Diversity Matters

Managing Stress

Fostering Collaborative Learning
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On the Cover
Students at the “Introduction to Academic Writing” lecture, organised by TLC.

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Please send your contributions and comments to tlc@unisim.edu.sg, with the header: “Communitas Contribution”.

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Dear Colleagues,

Earlier this semester, we conducted an Associate Satisfaction Index Survey in which 297 of you responded. This survey is conducted once every two years. We appreciate that you invested time to provide us with valuable feedback. As we continue to incorporate your feedback in our operations, we hope that you’ll keep your suggestions coming, and let us know how we’re doing from time to time.

The iStudyGuide initiative, which SIM University introduced a year ago, is progressing. Starting this semester, the printed study guide will be gradually phased out from Level 1 courses; only EPUB and PDF versions of the Study Guide will be provided. To help students prepare for this transition, Dr Henry Khiat, a faculty member of the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC), developed an online module, SD102 Learning Effectively Through Your iStudyGuide. This module introduces students to the various elements, functions, and features of the iStudyGuide. Do refer your students to this resource as they will undoubtedly find it useful. You can also access the module at TLC’s microsite, http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg.

To better understand students’ receptivity and use of the iStudyGuide, TLC surveyed students who have used the iStudyGuide in December 2013 and May this year. Currently, we are also conducting focus group discussions with associates who have taught with the iStudyGuide. Do approach any of the TLC faculty if you’d like to be part of the project.

At TLC, we increasingly believe that our main objectives are to enable, engage, and empower both associates and students alike so that they may attain their personal best in whatever they do, with the ultimate goal of quality education at UniSIM. In the last four years, we started out by enabling you – through the provision of online modules and workshops that introduce generic skill sets that are useful for your role as an associate at UniSIM. In the next four years, we want to engage you and to have you increasingly engage with your students – through the provision of more targeted development workshops and seminars that will equip you with the skills to better assess your students’ learning (for more on this, see Scholarship of Teaching and Learning under Highlights). We hope that in so doing, many more of you will feel a part of the growing community of practice and be empowered to take greater ownership of your students’ learning.

Already, a sizeable number of you are engaging with one another and are freely sharing your expertise. From this semester onwards, in addition to our TLC sharing blog that’s written by TLC faculty member Dr Abdel Halim Sykes, we’ll also be starting up a blog on visualisation tools that looks at various ways that associates could present data and information, such as infographics, doodling, and mind-mapping. This blog will be facilitated by Thum Cheng Cheong, an associate with the School of Business and a ThinkBuzan-licensed instructor.

This willingness to share expertise and ideas is also apparent within the pages of Communitas. In this issue, Professor Brian Peacock elaborates on how he uses one-page reports and posters to promote collaborative learning among his students. Cedric Chew shares his strategies for motivating students to learn, while Dr Yvonne McNulty highlights the importance of being sensitive to the diverse needs of your learners. With stress levels high among Singaporeans, Goh Boon Yeow explains how you might get a handle on stress. And, on a personal note, Serene Wee, a widely-published children’s book writer, shares her tips and passion for writing children’s stories and explains why it is useful for those who teach writing to pick up this art.

We hope you’ll find these articles – written by associates for associates – inspiring and providing you with much food for thought. Do keep your contributions coming. We look forward to engaging with more of you.

With best wishes,
Dr Selina Lim
Collaborative Learning Using One-Page Reports and Posters

By Prof. Brian Peacock

Collaborative learning and the ability to clearly and succinctly present one’s knowledge and understanding of a subject matter are key skills expected of 21st century learners.

So far, experience in four, qualitatively different face-to-face and e-courses – Aerospace Human Factors, Introduction to Human Factors (at the National University of Singapore), System Safety, Occupational Biomechanics – has demonstrated that these OPR/Ps are effective from the pedagogical viewpoint. This exercise is also well-liked by students, as indicated by their reflections during the end-of-course peer-reviewed poster sessions. Discussions with students revealed that they welcome the opportunity to change informal study groups into formal, product-focused, graded activities.

