with mischief and bravado. They wanted to win this debate, and you could see the confusion on the faces of Team 4A, who weren't just stunned with the irrelevance of the POIs proffered by Team 4B, but shocked that the schoolyard hooligans they had looked down on and gloated over had shapeshifted to verbose opponents in a war of words, with attitudes to match.

The 4B boys had been right all along, of course. They lost so badly, it was almost funny. I think they were the real winners that day though, as they left that classroom with a renewed sense of confidence in their abilities, an indignance at their loss, and a newfound determination to resume the fight, some day in some way. I don't remember the motion of that debate, but I cannot forget how everything changed after that day. Whether it was because they had seen and felt the potential within themselves or because of the camaraderie we had formed through the unifying experience of the debate, classes with 4B were no longer difficult or frustrating. Sure, they were still rowdy and naughty, but they were also attentive and engaged in lessons. They ridiculed my hastily scribbled stickmen illustrations on the blackboard, but they also tried to complete the tasks I assigned them. The cacophony of the classroom consisted of much good-natured teasing, a welcome change from the gloomy clouds of rebellion at the start. And when it was time, these naughty boys who had filled me with such dread on day one gave me an almost tear-inducing farewell on the last day of my teaching practicum.

I hope you're doing well, boys, wherever you may be. I might have taught you the basics of debating, but you taught me to look beyond the initial apprehension and chaos that often accompany first meetings.



RAGANESWARI RAMASAMY

Raganeswari Ramasamy is a language teacher in a national secondary school in Malaysia. Born and raised in Penang, she discovered a passion for story writing at an early age. This love for words led her to pursue a degree in TESOL at Universiti Sains Malaysia. She likes to write stories to inspire readers to develop their language skills.

AN INSPIRING STORY OF MS. ROSE'S LANGUAGE LESSONS

by Raganeswari Ramasamy

In the bustling district of Butterworth in Penang Island, there was a secondary high school. It was known for its diverse student body and other active programs. The school was a microcosm of the city itself because of the blend of cultures, languages, and traditions. Among its many dedicated teachers was myself, Ms. Rose, an English teacher who was well-known for my unconventional teaching approaches and deep commitment to my students.

It was a new term at school. I stood in front of my language room, looking out at my new group of students. I was instructed to teach both lower primary and upper secondary students. Therefore, the age of my students ranged from thirteen to seventeen years old, each with their own story and background. Some of them were excellent users of the English language, but the majority of students were intermediate and low-level users of the language who struggled with the difficulties of English grammar and vocabulary.

I began my lesson with a smile. 'Good morning, boys and girls! Welcome back to school again and Happy New Year. Today, we are embarking on another new journey, and I am your language teacher for this year. Before I begin with my lesson, I want to know about you. What are your interests? Your ambitions? What are your resolutions for this upcoming year?

Every student looked very nervous to share their views and thoughts. However, there was a girl named Hana who raised her hand confidently. "I love to write stories, but I am not confident in my English language. Thus, I hope that I will improve my language skills this year through your lessons." After Hana provided her views, another boy started to share his goals. Faris wanted to become a newsreader, Anita imagined becoming a language teacher, and Tan Swee Ling wanted to become a lawyer.

After listening to each student's view, my heart swelled with pride. 'I am happy to know your goals, dreams, and resolutions. That is awesome! You all have very unique goals and talents. I am here to assist you in identifying and nurturing them through the power of language. So, let us begin our first lesson today.'

I described that 'technology is a pivotal element in the learning context in this 21st century learning. Thus, I will implement technology tools while I am teaching English.' Over the next few weeks, I introduced my students to a variety of creative writing and speaking exercises to stimulate their interest in English using the technology platforms. I incorporated Google Classroom, Google Meet, Kahoot, Quizizz, and other online applications to practise writing activities and conduct speaking activities.

However, in the initial stage, students were confused by the conventional teaching methods to practise writing skills and speaking skills. But, after weeks, they began to see the magic in the new teaching methods by me. Most of their students were able to write and speak, even though they were still making mistakes in their language.

I always provided immediate feedback that informed my students about their strengths and offered constructive criticism. I also encouraged them to explore different genres and styles, pushing the boundaries of their creativity. “There are no wrong answers in storytelling and group discussions for speaking tasks,” I would frequently say, “only practice makes you perfect.”

One day, I introduced a new project that would become a keystone of my teaching philosophy: ‘The Uniqueness of Involving Oneself in Narrative Writing Development.’ I created a narrative writing module which was known as 4C’s to WRITE Module and it was copyrighted. Students needed to complete the writing tasks by following the writing module.



The front page of the 4C’s to WRITE Module

The idea was met with a mixture of enthusiasm and nervousness. Sharing personal stories was a vulnerable experience, but I assured them that the Google Classroom platform was a safe space, where their voices would be heard and appreciated.

Every student shared their stories according to the given themes for each week. The themes focused on unforgettable moments, friendship, horror, happiness, tragedy, journey of adventure, regret, and revenge. Each story was a window into their lives, allowing us to see their struggles, triumphs, and dreams.



I knew that writing their narrative essay sessions were more than just a language exercise. They were a way for her students to connect on a deeper level, to build understanding and empathy. After the online assessment, the following day in class, I encouraged them to ask questions, offer support, and celebrate each other's experiences. As the weeks turned into months, the students were able to write confidently. During the classroom writing activities, they attempted to write complex essays, involved in debates, and accomplished interesting stories into drama scripts. Besides that, towards the end of the year, after the examination, I announced a new task which required students to compile all their stories and the drama scripts into a book. After that, the anthology would be shared with the entire school to showcase the students' talents and hard work that they went through for the entire year.

The students were as happy as larks with the idea. They started to compile their stories, revising, editing, and refining their products with my supervision. The classroom hummed with liveliness and creativity as they worked with one another through the process. Finally, the anthology was compiled successfully. I had a special celebration to celebrate students' ability to create a book by themselves. After that, the anthology was sent to the school library and received praise from teachers, students, and parents.

As the year-end school holiday was approaching, I reflected on the improvement my students had made. It indicated that they had not only enhanced their English skills but also grown up as individuals. In conclusion, they were educated to prompt themselves, to listen to others, and to cherish the power of language.





CHOK SZE JIN

Chok Sze Jin is an English teacher who holds the best interest of students in her heart. She believes the success of a teacher comes from shaping students in the areas of character and knowledge, and vice versa. However, the best teacher is the one who keeps on learning and bouncing back stronger.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD

by Chok Sze Jin

The Apartment

The wind at the seventeen floor was cooler than he thought. The heavy wind was compressing him to escape from reality, into freedom. Tim looked at the college field in despair. Six months had passed and his mother has not sent him the money he asked for. He crumpled the last reminder letter in his hand and then discarded it onto the floor. A gust of wind slowly blew it away. It went upwards and then downwards...and such have been his own emotional turmoil. Sometimes, a thousand of bubbles seemed to burst in his mind. When the night fell, his heart was thumping as if it was bombarding his veins to a bloody mess.


Restoring River

Tim lived with his grandmother and two other younger siblings. The little cottage was slightly supported by stilts made from the mangrove trees. It has withstood the test of time. For decades, the family took shelter in this small house. When the night fell, it was cool and cosy. During the day time, the bamboo wind chime made a melodious sound when the gentle breeze moved through the window, putting anybody to slumber like a baby. Apart from the family's only asset, they were nourished by the satin ribbon-like river which flows downhill, surpassing a few villages. Underneath the water, polished pebbles were more precious than jewels. Tim found serenity and tranquil at the river down the pebble path. Growing up in Kampung Samudera, Tim lost himself to the restoring river. Every evening, he walked down the pebble path to rest under the bowed willow. From tranquil waters to the anticipation while waiting for a thud, fishing brought him a vast array of sensations and peace that connected him with a life that seemed unreachable.

Garret High School, Class 5 Neptune

Block 7 being the closest to the mountain, stood solemnly at the foot of the hill. Every morning, a scarf of silky fog enveloped the mountain like a lady hiding a faint blush, refusing to unveil her beauty. As early as 6.40 am, the light joyfully pierced through the cloud, dispersing a thin mist and fog. In a distance, white stocks contrast the green fields as they elegantly soared across it. For centuries, the mountain has been sitting beside the classrooms, listening to classroom stories retelling themselves over and over again.