Grading of the homework submissions (OPRs) by the instructor is generally quite lenient; most groups deservedly receive full marks and the whole class is able to view the submissions of their colleagues online, or in hard copy form, after class. The more elaborate end-of-course posters are graded by a combination of faculty, faculty colleagues and peers. These groups of graders use a rubric that addresses breadth, depth and presentation. The result shows greater discrimination between the groups; there is generally good correlation between the faculty scores and the combined (consensus) scores of the students.

Whereas some students prefer to opt out of the discrimination activity, the majority is serious about this opportunity for peer grading, which gives them the chance to compare their own efforts with those of their classmates on a similar exercise. The possibility of within-group peer grading of individual contributions was ruled out because of its potential counterproductive divisiveness.

In conclusion, this One Page Report / End of Course Poster process is easy to administer and well-liked by students. Above all, it is an effective way of implementing the many benefits of collaborative learning, and has proven to be a reliable and valid way of grading.

Prof Brian Peacock is the School of Science and Technology’s Associate Faculty Champion for 2013. This article was based on his project.
The Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) launched its revamped web site in July, marking its 4th anniversary. The web site is redesigned to reflect the centre’s growing portfolio in various areas, and to make it easier for you to navigate and find timely information and announcements. Take a peek at the refreshed look at http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg.

Books that were previously part of the Teaching and Learning Centre’s Resource Room at the SIM Library have found a new home. They’re now housed at the Resource Centre at Block C, 7.02. The small, cosy space is an excellent place to catch up with the TLC team, immerse yourself in resources featuring the latest teaching and learning methodologies and approaches, and unwind before the start of your class. From time to time, TLC will also be holding workshop sessions for small groups at the Resource Centre. So the next time you have some time on your hands, do make your way to the Resource Centre and check out the resources that TLC has accumulated for you. The TLC team would be happy to show you around.

Starting July 2014 semester, all Level 1 courses will have the study guide in PDF and EPUB formats. The print study guide will be gradually phased out. In line with this move, TLC developed SD102 Learning Effectively Through Your iStudyGuide as a handy guide for students. This module introduces students to the functions and features of the iStudyGuide, and how they may best use these to help them in their learning. Do remember to refer your students to this important resource. (You may also review the module at http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/learning.html.) Additionally, TLC’s start-of-semester talk for students, “Successful Learning at UniSIM” will also elaborate on the features of the iStudyGuide.

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Events in 2015

eLFA2015
Next year, in conjunction with SIM University’s 10th year anniversary, UniSIM will be hosting the 10th e-Learning Forum Asia 2015 (eLFA2015). eLFA is an e-learning conference that attracts 350-400 participants from all over Asia, as well as other parts of the world. It will be held from June 17-19, 2015, at SIM Performing Arts Theatre. The theme of the conference is “Disruptive Innovation in Education”. A call for paper proposals will be made in October 2014. If you have an interesting topic for which you’d like to submit a proposal for consideration, or if you wish to attend the conference, do look out for our announcement on the Associate portal and the TLC web site at http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-associates.html. Selected papers will also be published in a special issue of Advances in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

RWL9
Also next year, SIM University will be co-organising the 9th International Conference on Researching Work and Learning (RWL9) with Institute of Adult Learning (IAL) and National Institute of Education (NIE). The conference will be held from December 9-12, 2015. For more information, go to http://rwl2015.com
This year, the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) is launching several initiatives to support SIM University’s drive to promote and nurture a culture of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) among its faculty and associates. SoTL encourages teaching practitioners to closely examine evidence of students’ learning, and to reflect on and uncover the rationale behind their own teaching practices. The ultimate goal of the exercise is to enhance the learning experiences of students and the quality of teaching among faculty. The following is a brief overview of the TLC initiatives in support of SoTL.

**Innovation Seed Grant (ISG)**
The Innovation Seed Grant is aimed at nurturing and fostering innovative explorations into teaching practices and methods. Associates who have taught at least two semesters at UniSIM are encouraged to apply. The call for proposals starts July 15. Submission deadline for proposals is September 30. TLC will be conducting a proposal writing briefing and workshop in August. For more information on the innovation seed grant, go to [http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/seed-grant.html](http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/seed-grant.html).

**Advances in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**
This semester, TLC is launching the inaugural issue of *Advances in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. This open-access, trans-disciplinary journal will showcase various SoTL work by our colleagues as well as international contributors. The journal will serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas on teaching and learning, using an evidence-based approach to examining student learning and learner experience. So look out for our inaugural issue in July 2014 semester.

**Faculty Learning Symposium: September 13, 2014**
In line with our move to foster a scholarship of teaching and learning and a community of practice, this year’s symposium theme is “Evidence-based Practice: Action from the Ground Up.” Our keynote speakers for this event are A/P Doug Hamilton from Royal Roads University, Canada, and Prof Robert K. Kamei, Vice Dean of Education, Duke-NUS Graduate School of Medicine. Also sharing their projects are our Associate Faculty Champions for 2013 – Lily Lim (SASS), Yeo Beng Teck (HDSS) and Prof Brian Peacock (SST). Join us also for a pre-symposium workshop on September 12, facilitated by A/P Doug Hamilton. For more information, keep a look out for updates at [http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-associates.html](http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-associates.html).

**Action research workshops**
Faculty from TLC will be conducting action research workshops in December for successful Innovative Seed Grant recipients and associates who are interested in learning how they may gather evidence of their students’ learning and to use that information in their teaching. More information will be available at [http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-associates.html](http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-associates.html).

**TLC Seminar Series**
TLC is hosting a series of seminars focusing on teaching practices and pedagogy. On August 19, Dr Yvonne McNulty, an associate with the School of Business, will share her experiences in teaching culturally diverse learners.

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**Learning Journey**

Last semester, 50 associates attended the workshop on ‘Creative Learning with Visualisation Tools’ that was conducted by Mr Thum Cheng Cheong, a ThinkBuzan-licensed instructor and associate with the School of Business. During the workshop, Thum introduced a palette of visualisation tools and techniques for designing individual and collaborative learning activities that used practical everyday materials such as Post-It notes as well as high-tech, iPad applications like Educreations.

After the workshop, one of the attendees and an associate with the School of Business, Mr Ngiam Tee Woh, immediately put into practice some of the techniques he learnt in BUS360e Product/Service Innovation and Design. According to Tee Woh, “the course already has a strong emphasis on the use of mindmaps. Now that it is converted to an e-course, we only see the students three times. So I created a skeleton of mind maps that students could use. I also asked the students to start to populate it as they do their own self-study.”
Since 2012, the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) has been providing academic support for students via online modules, workshops, and lectures. These address two broad areas of student learning – namely, (i) English-language and academic writing skills, and (ii) study skills. This year, we’ve streamlined and added to our offerings of modules and talks (see below). All students have access to our modules via MyUniSIM. So do refer your students to these resources.

**English Support Programme**

1) **Online modules**
   - a) SDE100: English Proficiency Assessment 1
   - b) SDE101: Essential English Skills
   - c) SDE102: Developing Academic Writing Skills

2) **Lecture**: Introduction to Academic Writing

**Learning Support programme**

1) **Online modules**
   - a) SD101: Essential Skills for Self-Directed Learning
   - b) SD102: Learning Effectively Through Your iStudyGuide
   - c) SD103: Academic Integrity

2) **Workshops and talks**
   - a) Successful Learning at UniSIM
   - b) Learning Creatively and Critically With Mind Maps
   - c) A Practical Guide to Answering Essay-based Examinations and Assignments

For more information on the modules and workshops, go to [http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-students.html](http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/events-students.html)

For BUS488 Corporate Strategy, Tee Woh used Post-It notes to write detailed notes of concepts which he beamed up using the visualiser. He subsequently pasted these notes onto the overall picture to help reinforce student learning.