"Click, clock, click, clock". The class teacher's footsteps were clacking along the staircase and then to the corridor. When the morning broadcasting was announced,



students were already queuing outside the classroom. Clutching a blue book on the right arm, I began taking attendance. “Sigh! Tim is absent again! Today is day 60.” I murmured as I reluctantly issued the third warning letter. The first seat in the middle row was vacant as usual. Predictably, many other teachers were accustomed to putting the LCD projector, extension wire and speaker port on his desk, taking his chair and the desk for daily convenient use.

“He isn’t coming back to school after all. He wants to quit school.” responded Charles, the boy who sat next to him.

“Teacher, I saw him at the kampung yesterday,” said Musa, his childhood friend who lived in the same village.

“Oh really? Did you ask him to come to school?” I asked the boys.

“Madam, his door is always shut. Nobody comes out during day time,” answered Musa.

The class went on as usual on that ordinary morning. However, I was unsettled. I had been trying to reach Tim’s mum countless time. According to Tim, his mum was working in the city and seldom comes home. After two unsuccessful calls, I hung up the phone. Moments later, a strange message hit the phone.

“I’m sorry, teacher for my son. I will come to school next Monday.”

It was another Monday morning when a group of teachers was walking from the canteen. As I was heading back to the staffroom, a woman in her late thirties caught my eyes. Standing behind the woman, I saw Tim with a slightly long fringe which didn’t distort his charming appearance. Expecting to see me and the school senior assistant, his mother introduced herself to me. Immediately I brought her to see the school counsellor who was a vibrant young lady teacher. In the counselling room, a decision was made after a long discussion. Tim has finally agreed to register himself for boarding.

The Retreat

During the following days, Tim didn’t fail to attend classes. His eagerness to catch up with the lessons encouraged me. It ignited the desire in my heart to rescue the prodigal son. A boy who was lost out of his own inclination.

“Boys and girls, submit your Happy Retreat registration form by 25th August,” I announced excitedly.

“Madam, is this compulsory to join?” protested the girls.

“Madam, can we choose our own roommate?” asked Kylie who has never had sleep over.

“This camp is for you to relax and have fun. We hope to gear you up for your final examination,” I explained patiently.

Before the closing date, all 30 students handed their forms.

Happy Retreat was an annual event initiated by the school principal. She desired to uplift the resilience of the exam candidates to meet the many challenges. That year, “Persevere and Shine” was the theme as we hoped to see each and every one of the students work towards their dreams and to never give up. A total of 254 candidates had fun under the starry sky, barbecued and danced around a bonfire that was once in a lifetime experience. When the sun was up, they gathered for Sunday mass. A youth priest shared about a dream worth pursuing and a life worth fighting for. The Catholic majority children were spiritually filled that morning. After a short rest, the students moved to their respective groups. Meanwhile, teachers were stationed all over the school compound and classrooms to welcome the teams for Race of Your Life 2.0. For activities, teachers innovated tasks that required knowledge and skills. Laughter was heard all over, and the school became much livelier than before. In short, our philosophy of education was manifested throughout the activities as they sought to collaborate, communicate and cooperate among the diverse background and social status until a common goal was achieved.

Sweat was rolling down from his forehead. Tim and his team were running around the school compound to complete the task. “Hi guys! You are stationed here and the rest of the team follow me,” instructed the leader, Milla. Tim was brimming with pride when his team finally scored the highest point. Pride and a sense of actualisation were shining in his eyes. The 3 days 2 nights event was a turning point when Tim braced himself to achieve his first serious goal in life. He just wanted to pass his finals, and reinvent himself. However deep down in his heart, there was a pocket of air stuck in his sea of emotions. That dark secret place was where he yearned for love and affection. Ultimately, he thought he found it in his new girlfriend. But alas, it was not to be.

“Boys and girls, I was very disappointed to hear the report of the warden,” exclaimed the head warden. “Against the rule of the dormitory, two of you have been hanging out. Such offence could suspend you from the hostel,” warned the head warden sternly. Tim and the girl were reprimanded but the girl denied it vehemently, stressing that they were just friends. But for Tim that was a deep sense of betrayal. Since the final examination was around the corner, Tim was spared from being suspended from the hostel.

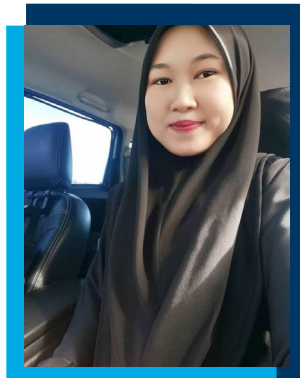


Reality

On 15th November 2022, I heard about Tim again. This time it was the news of his passing. For days, I was in disillusioned. In many sleepless nights I asked God “Why him?” I surrendered the passing of my beloved pupil to his Maker. I was left with no regrets to have once been in his life, teaching and moulding him. After all, it takes a village to raise a child. In my quiet moment, I realised it’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken ones. For this, Tim did not come from that village. He came from a bleak land, but has gone to another place with solace and solitude. Mental health is a serious issue and Tim’s death proves that we should always be emphatic and never be quick to judge.

Enjoy your wings, Tim.

- *This story is inspired by narratives on mental health. Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*



NUR HIDAYAH SAFARUDIN

Nur Hidayah Safarudin, holding a Bachelor's degree in English (TESOL) and a Master's degree in Corporate Communication, seamlessly integrates language education and communication. Driven by a passion for applied linguistics, she is committed to fostering effective communication and language acquisition, persistently exploring effective approaches to inspire students to embrace language learning with confidence.

FROM SCRIPT TO SPOTLIGHT: BRIDGING ENGLISH AND THEATRE IN CINDERELLA REIMAGINED

by Nur Hidayah Safarudin

In 2017, I embarked on a unique educational journey that blended two of my classes: English for Oral and Written Communication, a diploma course, and Language and Theatre, a degree course. The students were the soon-to-be teachers and their diverse backgrounds and varying proficiencies promised a dynamic and enriching project, though not without its challenges. With only one semester to bring this vision to life, the pressure was on to transform a classic fairy tale into a contemporary theatrical masterpiece.

The task was nothing short of ambitious: to recreate the Cinderella storyline into a modern theatre performance. This endeavour required the students to dive into every aspect of production, from designing eye-catching posters and handling publicity, to building intricate props primarily from recycled materials, and committing to rigorous rehearsals both in and out of class. The degree students, in their quest to complete the Language and Theatre course, were challenged to craft a new storyline that imparted a meaningful lesson to the audience. Their reimagined version of Cinderella was a blend of creativity and innovation. Instead of a pumpkin carriage, they introduced a sleek sports car made out of cardboard. The traditional fairy godmother was transformed into a whimsical fairy godfather, and Cinderella herself evolved into a rebellious, spirited character. Reflecting these changes, the title of the play was aptly revised to “The Necklace,” centering around the protagonist losing a necklace instead of a glass slipper. This play was also a collaboration between the degree students and my diploma class. The latter, enrolled in the English for Oral and Written Communication course, were tasked with infusing the performance with musical and rhythmic elements. They crafted enchanting songs to serve as overtures and musical interludes, weaving in elements of choral speaking to captivate the audience. Additionally, these first-year students, with varying level of English proficiency, brought vitality to the project through spirited dance routines. For them, this immersive experience proved to be more than just a project—it was a transformative journey that honed their linguistic skills while igniting their passion for performance.

The degree students were meticulous in their script preparation, diligently reimagining Cinderella into “The Necklace”. Despite the challenge of communicating and understanding their newly crafted script, they showed resilience. Their commitment to rehearsals and prop preparation was commendable. On the other hand, the diploma students, though less experienced, exhibited boundless energy and enthusiasm. They dissected song lyrics to fully embrace the storyline. Their dedication bore fruit in remarkable progress, as they honed their pronunciation and embraced newfound



confidence with each rehearsal. Their dance choreography too, was well-executed, and their eagerness led to extra rehearsal time in a dance studio. Set to the captivating melodies of tracks like “*Strong*” by Sonna Rele, “*Cinderelly Work Song*” and “*One in a Million*” by Ne-Yo, their performances exuded vibrant energy and infectious enthusiasm, leaving an indelible mark on all who bore witness.