Thum will be sharing more ideas on how you might use visualisation tools in your teaching through a blog on the TLC web site. So log onto [http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/community.html](http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/community.html) if you’d like to learn more or share your own ideas on how you’ve used visuals in your teaching.
Recently, I was asked to prepare a ‘Statement of Teaching Philosophy’ for a job application. Having lectured for more than 10 years, summing up my teaching approach in a succinct one-page document seemed rather daunting. But as I discovered, being forced to consider what makes me want to teach and then what makes me an effective teacher, there is so much more to it than simply turning up in a classroom with a bunch of Power-point slides!

The reality is that a class is a community of learners. A good teacher not only cares about students and whether, what, and how they learn, but is also not afraid to push the boundaries. In Asia, where much of my teaching experience has been gained, the learning community is diverse and oftentimes complex, with students from various backgrounds and with different skills, goals, and approaches to learning. How, then, does one navigate the Asian classroom?

First and foremost, the traditional approaches to teaching still have merit - time-tested graded quizzes, exams, case analyses, and assignments as deductive methods of learning all play an important role. But because the learning community is evolving, I constantly strive to adopt innovative teaching principles and approaches including personal experience, experiential exercises, case analysis teams, group debates, current business examples, and the application of students’ “real world” experiences. Employing these inductive methods not only stimulates an interest in students to engage with the topic, but also supports the transfer of learning from the classroom to real life situations. My fundamental belief is that curiosity, involvement, and relevance are indispensable for effective learning.

Student involvement in class discussions is often a challenge in Asia. Rather than signaling disinterest, I have learned through my teaching in Singapore and China that the ‘silent treatment’ is a deeply instilled cultural attitude of showing respect to a teacher by not questioning their authority. Still, hearing the sound of one’s own voice for an hour or two is hardly enjoyable! So to create a supportive learning atmosphere, I challenge students to share their insights within the safety of the classroom, knowing that they will deliberate on their reasoning before speaking up because I will often ask for justification of any examples or arguments presented. Over time, the sharing becomes easier – not just because students feel empowered by their involvement, but...
because I take great care to ensure that their contribution is valued and that they do not lose ‘face’ in front of others.

One of the biggest advantages a teacher can have in the classroom is to understand the specific culture in which they are immersed and the various cultures of the students they are engaged with. Because I have lived and worked as a scholar-practitioner in four countries (Australia, United States, Singapore, and China), and travelled to many more, this alone allows me to offer real life examples in helping students to apply textbook knowledge in different business settings while also facilitating my ease of communication with students from different cultural and educational backgrounds. Involvement in curriculum administration and course development helps in this regard. At James Cook University Singapore, for example, I was instrumental in redeveloping an Australia-based international HRM (MBA) course to reflect the Asian context in which students were situated. Likewise, at Cabrini College in the USA, my role included revising and delivering the undergraduate study abroad program for Australia. And in China, where I taught at Shanghai University, I developed students’ thinking to expand their ideology beyond only the Chinese workplace.

As an adjunct professor, I assume multiple roles in order to navigate the social complexity of the classroom. These almost always extend beyond that of just ‘teacher’ and ‘marker’ to also include the roles of study skills coach, industry expert, careers adviser, role model, and mentor. In mentoring, for example, I often discuss with my students the challenges and opportunities that they may face after graduation, as well as the benefits of life-long education - whether in the workplace or through continued tertiary studies. As a study skills coach, I routinely check in with students about their time management challenges, how to prioritise their work and family life with studying, and to offer recommended resources to help them with their research and writing skills. It also helps when I share my own journey through university, almost all of which was undertaken as an adult learner while juggling marriage, children, full-time work, and living abroad. For female students, in particular, who often assume the majority of the primary caregiving role for children (especially in Asia), having me standing before them as someone who has lived (and survived!) the journey serves as a tremendous motivator for them to ‘keep going’. In effect, being ‘real’ and presenting oneself not just as an expert but also as a ‘trier’ and ‘doer’ are important personal traits that most students appreciate.