As the highly anticipated day dawned, the performance hall swelled to its limits. Among them were a multitude of supportive friendly faces, comprising primarily of students enrolled in education programs, each a future educator in the making. Both groups performed admirably, despite some humorous mishaps. Despite the meticulous preparation, a few unexpected mishaps added an element of spontaneity to the play. The audience erupted into fits of laughter as the fairy godfather’s wand unexpectedly shattered to the floor, and the cardboard sports car, intended to glide effortlessly across the stage, stubbornly refused to cooperate as planned. These unforeseen moments transformed into endearing comedic highlights, further enhancing the charm of the performance. The performance concluded with a thunderous round of applause.



Picture 1: A group photo after the theatre performance

At the end of the day, my heartfelt aspiration was for the students to discover the joy and fulfilment that learning English could offer, and to recognize the enduring bonds and cherished memories that could be forged through collaborative performance with friends. Through this transformative project, they not only honed their linguistic abilities but also cultivated a myriad of invaluable skills. In the days that followed, a reflective session provided an illuminating glimpse into the profound impact of the project. The students expressed deep appreciation for the learning opportunity that the play had for them. It was evident that the project had left an indelible impression, empowering them to embark on their educational journey with newfound confidence and enthusiasm.

Recently, I encountered one of the former students, Ms. Haizatul Hanisah, who had performed as the narrator during the play. Witnessing her now flourishing as a



teacher, *Cikgu Hanisah's* achievement fills me with immense pride. Seeing my students thrive as educators, sharing their stories and inspiring others, is deeply rewarding. Reflecting on this moment, I'm reminded of the profound wisdom imparted by my own lecturer and mentor, Madam Ho Hwee Geok. She said her students are the jewels in her crown. Today, I wear my own crown, thanks to mentors like Madam Ho who instilled the unwavering determination to pursue excellence in education, just as she has done.



Picture 2: A photo captured during my Bachelor's Degree studies, featuring myself alongside my former lecturer and my mentor, Madam Ho.

Reflecting on a Hadith, “*When a man dies, his good deeds come to an end, except three: Ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, and a righteous child who will pray for him*”. While the continuity of charitable deeds and the righteousness of future generations may not always be within our control, as an educator, I find solace in knowing that I play a pivotal role in nurturing our future generations with invaluable knowledge. In the end, it is this legacy of knowledge that will endure beyond our lifetime, enriching the lives of others yet to come.



DILINI RANASURIYA

The writer Dilini Ranasuriya is an English Language lecturer attached to a vocational university and is passionate about enhancing the four skills of English Language. The writer is engaged in teaching English for undergraduates who seek employment in variety of vocations.

I WANT YOU TO FALL IN LOVE WITH DARCY THE WAY I FELL IN LOVE WITH DARCY...

by Dilini Ranasuriya

I was asked to teach a novel to my undergraduates. Being a fan of Jane Austen for a long time, I decided “Pride and Prejudice” would be a good choice. I must mention first and foremost that this was one of my favourite novels that I developed a liking to as an undergraduate. Thus, I thought it was a good choice.

So came the day that I was to start with the novel. “Hello class. Today I am here to teach you one of Jane Austen’s novels, “Pride and Prejudice”. In an enthusiastic tone I started off with the novel. I was very confident that the learners were going to enjoy it. As per my usual teaching style, I started off giving a small description about the author, Jane Austen and her background. Then, I started a small discussion about Jane Austen and from this, I learnt that my learners did not know much about Jane Austen. Well, this did not stop me from being over enthusiastic about teaching them Pride and Prejudice. So, one week after talking with the students about Jane Austen and her other works, I glided into the novel. The moment I opened the book, inside my head I was telling myself, “Wait till you fall in love with the novel and Darcy of course” and this was my expectation. So, I started going on from page-to-page reading and highlighting important quotes, facts and stating that they will be of use in their upcoming examination.

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”.

When I was reading these lines to the learners, I was falling in love with Pride and Prejudice over and over in my head. I was thoroughly enjoying it even after many years having read the novel. Occasionally I looked up and checked the faces of my students to see if their eyes were sparkling in admiration, but each time I looked at them, I saw my students looking at me without any emotions, some yawning and even dozing off. I took this positively and encouraged myself, thinking that since it was the first day of the novel, they would soon get themselves adjusted and get a liking to it.

So came the next day, and I started from the page where I stopped. To be honest, I was not getting fond of not only the novel but I was also falling in love with Darcy once again by reading it all over. I remembered how all of us fantasized about marrying a Darcy and I always thought of my husband as a Darcy in terms of qualities. So, this all showed how deep rooted the novel was in me the way I learnt it.

So dawned another day and like the last time, after reading about two pages, I looked at my learners and saw that there was no improvement, no admiration and no eyes lit up on the mention of Mr. Darcy. Although on this particular day, I did say to myself that “Soon they will love the novel”, something inside my head was saying that

things were not working out properly.

So that day when I went back home, sitting alone recalling the lesson and my teaching, I knew that there was something wrong with the learners or with my style of teaching. Hence, I made up my mind as to what I was going to do.

So, I arrived on the fourth day, with *Pride and Prejudice* in my hand and I was horrified to see out of 30 students, only 15 had turned up. This again disturbed me and I resolved to talk to the class about what I had been doing in the previous weeks and realized that they did not understand anything in the novel. They could only give me some facts about Jane Austen. I was a bit worried when the students said that the novel was boring and they felt sleepy during the class. They were not enthusiastic.

This struck me hard. How did this happen with a novel that I enjoyed very much. I knew that I was not a bad teacher as per feedback obtained from my previous lectures that I have conducted. So that evening, sitting on my couch, I was pouring the whole experience out to one of my batchmates over the phone. Then she said this about the novel - "Oh yes, we used to like it of course. Remember how boring it was at the beginning?"

"Boring?". Then my friend said, "Oh yes, it was. We were always falling asleep during the first lessons and then we were..."

"Then we were? what?", I asked in excitement.

"Why, can't you remember? We were shown the film on the novel and then only we began to slowly understand..... and also, we fell in love with Darcy" she said in laughter.

"Oh yes! Now I remember. It was the film that made us understand the novel".

After the phone call, I recalled upon how we were shown the film and then started to enjoy the novel. The film motivated us to enjoy the novel and it made us understand the characters, the culture and the setting on which the novel was based upon. The themes that Jane Austen tried to speak on was well understood through the scenes of the film.

I wanted to change the way I taught the novel. That was where the problem lied. I wanted learners to feel the way I felt. In the end, I showed the film alongside reading the novel. This brought a drastic change, leaving me overwhelmed with happiness. Using a film to explain a novel was indeed fascinating and effective.



JANICE CHUA HUI LENG

With over a decade of service at Labuan International School, Janice Chua Hui Leng is an accomplished secondary English teacher, specializing in teaching English as a second language and adept at addressing diverse student needs. She firmly believes in lifelong learning, tailoring her teaching to each student's unique journey. She prioritizes not only academic achievement but also imparts valuable life lessons for her students' holistic development.

ECHOES OF LEARNING: INSIGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

by Janice Chua Hui Leng

My journey to becoming a high school English teacher had been winding, filled with twists and turns that ultimately led me to this moment. But as I stood before my class, I knew with certainty that I was exactly where I was meant to be. However, my role as a teacher extended far beyond the pages of a textbook. I was a mentor, a guide, and a source of inspiration for my students as they navigated the turbulent waters of adolescence. With patience and empathy, I listened to their struggles and celebrated their triumphs, offering guidance and support every step of the way.

In my classroom, there was no judgment, no prejudice, only a deep-seated belief in the inherent worth and potential of every student who walked through my door. I encouraged them to find their voices, speak their truths, and embrace the power of their stories. As the morning sun filtered through my classroom windows, I stood at the front, ready to embark on another day of literary exploration with my students. With a stack of well-worn books and a passion for storytelling burning bright within me, I welcomed my students with a smile that mirrored the excitement.

As the top Form 5 English teacher, I relished the opportunity to engage with such a dynamic and diverse group of students. Each day brought new challenges and adventures as we delved into the intricacies of literature, language, and communication. My commitment to excellence was unwavering. Before each class, I poured over lesson plans with meticulous attention to detail, crafting engaging activities and intriguing discussions designed to challenge my students' intellects and ignite their passion for literature. From dissecting the symbolism in "To Kill a Mockingbird" to analysing the complexities of modern poetry, I spared no effort in ensuring that my students received a comprehensive education that would serve them well beyond the confines of the classroom.

But it was my attentiveness that truly set me apart. I had a knack for sensing when my students were struggling, whether it was with a particularly challenging concept or a personal issue weighing heavily on their minds. With a compassionate ear and a reassuring smile, I offered guidance and support, helping them navigate the obstacles in their path and emerge stronger and more resilient than before.

Every day in my classroom is a tapestry woven with stories of inspiration, growth, and laughter. From the quiet breakthroughs of struggling students to the exuberant debates among eager learners, each moment paints a picture of the transformative power of education.



One particular memory stands out vividly in my mind. It was the story of Farah, a shy and reserved student who had always struggled to express herself in English. Despite numerous setbacks, I refused to give up on her. Through patience, encouragement, and innovative teaching methods, I watched as Farah gradually found her voice. The day Farah confidently stood before the class and delivered a heartfelt speech in flawless English was a testament to the unwavering dedication of both student and teacher.

Yet, beneath my nurturing exterior lay a stern resolve. I held my students to the highest standards, pushing them to strive for excellence in everything they did. Late assignments and half-hearted efforts were met with firm but constructive criticism, a reminder that success was not achieved through contentment but through hard work and determination.

Despite my strictness, my students knew that I cared deeply about their success and well-being. Behind every stern reprimand was a genuine belief in their potential and a commitment to helping them achieve it. As the school year progressed, I watched with pride as they grew not only as scholars but as individuals, armed with the knowledge, confidence, and resilience to conquer whatever challenges lay ahead.

The students themselves were a testament to the rich tapestry of our school community. With their diverse backgrounds and experiences, they brought a wealth of perspectives to our discussions, enriching our learning environment and broadening our horizons. From the bustling streets of New York City to the tranquil shores of California, each student had a story to tell and a voice to be heard.

But amidst the hustle and bustle of academic pursuits, there was also a palpable sense of camaraderie and friendship among the students. Whether it was collaborating on group projects, participating in extracurricular activities, or simply sharing stories over lunch, they formed bonds that transcended borders and bridged cultures, united by a common thirst for knowledge and a shared sense of belonging.

As the school year progressed, I watched with pride as my students blossomed and thrived in this vibrant and supportive community. They grew not only as scholars but as global citizens, equipped with the skills, knowledge, and empathy to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. As they prepared to embark on their next chapter beyond the walls of our school, I knew that they would carry with them the lessons they had learned and the friendships they had forged, forever grateful for the transformative experience of international education.

As the day drew to a close, their voices lingered in the air, a witness to the profound impact they had on the lives of their students. For in the halls of Labuan International School, the stories of triumph, struggle, and growth were not just confined to textbooks—they were woven into the very fabric of the community, a demonstration of the enduring power of education and the dedicated teachers who made it possible.



In conclusion, let us reflect on the wisdom of the age-old proverb: 'Teaching is the profession that teaches all other professions.' As educators, our impact extends far beyond the confines of the classroom walls. Let us embrace each day with a heart full of compassion, a mind open to new ideas, and a spirit dedicated to nurturing the minds and hearts of our students. Remember, teaching is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about instilling a love for learning, fostering resilience, and empowering each student to become the best version of themselves. So, as we embark on this noble journey of shaping young minds, let us never underestimate the power of our influence. With patience, dedication, and unwavering belief in the potential of every student, we can make a profound difference in their lives and the world. Let us continue to inspire, to uplift, and to ignite the flames of curiosity and passion within our students. In doing so, we not only shape the future but also leave an indelible mark on generations to come.



THINUSHA SELVARAJ

Thinusha a/p Selvaraj is currently a lecturer at Universiti Tunku Rahman, Sg.Long, Selangor. She is currently pursuing her Doctorate studies in the field of Education, majoring in Instructional Technology. As an educator, she does research and attends conferences when there are opportunities.

THE ART OF ASSISTING DISCOVERY

by **Thinusha Selvaraj**

Being an educator was never in my list for once. Right after I completed my Bachelor Degree (BA) at Universiti Sains Malaysia, I continued my Masters (MA) at University of Malaya. While undergoing my MA, I started teaching English as a part time job to primary and secondary school students, during the weekends in my residential area. Also, I started teaching English to young learners at Cambridge Learning Centres and English Holiday Camps and Programmes conducted during the school holidays. I didn't know that this was the beginning of my career. This was something that I did to support myself as a postgraduate student.

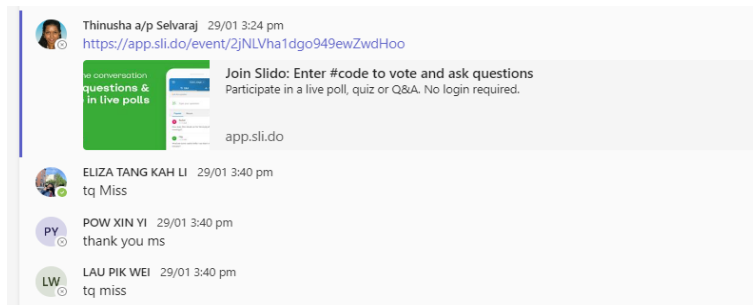
Teaching young learners was something new to me back then, as it really tested my patience. It was not an easy process but I learnt the tips and tricks to handle young learners. At the same time, as an educator, I also learnt how to teach and guide young learners. It was challenging, yet a good learning phase for me. As time passed and when I was almost completing my MA programme, I was given the opportunity to teach the English Enhancement Programme to foreign students in a private university. During this phase, I learnt more techniques to teach English, from Beginner to Intermediate levels. I continued my part time teaching while teaching in the private university. After completing my MA in 2012 and a few years of teaching the English Enhancement Programme, I received a better offer to develop my career in a reputable non-profit private university. I accepted the offer and officially started my career as an educator to teach English language to young adults who are undergraduates in the private university.

Technology was still progressing rapidly back then although not advanced as today. It was totally a new experience for me to handle Malaysian undergraduate students. I couldn't agree more that it was totally a different experience for me to handle young adults compared to young learners. My teaching experiences and students' evaluation made me learn more ways to deal with young adults. I began to realise that treating them like the young learners is a definite "no". Some of them would pay attention, some of them would not and worse still when some of them sleep, ignore and continue to do their own work. Many times, I had thought of various ways and implemented them to get students engaged in class discussions and activities. Unfortunately, I had to accept the fact that it may not be successful all the time; there were ups and downs in each stage of the implementation.



Picture 1: Example of digital tools

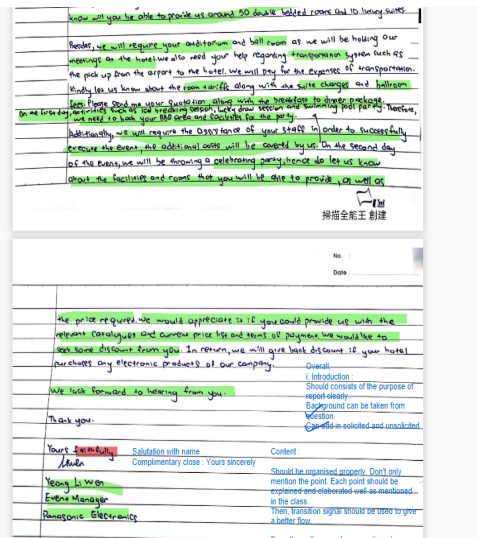
In 2015, I started my Doctorate studies at the Open University Malaysia (OUM) to expand my knowledge. As technology progressively brought changes in the education industry, digital tools such as iPad, iPhone and laptops became necessary tools for most of the students within the classroom. Things even took a vast change during the Covid-19 period when online learning was implemented in the education field in Malaysia and around the world. Teaching and learning were done through digital tools, digital platforms and learning management systems (LMS). I was unable to see my students because most of them would prefer to turn off their cameras during classes. Worse still, I had no idea if there was anyone on the other side of the screen. There were no responses for questions and many of them just kept to themselves. Sometimes, I had even thought that I was talking to myself. Nevertheless, it was a good and new learning experience for me as I had the opportunity to learn more about online learning, distance learning, digital tools, digital platforms and the implementation of technology in education. While continuing my doctorate studies in the field of education, I managed to implement a few new techniques in my teaching during endemcity.