One of my favourite techniques for engaging students in the Asian classroom is to host guest lectures. This involves inviting an industry expert to take over all or part of a scheduled lecture and to present on a pre-arranged topic of interest to the class. Because I have extensive international experience as a scholar-practitioner (http://expatresearch.com) and a wide network of industry contacts, I am able to draw on this expertise to broaden my students’ perspectives and, in turn, situate their learning within the wider discourse of globalisation and its flaws and successes. Sometimes, if there is an oversupply of guest lectures, I defer to the students to decide from a short-list as to whom they would like to invite into their classroom. Guest lectures (at least once during the semester) are therefore an essential part of my teaching approach.

Another favourite classroom approach is to educate students about academic referencing, plagiarism, ethics, and good academic writing. Over many years, I have learned that students come from a variety of educational backgrounds with some more rigorous than others, thus there are usually gaps in learning especially around plagiarism. As I love to write and publish in both academia and industry, and have done this successfully for more than a decade, I always make time to show students ways of viewing an issue through various media, including high quality journal articles, reference texts, industry reports and surveys, videos and films, and even newspaper and magazine articles. A crash course in Endnote (a bibliographic software program) is usually a must, not only to help students manage their research but to improve the quality of their assignments (and save them time)! These skills are highly transferable to the workplace when, as managers, students are required to submit reports and recommendations to their superiors showing evidence of applied research and competent writing skills.

It is worth mentioning that I have been privileged to have a number of mentors throughout my career that have profoundly influenced who I am, and whose insight and integrity have shaped my teaching approach both inside and outside the classroom. I feel a calling to the profession to “pay it forward” and to develop capable individuals whose ideas are accountable to the highest ethical standards. My commitment to teaching therefore leads me to walk into every class with passion and enthusiasm, to prepare for each class as carefully as I would for a conference keynote address, to gather state-of-the-art materials, and to set instructional and mentoring goals that are achievable and transformative. I love to learn, to do research, and to teach, especially in an interdisciplinary and multicultural setting.

Dr Yvonne McNulty is an associate faculty with the School of Business. An engaging and award-winning lecturer and conference speaker, Yvonne is co-author of the best-selling management book, “Managing Expatriates: A Return on Investment Approach” (Business Expert Press, 2013). Her research has been featured in The New York Times, Economist Intelligence Unit, and on BBC Radio.

Yvonne will be sharing her tips for teaching diverse learners as part of the TLC Seminar Series on 19th August 2014, 5.30-6.30pm. Look out for the registration details on the Associate Portal.
Teaching Excellence Award Recipients

Zainaba Bte Omar
School of Arts and Social Sciences

“Students who challenge themselves despite their hurdles give me the desire to be here. I want to tell them that in the race for excellence, there’s no finishing line; we only need to contend with ourselves. You want it, you’ll get it!”

Tony Halim
School of Business

“Teaching at UniSIM is a humbling experience as our adult learners come from different industries. We learn with and from each other. It has been a privilege to teach at UniSIM.”

Daniel Chan
School of Human Development and Social Services

“Teaching is one of the ways in which I can actually leave my legacy behind. My influence and impact doesn’t just stop with me alone, but it goes beyond me.”

Tam Wvi Huat
School of Science and Technology

“Simplicity and authenticity guide my teaching and learning moments.”

Watch the Video

Hear what the students and Heads of Programmes have to say about the 2014 Teaching Excellence Award recipients at:
http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/teaching/community/communitas/201407/

Scan the above QR code to watch the video.
You probably have heard it from your friends, your loved ones and perhaps it comes from yourself: ‘I am feeling stressed with my work…’, ‘It’s been a stressful day today…’, ‘I feel stressed when I am with….’ ‘This is indeed stressful!’

Stress is felt daily and almost in all situations. It can be intense or it can be just something which you find challenging. An annual Health Promotion Board survey in 2012 found that one in five workers polled reported that they were highly stressed (The Straits Times, 2014).