Picture 2: Implementation of games via digital tools and platforms during class

As classes started moving progressively from online learning to hybrid learning, and followed by physical learning during endemcity, it was a good learning experience for me to make my classes more interesting. Firstly, I started implementing online quizzes using Slido, Kahoot and Quizizz for all my students to participate after my lectures. Through this method, I noticed that most of my students participated actively in the quiz given related to the lecture topic. To encourage and enhance their participation, I used to call the top 3 performers at the end of the session and congratulate them. Additionally, introvert students also took the opportunity to participate collaboratively in activities using their digital devices on digital platforms during the classroom activities. These works were then kept for lecturer's and peers' feedback. Using these devices during classes for learning purposes had shown positive results where other peers had the chance to give feedback and seek further clarifications. For those who do not own any devices, they were

encouraged to do it on a piece of paper, capture a screenshot of the task and upload it on Microsoft Teams. This method had encouraged all students to participate. Also, these digital tools were used to take down notes, snap shot unfinished tasks during class and complete classroom activities.



Picture 3: Written sample work of a student uploaded on Microsoft Teams



Picture 4: Group tasks using digital tools during physical English class

Now, with AI and Chat GPT, it is not surprising to receive replies from students that they are using these tools for their assessment. Some of them reply boldly that Chat GPT is very useful for their assessment. It is a fact for me to accept and not something to be denied. While there are many ways to encourage the use of AI and Chat GPT, I think it would be good to expose to students on how Chat GPT works, especially for language assessments. This is because, based on my experience, Chat GPT provides various answers which suit the question. However, when there are specific answers needed, specific ways of asking the questions are required and proper investigations are required when selecting the answers. From my point of view as an educator guiding young adults, I think the implementation of technology in classrooms should be enhanced wisely and carefully so that the desired learning outcomes for the courses are achieved successfully.

In this digital era, it is a need for me to remind myself that I am not always right and students may have better knowledge when it comes to technology. It is essential for an educator to learn and relearn because everything is being updated constantly from time to time.



AIMI SHAHEERA SALLEH

Aimi Shaheera Salleh is an English educator with 12 years of experience in secondary schools. In 2023, she transitioned to tertiary education, bringing her passion for creative teaching, especially project-based learning to young adults. Her aim is to bridge the generational gap in class: think navigating Harry Potter fandom while connecting with the Gen Z!

THE UNLEARNING OF DOUBT

by Aimi Shaheera Salleh

Fresh out of university, a wide-eyed graduate from the land of the long white cloud (New Zealand), I entered my first classroom in 4 Ibn Sina. My idealism about how teaching would unfold, fueled by Kiwi pedagogical theories, buzzed this 25-year-old 'newbie' English teacher with nervous energy. Facing me were 22 equally curious (and likely apprehensive) 16-year-olds, a daunting yet exciting prospect for a first-time teacher. Calmly introducing myself, a touch of pride echoed in my half-genuine Kiwi accent. I joked, "With morning coffee, I'm usually in a good mood," adding under my breath (except on PMS days), a comment that elicited a cringe from the boy seated in the front right corner, whom I caught out of the corner of my eye. "Oh boy," I thought, "what have I gotten myself into?"

The next few weeks proved to have been a whirlwind. Juggling the expectations I set for myself after my four-year TESOL degree overseas with the realities of home had been more foreign than I'd anticipated. Shyness and a reluctance to speak English dominated the homogeneous boarding school environment. And just like that, my meticulously crafted "teacher persona" and out-of-the-box lesson plans needed a quick recalibration. But, how could I meet everyone, and everything halfway?

Three months in, and my desk mirrored the chaos in my head. Staff meetings, homeroom duties, and mountains of grading threatened to bury my lesson plans. The echoes of teenage groans still lingered after my latest attempt at teaching the future tense with a crystal ball (a surefire A+ in my Burmese lecturer's eyes, but apparently not everyone shared her enthusiasm for fortune-telling grammar. A lifeline emerged in the staffroom. "Want to revive the school newsletter? It's been on hold for a while," a colleague, Mr Niz offered, handing me the reins. Another glance at the desk's visual clutter was all it took. "Sure, I'll take it on," I said, a spark of determination replacing the earlier overwhelm. "What's the name?" "ICON Newsletter!" he beamed.

A surge of determination coursed through me as I flipped through the thick file of past ICON Newsletters. Each page brimmed with personality, student artwork, and quirky articles. It held a forgotten spark, a testament to a time when English wasn't just textbooks and tests. Recreating that magic, with my own twist had become my sole mission.

First, I needed a partner in crime. Nana from 4 Ibn Rushd, my bright-eyed student with an infectious passion for English, immediately came to mind. During night preparatory time, we huddled in a corner, the fluorescent lights of the library buzzing overhead. "Nana," I began, a hint of excitement in my voice, "remember you told me how you missed getting lost in those English novels back at home? I have a way to rekindle that love for reading and writing. Here's the best part - you get to share it with the whole



school!" Her eyes lit up. "OMG! Whatever it is, I'm so in!"

Our next official meeting was during lunch break. Nana and I were engrossed in the next hour planning, strategizing, and visualising our dream. We needed a team. Enter Adib, the school's shy but talented graphic designer. Two enthusiastic writers, Muzzy and Nana herself, along with the ever-curious reporters, Haziq and Umi, quickly joined our ranks.

It was a few days into Ramadhan in 2011 when we planned our first issue before Nana, ever the planner, pointed out, "We need another graphic designer, the workload might be too much." We all agreed, and with renewed enthusiasm, we recruited a quiet but skilled artist, Saifuddin, into the fold. And then there was Aiza and Nisa, who might have overheard of this little 'secret society of ours' volunteered to be part of the team. "Let us be the 'runners'. We'll run for anything you need!" It was at that moment that I felt a glimmer of hope after months of self-sabotage. So there we were, a motley crew of eight – a teacher, a dreamer, a designer, storytellers, reporters and runners – our ICON "Dream Team" officially assembled.

Sprawled across the staffroom floor, surrounded by crumpled paper and scattered ideas, we brainstormed. 'RAMADHAN REVISITED' was Icon'11 Newsletter's first issue. With much anticipation, the first physical copy of the newsletter emerged from the printer. We scanned it for any last-minute errors, then it was off to risograph printing for multiplication! Fifty copies hummed into existence, a tangible symbol of our efforts. The next day, a nervous anticipation crackled in the air as we made the announcement. "Class presidents," we declared, "please come to the Reading Room to collect your copies of the ICON'11 Newsletter!" But as the presidents trickled in, a wave of uncertainty washed over us. Their blank expressions held a truth we hadn't considered. Would this spark a renewed interest in English, or would this turn into another well-intentioned project gathering dust?

A month after our first issue hit the stands, we reconvened, brimming with hope for the second edition. The question of frequency lingered in the air: "Weekly or monthly?" We exchanged excited glances; the energy palpable. Feedback was rolling in amongst the team: classmates were clamouring for more jokes, the girls loved the comic and interview, and a senior even questioned if Nana and Muzzy's pieces were truly their own or Ms. Aimi's work in disguise! I finally declared, a collective grin erupting across our faces. "Let's do this weekly!"

Six months into Icon 11 Newsletter, it was then a source of edutainment for the students and teachers alike, using articles as references in class discussions. Gone were the days of presidents cluelessly collecting copies. They raced to the Reading Room, eager to snag individual copies for their classmates. Our team grew organically, swelling to 22 passionate members. Fueled by pizza, proofreading and rewriting our "project baby" until the wee hours of the morning. And guess what, that boy who cringed in my first class has become one of the celebrated writers and pioneers of Icon'11 too.



MANI AK JACK

Mani Jack is a teacher-educator with 21 years of experience in one of the best fully residential schools in Sarawak. In addition to teaching English language, he also incorporates the elements of integrity, the culture of doing things properly, noble characters and essential thinking skills in his teaching as his main aim is to produce great leaders who are also great thinkers as those two are foundations of a developed nation.

THE POWER OF TRUE STORIES, ANALOGIES, MOVIES AND CRITICAL QUESTIONS

by Mani ak Jack

Even though I have been teaching for twenty one years, I always consider myself as a student because I love to learn. I always believe that an effective teacher is also an effective learner. Furthermore, the colours of every student and every generation can either slightly or heavily alter your old perceptions. Therefore, these experiences and new knowledge have helped me to adapt to the student's characters, mindset and behaviour which have been changing sometimes drastically due to the influences of the many elements of the modern world. I am not a psychologist, but I love to learn about human psychology because it helps me to understand my students and it also helps me to create specific exercises to improve their proficiency in English language.

Some students consider English as a scary language, some just consider it as a language, some consider it as the language of the colonizers while some consider English as an important gate to a new horizon. What did I do to get all of them to understand the importance of the English language? I always use many types of analogies, great movies, inspiring stories and high order thinking questions to plant a thinking seed in their minds.

For those who are scared of the English language, I shared with them my own story, especially how I tame my own fear. When I was at the university, I despised reading. Reading made me sick to the core before because every time I read complicated articles and journals, the vocabulary murdered my interest to read the whole writing. I stopped reading every time I came across a vocabulary that I didn't comprehend. One day, I fell deep into my own self-reflection. I asked myself, "How long shall I run away from this fear?" "How long can I sweep my own weakness under the carpet of my incompetency?" Those critical questions finally woke me up from my own illusion. I visualized the possible consequences that I would experience if I refuse to embrace this challenge. I began to get the best dictionary and faced every word that was an alien to me. As time went by, reading difficult articles has become my new playground. I am used to taking the bull by its horns. I used this story every year to motivate this particular group of students to help them conquer their own fear.

Some students have been influenced by the negative minds saying that English is the language of the colonizers. Therefore, some students took the English language for granted. What did I do? I played with some critical questions such as, "Why did they colonize you?", "Why did they finally give you the freedom to run your own country?", "Did they give your parents and grandparents access to good education before they granted you self-governance?", "How did the Indians claim their lands from the British?" and "Would you like to be recolonized?" I used historical facts to help them under-




stand that if they fail to learn and master the language of the past colonizers, history will definitely repeat itself. I also told them that English is no longer the language of the British but the language of the global community as English is the language of abstract knowledge, science and technology. If we were the ones who created the many useful things in this world, the British and the Americans will definitely make the efforts to learn our language. However, we are not the creators of many critical man-made creations. We are the users. Obviously, we have to learn their language because they have never stopped us from mastering their language.

Now let me talk about what I did to help them understand grammar. English grammar can be extremely difficult to those who are ignorant of the grammar rules used in any language. Basically, the students are heavily influenced by the grammar rules of their first language. Most of the time, they would just speak or write without thinking too much of the grammar mistakes or rules. They didn't realize that the complexity of a language is actually good for the mind as it gradually boosts thinking skills.

First of all, I would talk about the amount of respect that they should have for a particular language. I told them that if they fail to respect their first language, they will also not be able to speak and write their second and third language. They should always speak properly as their daily habits will determine the quality of their spoken and written English. I also talk about the culture of doing things properly. I used Japanese culture to make them think. For example, I talked about one of the Japanese brands called Toyota. The Japanese will never sell something of a low quality to anyone because they are deeply concerned about their customer's satisfaction and safety. That is the reason why Toyota has been known and recognized internationally for the distinctive reliability of their products. They will always make sure that they check every little thing before they release their products to the market. In addition to that, they will also be responsive towards any complaints as they will never compromise on the integrity of their reputation. By using this analogy, the students will understand how the culture of doing things properly affects how they do their work, especially when they are asked to speak and write proper English.

Regarding the grammar rules, I always drive their thoughts into many different perspectives so that they can relate the analogies to the grammar rules. For example, I used my driving experiences to explain the importance of grammar rules. As the matter of fact, there are many types of road users. Some are civilized while some are pure demons as this type of uncivilized group shows very little or no respect for the laws. However, even the ones who respect the laws will also be penalized by the laws if they don't have a solid self-discipline as long as anger management is concerned as these civilized drivers could be provoked by the road bullies. In other words, no matter how bad other drivers are, you must respect the law and control your anger because if you fail to control your anger towards the law breakers, you will also have to pay for the price even though you are right in the first place.





The same thing goes to the grammar rules. The more grammar mistakes you make, the less competent you are in using the English language. The worst part is if you sit for a public exam, a student who does not embrace the grammar rules will not get the marks they desire. In other words, no matter how complex the grammar rules are, they have to respect and follow the rules. If a student refuses to abide by the grammar rules, they must accept the consequences with an open heart and mind.

Of all the grammatical mistakes that the students always make in writing and speaking is subject-verb agreement. In this case, I always write a random sentence by using their first language and translate the first language into English language. I will explain and compare the grammar rules of their first language and the English language. Moreover, I will write a list of grammar rules in English that do not exist in their first language. This explanation is essential because if they were to ask to write an essay in English, they must first switch the grammar rules mentally especially their awareness about the presence of the rules of subject-verb agreement.

In terms of pronunciation, intonation and rhythm of spoken English, I used movies. In general, we are influenced by British and American movies. Some people speak poorly pronounced English words, some speak good English while some could speak beautiful English especially the ones who love literature. When I did my first degree, I watched a lot of movies. From those movies, I managed to identify which actor or actress who can speak good and beautiful English. Some actors or actresses teach you how to speak in a convincing manner. The ones who can speak beautiful English are Rachel Weisz, Anthony Hopkins, Micheal Caine, Morgan Freeman and Nicole Kidman. On the other hand, the ones who could speak in a convincing manner are Keanu Reeves, Daniel Craig, Sean Connery, Tom Hanks and Leonardo Dicaprio. I shared these great and influential names with the students and I asked them to watch their movies. These actors will help them to express each word beautifully and they will also learn about accents and facial expressions. Why did I encourage them to watch movies? The main reason is that we don't have enough English environment in this state and we lack native English speakers residing here. In other words, I always told them to work on the solutions instead of playing with the common excuses as the access to knowledge these days is widely open to all.

In conclusion, true stories, analogies, movies and critical questions can be very effective in helping and motivating the students to improve their proficiency in English language. However, all of these tips will be meaningless if the English language teachers themselves fail to lead by examples. In other words, an English teacher must speak good English first. An English teacher shall not be influenced by the poor quality of spoken English spoken by the students as the students should follow the high standard of the spoken English set by that particular English teacher. Otherwise, it will be like the blind leading the blind.



THILIP KUMAR MOORTHY

Dr. Thilip Kumar Moorthy is an Assistant Professor from Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology. He teaches courses like Curriculum and Syllabus Design, Material Selection and Adaptation and Teaching Listening and Speaking. He is also the Coordinator for Teaching Practicum for Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English with Education students.



MY UNIQUE PRACTICUM JOURNEY

by **Thilip Kumar Moorthy**

This boy has been my student since Year 2 in his university days. Lots of hope was on him that he will perform well in his practicum as he has always been confident to teach different levels of students. But, there is this specific catch about him, he loves political and war-based content to be included in his lesson plan. He hails “Hilter” and “Stalin” a lot in his trial lessons. It was too difficult to take it out from him!