So, what is stress? Why is it that in some situations you feel highly stressed, while in another situation you view it as a challenge and are able to cope with it effectively? How do we cope with stress?

The level of stress you feel when encountering a situation will depend on how much resources you are able to gather to help you deal with it. If you feel that you have more than enough resources to deal with the situation, then you’re likely to view it as a challenge. If a fair bit of effort is needed to deal with the situation, then moderate stress will be experienced. However, if the resources gathered are not enough to deal with that situation, then you will feel highly stressed (Taylor, 2012). Hence, stress is a very personal thing. You may deem a situation to be stressful but others may just view it as a challenge. It depends very much on how you perceive that situation and how much resources you can gather to help you deal with that situation.

Stress can be harmful to your body. Prolonged and high level of stress can cause psychological distress, leading to changes in the body that may have short- and long-term implications. In the short-term, stress can compromise your immune system causing flu, and psychosomatic symptoms like gastro-intestinal problems, hypertension, neck aches, fatigue, eczema, headaches, hives and constipation. In the long-term, prolonged stress can lead to burnout, a condition marked by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a low sense of efficacy in one’s job (Taylor, 2012). Long-term stress is also correlated to lifestyle...
diseases like cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and stroke, which can be fatal (ibid, 2012). It is not a good thing to allow prolonged stress to affect your way of life. To avoid being overwhelmed by psychological distress and even fatal lifestyle diseases, it is important that our daily stressors be effectively coped. In the face of stress, it is very important that its impact is well managed – what is known as coping.

Coping is defined as thoughts and behaviours that are used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are deemed to be taxing or stressful (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 as cited in Kaiseler, et al., 2014). Coping is not just a one-off action to a particular stressor but rather, it is a continuous set of actions or transactions that takes place over time during which the environment and the individual exert an impact on each other (Taylor, 2012) There are many ways to cope with stress. This article discusses three ways.

Three ways to cope with stress
The first way to effectively cope with stress is to maintain a positive emotional state. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that positive emotional states are associated with better mental, physical health and life satisfaction. (Bastian, et al., 2014; Cohen and Pressman, 2006; Richman, et al., 2005). To maintain a positive emotional state, it is important that we stay optimistic with the situation that we face. People with an optimistic nature tend to cope more effectively with stress and hence, reduce their risk of illnesses (Scheier, Carver, and Bridges, 1994, as cited in Taylor, 2012).

Optimists have a more positive mood and they are more active and persistent in coping efforts. They also tend to seek more social support easily and view these stressful situations positively, unless the situation is deemed as uncontrollable (Scheier, Weintraub, and Carver, 1986). To cope with your stress effectively, one of the important things to do is to stay happy and optimistic about your situation, no matter how stressful it may be. This way, you will feel that your stress will be much manageable.

The second way is to maintain psychological control over the stressful situation. Psychological control is the belief that one can determine one’s own behaviour and influence one’s environment so as to bring about desired outcomes. When you perceive the situation as controllable or believe you can successfully cope with the situation, you can lessen your distress and reduce your psychological responses towards stress (Taylor, 2012). Whenever you encounter a difficult situation, calm down and tell yourself that you will be able to control the situation. At the same time, maintain an optimistic outlook that you will ultimately be able to overcome the difficult situation. This way, you will be able to view the situation as a challenge and think about how you can gather your needed resources to overcome it.

The third way to deal with stress is the coping style you use. Coping style is known as the inclination to deal with a stressful situation using a particular way. There are four ways in which we can choose to cope with our stressors: by avoiding it (avoidant coping); approaching it head-on (approach coping); focusing on the problem (problem-focused coping); or controlling your emotional reactions to the situation (emotion-focused coping).

Coping styles
We can choose to use avoidant coping styles where we avoid or minimise the threatening event facing us; or we can confront the threatening event using the approach coping style. Besides that, we can also choose to do something about the stressful event (using the problem-focused coping style) or try to regulate our emotions that arise because of the stressful event (that is, emotion-focused coping style) (Taylor, 2012).