Very enthusiastic but his direction was not the same as the rest of the students and that makes him a little “unique” compared to others in his batch. He sees the entire lesson planning process in a very different manner where he tends to analyze in a very open space style. He has questions like “why should we not introduce things that interest the students and why are we imposing things on them?” or “The content that is in the students’ book is not necessarily needed to be implemented into the students, we can introduce different things to them.” His friends tend to sideline him because his lesson contents are not common matters that they can understand. I always advise him by telling him that whatever he has in his mind is not wrong but there is a reason why we have the curriculum content that we need to follow as students need to be coached in knowing the basics before even introducing whatever he has in his mind. Encouraging him was a very big task as he is always having the issues of not sharing similar things with his batch mates.

He got placement in a model school which focuses on good moral values. It was a school with lots of rules and regulations. It is anticipated that such school has a reputation of doing things in a very rigid manner, therefore, getting this school seems to be a little “identity clash” for him as he was a person who wanted to experiment different methods.

The day has come, his observation day, the students that he was handling were all below average and their concentration span was less than 5 minutes. I went to his class with an open heart hoping that he would have prepared a good lesson and of course a little nervous with what he had to offer his students. *Crossing my fingers that he doesn't prepare anything crazy!* He had a half an hour lesson, the topic was on recycling and as wacko as possible, he told the students they will be doing posters. I was like, what! Poster! How on earth will you prepare a poster, without guidelines in half an hour? I was calm and composed. I let it be. I waited until the end of the lesson, the lesson did not achieve the learning outcome as the lesson was not able to be completed by the end of the class. It was devastating.

I met him for discussion. My first question to him was, why poster? Why have you decided on doing such a big thing in a duration of 30 minutes? Isn't that



too much? He didn't say anything. I told him, for half an hour lesson, you could have used a worksheet, you could have done pairwork, you could have gathered them to play certain language games, crossword puzzles in class, vocabulary enhancement. You can never go wrong with these activities because you are still within the scope of the syllabus. He didn't look at me, he told me, "sir I will do well the next time. I am very sorry for such a crappy lesson."

I didn't say much, I only told him, "buck up, you have a good school supervisor to assist you, do well, don't disappoint." The most important matter is to make sure you know how to plan the lesson. You cannot do what you have been doing in the university. Here you cannot experiment too much and you must execute logically according to the duration, scheme of work and also the syllabus.

I did a teaching framework with him, I told him to be my student and I did a full blown lesson plan with him again. I looked back at his syllabus and tried to explain to him how to handle the class better by including the student's proficiency as the main criteria.

Therefore, my instruction for him that can be useful for other new practicum students was:


1. The first thing – You should get yourself familiarized with curriculum structure – know inside out, the syllabus that is being offered. Try to refer to the teacher's book or your teacher supervisor as a guide.
2. The second thing – know your students – try to ask them questions and check their proficiency level. As simple as, "how are you?" Get them to respond.
3. The third thing – duration and plotting of lessons – these have to be done properly – pair work or group work can be done if the lesson is more than an hour. Individual work focusing on exercises can be done for a 30 mins lesson (Both the methods are still within the syllabus content).
4. Finally – your delivery – one has to decide the parts in the lesson and I would suggest having the teacher input, guided practice and independent practice in your lesson plan to allow a flow in the lesson.

I gave him a second chance. I didn't fail him.

This chance was so important that now he has become a successful teacher in an embassy based school. I am glad the chance has changed his path of becoming a better teacher and I was also happy that I didn't unnecessarily fail him at the very beginning.

I hope this sharing will be helpful for those who are having practicum students to supervise and giving them a second chance is very crucial so that we





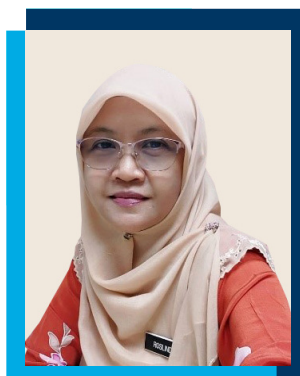
don't lose these gems in our education system. As uncertain as they can be, but giving them guidance will never disappoint you as a supervisor.



“

Teaching is more than imparting knowledge; it is inspiring change. Learning is more than absorbing facts; it is acquiring understanding.

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD



ROSLINDA AHMAD

The writer has 27 years of teaching experience in three urban schools. She has a degree in TESL and Masters in Education Psychology. She is one of the editors of the KSSM Chemistry DLP (Dual Language Programme) textbooks for forms four and five. She has also presented mini research papers in several national and international education symposiums.

STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2024

by Roslinda Ahmad

It was my 10th year of teaching profession and I was heavily pregnant, teaching the form one class of boys and girls. Can't say they were naughty but they were a handful. What's more, it was the afternoon school session, all hot and humid. If you had a class after 6 p.m., you are officially a babysitter enduring 40 minutes of 'after physical education' sweat stench.

I remember this boy named Dennis Tang (not his real name). He was a cute and chubby straight-haired dude who always had something to say in class even if no one was listening. He sat right in front and always waited for me to come and talk to him. His jovial aura and cheeky smile always had me wonder how his mom could ever gather herself to scold him if he got into mischief. He's such a cute innocent boy.

One day, I was absent from school but I had brought home two piles of exercise books to mark. One of which was Dennis's class. So, I decided to spend the day just by grading their assignments. Once I had my coffee, I started to flip the pages one by one without looking at who the book belonged to. Suddenly a piece of paper fell out of a book. It looked more like a wishing card than a normal piece of paper. When I opened it, I recognized the handwriting almost immediately. However, it was special. The cursive was unusually neat and the message was written on a blank piece of paper with no lines in it. It read ...

Dear Clarissa,

I know you have a boyfriend. And I know I am nothing compared to him. I also know that your friends don't like me either. I have nothing to offer you because I am ugly and short. I am not good-looking like the other guys in your class. Please let me be your friend. I think you know who I am because I've seen you smiling at me sometimes. I'm sorry if I never smiled back, it's because I don't know how to react. Can we meet in school tomorrow at 12:00? I will wait for you at the Bilik Sukan gazebo.

Dennis Tang

Stumped, I could even feel myself blushing after reading the card. You see, I taught both Clarissa and Dennis. I know how absolutely beautiful Clarissa was. But I also know Dennis was a sweet and pleasant boy only without the good looks; well not the macho look anyway. He will grow up and turn heads in one to two years' time. But that's too long for Clarissa to wait, isn't it?



On Monday, I went to Dennis's class. Somehow, he looked agitated. He wasn't himself as he was not talking to anyone at all the whole time. When I started returning their books, I noticed Dennis anxiously waiting for his book to be handed to him. As soon as he received it, he opened it, flipped through every page trying to look for something. The look of disappointment was clearly on his chubby little face. Then he walked to me slowly and as he was about to open his mouth, I quickly took out the card from my handbag and said to him, "I hope you know what you're doing." He blushed like a red light at a stop.

As a teacher, one must never make a child feel embarrassed of his honest attempts but let him navigate his own course responsibly. As an English Language teacher though, I feel proud that my teachings have been utilized for a good course (he didn't make any grammar mistakes in the card). As a parent, I feel anxious about the outcome of his innocent invitation. All in all, this experience was something I can never forget. I realize I have become an important part of Dennis's life because I think I was the sole protector of his secret; the one true secret keeper.

Why I would like to share with you this little experience of mine, is because I truly believe that the early teenage years are such a challenging and confusing phase for a child. They go through all kinds of uncertainty and yet they are expected to meet some kind of achievement at the end of the day. Who's going to be there when they are lost? The ones whom they are going to pour out to when they can't tell it to their own parents and siblings. It's us- their teachers. So, the very basic thing to do is to listen to them and gain their trust by not embarrassing them or spilling the beans. And from there, we could be their shoulder to cry on, a kayak paddle or even a lifejacket.

To Dennis, good luck!





HOOI CHEE MEI

Hooi Chee Mei is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Modern Languages in Faculty of Creative Industries, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Her area of interest is on Applied Linguistics, specifically in syntax and pragmatics. Her expertise includes teaching methodology and English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

AN EGG-MAZING ORAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS COURSE

by Hooi Chee Mei

Last year in the October 2023 semester, I was assigned to teach Oral Communication and Interpersonal Skills course. This has been the course that I usually taught ever since I came into Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) in May 2021. It was a short semester, in which the lessons were taught for only seven weeks. In that semester, I had a lecture class with two tutorial classes. All in all, I had a total of 37 students in the course. It was not easy to teach in a short semester as the syllabus would need to be rushed to ensure that the students were able to learn from all the concepts and theories from the course.

For their assessments, they would need to deliver three presentations in groups. For the first presentation, they would need to present in their groups pertaining to a theory related to communication theories. They would then need to do a drama based on the communication theories in their second presentation, and finally, they would need to do an impromptu speech based on the topic given to them.

I still remember that for the first presentation, some students did not feel comfortable, and they did not know how to use verbal communication together with non-verbal expressions to deliver a speech or a presentation until I provided them with my feedback. Some of them stuttered and paused, while some were not confident with their presentations. During the feedback session, I provided all my students with my personalised and detailed comments. I told them this:

“Dear students, you would need to be confident with yourself as you present. If you cannot remember your points, then take cue cards with you and refer to them if you cannot remember your points. However, you cannot look at the cue cards all the time. This is the time for you to shine for two minutes. Tell your audience about your stories pertaining to the theory. Then, you can talk and explain more since you know yourself more than others.”

They took note of my comments to further improve their presentations.

In their second presentation which was on drama, I could finally see their hidden talents being showcased. Before their second presentation, I told them what they would need to do and showed them recorded drama videos of the previous drama presentations from my previous students. From that, we discussed what my previous students could improve on their verbal and non-verbal expressions together with the storyline, as well as audio and visual effects displayed. One group eventually asked me for permission to prolong their drama to 25 minutes though I mentioned previously that the drama would need to be done between 15 to 20 minutes. Nevertheless, they told me



that they had more than 20 over scenes to prepare for the drama. Since it was the short semester, I realised the students did not have much time to waste to cut down the scenes to be within the time limit. Therefore, I changed the approach by allowing all groups to do their drama to be done in a maximum of 25 minutes. The students took the initiative to use their props and put on costumes to ensure that they would be able to act their role in the drama. I truly enjoyed all the drama presentations. All in all, I could see the amount of effort put in together with all the sleepless nights of endless drama practices to make the drama presentations happen. The introvert and quiet students also managed to reveal all their expressions though that was their first time acting in the drama. The extrovert and active ones also toned down to make way for others in their group to shine, as well.

From this, I could see that the students really took my comments and feedback seriously and that made me a proud lecturer. I told them that all of them would need to have an equal or balanced time of screening or acting because otherwise, I could not provide them with fair marks, to which they understood what I meant. Moreover, I provided my feedback to all the students on how they acted for their drama presentations.

Lastly, they had to do their final presentation which was an impromptu speech. This final presentation especially impacted some introvert ones to stand out because they spoke and presented with confidence. They had to study all the theories and concepts that I taught in the course and instead of regurgitating all the information out by writing, they would need to present an impromptu speech based on the question that they selected. The question would be based on what was taught to them. Based on my observation, I must say that they really had improved tremendously from their first presentation to their final presentation because they heeded my advice and comments seriously.

In order that I would not be biased in evaluating their presentations, I would always follow the marking rubrics as I gave marks for their assessments. This would make me critical as I gave my evaluation. At times, as an educator, I might be swayed away with emotions by giving more marks to some students, but by creating precise marking rubrics, it would reduce any form of subjectivity.

The journey with all the students in this course was amazing and this would be something that I coin as “egg-mazing” because the “egg” represents life given to the students who were once shy, but they are now born again to be more confident in themselves to present in public. My advice to all educators would be that we would need to give the extra touch and attention to students by giving our all, but we would need to remember that we are not robots. We could change our approach to cater to the students’ needs and be ourselves to shape this future generation to be better individuals.






IDA RUHIDIBA BAKHTIAR

Ida Ruhidiba Bakhtiar is currently an academic lecturer in one of the Teacher Education Institutes in the northern region. For nineteen years, she taught English in four different schools. Her passion for the teaching of English language drove her to pursue a doctorate degree in TESOL on a part-time basis at one of the leading institutes in the northern region.



THE FEAR FACTOR: TO FEAR OR NOT TO FEAR

by Ida Ruhidiba binti Bakhtiar



In the span of two decades, I had the opportunity to teach at three boarding schools and an all-girls school. Out of these four schools, the longest that I had the honour of teaching goes to the three boarding schools that saw me dedicate 16 years of my teaching career to these very learning institutions. People I encountered would often assume that teaching in a boarding school is like a stroll in the park, and believe it or not, it is often associated with “being fortunate” (almost the equivalent of hitting the jackpot) to be able to teach students who are deemed “intelligent, well-behaved, and angelic.” Believe me when I say that there were times I found myself wanting to stand on an overturned milk crate, vying to catch people’s attention to take heed of what I had to say. After all, we are humans; we only see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear.

Sometimes we forget, even in the sunniest of weather, that “rough winds do shake the darling buds of May and the sun, his gold complexion dimm’d.” Though I may sound like a second-rate version of Shakespeare, my point is that teaching in a boarding school is not all cupcakes and rainbows with a flying unicorn thrown into the equation. Perhaps I’m being overly dramatic here, but I assure you that teaching in a boarding school has its own fair share of ups and downs as well as obstacles and challenges along the way. You’ll be surprised to learn that despite being the “chosen ones”, there are some students who treat the English language just as Boo Radley was treated by the folks of Maycomb County—an entity that engulfs them with this unspeakable fear when wanting to speak the language in class.

And so it goes that our fearful story revolves around my own students back when I was teaching in boarding school. I had often thought that being fearful of learning the English language was not among my students’ primary battles in learning. Boy, how wrong I truly was! The first time I set foot in 3 Omega, I carried with me the hopes and aspirations to take these students to greater heights where English is concerned. I was so thrilled to be given the opportunity to teach these smart, bright, and potential A students that for the first lesson, I chose Roald Dahl’s book entitled *More About Boy*, which featured an incomplete essay he had written but never got around to finishing it on *The Life Story of a Penny*. I even fooled myself into thinking that my students would be just as excited as I was about the writing task I was going to give them. It took me two whole days to prepare the lesson and the materials needed to carry out the lesson. I could feel my eagerness getting the better of me. Finally! I could conduct a lesson that allowed me to fully utilise interesting materials from books that I read, rather than the normal workbooks I would use to teach my students the writing process.

To begin with, I held up the book for all to see. All I got from them were empty stares and the sound of utter silence. Not wanting to give in to their silence, I started



asking them questions, hoping that somehow it could spark even the slightest interest. All I received were the occasional “huh” and them nudging each other for some answers, which resulted in them not answering any of my questions. As they failed to give their full cooperation in my class, they left me feeling agitated. When my former lecturer assigned a task to me, it helped me fully grasp the understanding behind their attitude. At that moment, the thought that this assignment was meant to rescue me from my naivety and lack of knowledge crossed my mind.

Based on what I gathered, these students refuse to speak the English language, largely due to their fear of making mistakes. The fear that they had inside of them is like a wall they built inside of themselves that prevents them from speaking English. As their (former) English language teacher, it was disheartening to listen to their responses, for fear was the barricade that prevented them from even making an attempt to try. I realised that I had to allow some space for my students to make mistakes and, most importantly, to provide a platform for them to try, especially in the English language class. Although we know that fear is not uncommon, when it is the one factor that prevents students from speaking the language, it greatly affects the way we teach them. Once this realisation was made known to me, together with my panel mates, we came up with the PBL activity that required them to prepare a static display and presentation on the prescribed novel learned in class. To my surprise, these students had gone to great lengths to create amazing displays about the novel they learned and had shown me how much of an impact a teacher has on the students in helping them defeat their epic battle against f-e-a-r.



This book is more than a mere anthology; it is a celebration of the human spirit and the enduring connections forged within the classroom. Each story within these pages offers a unique glimpse into the world of teachers, revealing moments of triumph, challenge, humour, and heartache. Through the voices of teachers, we explore the myriad ways in which teaching transforms not only minds but also souls.

Dr. Thusha Rani Rajendra



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