The style that is used to cope with the stressor will depend on the type of stressors faced and also the duration of the stressor. When faced with long-term threats, people who use the approach coping style may face great anxiety and stress in the short-term. Hence, they will need to cope with this short-term stress first before they can cope with their long-term threats (Smith et al, 2000). For short-term threats, people may be able to cope with the stressor by avoiding it; however if the stressor persists, then avoidance is not an appropriate coping style.

Silver, et al. (2002) found that people use avoidant strategies fared worse psychologically in the long-term than those who use more active coping styles. Studies have also found less psychological and health benefits for people who choose avoidant strategies than those who use approach coping styles (Wolf and Mori, 2009). Hence using an approach coping style in face of a stressor is more beneficial.

Besides choosing to avoid or confront a stressor, we can also attempt to do something constructive about the stressful situation – what is known as problem-focused coping – or we can choose to regulate our emotions in the face of the stressful situation (that is, emotion-focused coping) (Taylor, 2012). Both coping styles are useful and it depends on the situation in which the style is being used (Vitaliano, et al., 1990). When dealing with work-related issues that need to be handled constructively, problem-focused coping should be used as this involves taking direct action against the stressor or seeking help from others. At times, you may need to accept the situation and take it in your stride. That's when the emotion-focused coping style will have to be used (Zakowski, et al., 2001). The coping style that you use depends on the situation you face and how comfortable you are with that situation. However, it is not helpful to avoid the situation using the avoidant coping style. The problem will still persist and your stress may worsen in the long-term. Be optimistic, tell...
yourself that you are control of the situation, regulate your emotions and confront the issue you face. The intense stress that you face in the short-term will definitely be more worthwhile than facing a stress that may worsen in the long term.

This article has discussed three ways in which we can deal with stress. There are many other ways in which we can effectively cope with the stressors that we face. These include seeking social support, using coping interventions like mindfulness training, expressive writing and relaxation training. However, the way we cope with our stressors will depend on how we maintain our psychological state of mind and how we choose to approach these stressors.

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References


“The best teaching plan, text-book and presentation material in the world won’t get students motivated and excited about learning.”

The above quote from one of his lecturer friends became the trigger for Cedric Chew’s contribution to this issue of Communitas.

As instructors, sharing subject knowledge is easy; the challenge is getting our students to successfully apply those theories. Motivating, lighting, and stoking the fire in our students to practise lifelong learning is the hardest act, but also one with the highest pay-offs. I hope you will find the ideas below useful in helping you light your students’ fire for learning and growth. Many of the ideas are based on timeless motivation principles.

Help Students Find Intrinsic Motivation
I try to do this in my classes by sharing short 2-3 minute motivational videos. I also ask my students to share their own stories about people they know who overcame great hardships. Some of the stories may be about students who overcame their struggles because they had a strong sense of purpose. I once shared about the joy of learning by using the example of a 96-year-old Taiwanese man who went back to school. I discovered that one of the key reasons some students work harder than others invariably stems from the fact that they are more intrinsically motivated to grow. Hence, be more creative in your class as you strive to make learning fun, relevant and beneficial. Do your best to rekindle your students’ intrinsic motivation to do their best! This is the most powerful gift you can offer your students.

Be Business-like and Fun!
Good instructors tend to the business of the classroom. They motivate students well and help them set clear stretch goals. They understand a key motivation principle – that people like challenges and growth, and they will work hard if they believe the goals are within their reach. As instructors, let us attend to the business of helping our students set learning goals, and formulate study plans and strategies. We should support our students as we push them to achieve their personal best. It makes sense to attend to the business of tracking your students’ progress, having feedback sessions with them, beaming up samples of good answers and showing them what success looks like. Most students want to succeed. Students will find you caring when you help them figure out what they need to do to achieve their learning goals. These caring acts motivate them to attain their personal best.

A smart instructor will attend to the business of the classroom and concurrently create a fun learning environment. Remember the training courses you attended before? Didn’t you learn better when the trainer was firm and fun at the same time? If your students know that you are light-hearted, even silly at times, they will be less worried about their own performance in class. Most people learn better with less stress and more motivation. If you adopt a fun learning approach, your students’ assignment scores will improve.

Be Enthusiastic and Relevant
One of the best ways to get your students motivated is to share your enthusiasm for teaching and, more importantly, the joy of learning! I vary my teaching activities to make my own strategy subject more interesting and relevant to my students. Concepts like SWOT analysis, core competencies, etc., can be applied at work and in our personal lives too. Knowledge of industry analysis and financial analysis tools can help students make better financial investments and impact their lives. Many instructors will be a lot better off simply by paying attention to the ‘big R’ – Relevance.

For example, if you are teaching an audit course, you can bring the subject to life by sharing stories of people who have committed massive fraud due to simple audit lapses. You can ask your students how they would prevent the lapses. Most students are thinkers and they would be motivated by relevant, thought-provoking questions. Students are motivated to discover the solution themselves. If you were a student today, would you prefer your instructors to possess story-telling skills so that they can present stories and challenges in an engaging manner?

The issue of relevance is important. Each student is different. You need to stay relevant in order to connect with all of them. One of my students is a property agent. After she gave a great presentation in class, I told her that she has high potential to be a performing property agent, bringing value and helping people own or rent good homes due to her persuasive ability. Once she heard that, she would volunteer whenever there were presentation opportunities in class.

Tweak Your Curriculum
Sometimes, motivating your students may just require you to make slight changes to the material you are using so that your activities are more relevant and fun. All of us were students before. Like me, you must have wondered why many of our teachers kept re-using the same old boring curriculum. You can bring different ways of teaching and make learning fun for your students. For example, I beamed up all my students’ learning points...
from an industry talk in one of my lessons. At a glance, everyone saw first-hand the rich variety of views available once they drew lessons from the diversity in the class. This enabled me to get them to reflect and internalise an important learning point. In life, there are many angles to view an issue, a challenge, etc., and there are no model answers. If we think deeply enough about an issue using a good framework or business theory and consult more with others, some of our own reflections can be very insightful and benefit us greatly.

Games can help you motivate and engage your students. Your class can be more fun if you foster a friendly spirit of competition in the classroom. Our brain loves new experiences and challenges. You can set up a game where the team who shared the most number of learning points for the day wins a box of Kit Kats. Each of their simple acts of presenting what they’re learning to the whole class can help your entire class understand and remember important points.

Another motivating strategy is to simply increase the opportunities for your students to share their understanding in class, more than what may be prescribed in the lesson plan. When students can showcase their ideas, they feel more included and valued, and are thus more motivated to learn!

Offer Impactful Feedback
I think no form of motivation can work as well as feedback. It is good to make them in an encouraging manner. When students feel that you’re taking an interest in them, it creates a safe learning environment and motivates them to work harder. Your students will feel good getting hard-earned praises from you - someone they respect and who cares for them as an individual. It is best if you were more specific on the areas for improvements and provide suggestions on how they may improve. Delivering feedback so that students really want to take action to improve is not easy. Feedback works when it’s done with the right dose of praise and encouragement, at the right time, in the right place, and in the right manner.

Go the extra mile
Do more than the average instructor is expected to do. Getting to know your students is more than just memorising their names. Students need to know that their instructor has a genuine interest in them and care about their success. You demonstrate care when you share relevant information related to the subject you are teaching in class. As such, do not just depend on the study guides alone. You could share with your students the most interesting development in the last five years in the subject you teach.

If you are teaching economics, you could pose an interesting opening question to your class, for example, “How was Warren Buffet able to make US$1.9m per hour in the last year?” This will surely pique their interest. You can share with your students summaries of relevant new articles, related videos, ask them questions about the concepts in the article, etc.

Go the extra mile. Deviate from assigned text at times and maybe screen a TEDX video during break time. Good instructors try to get students interested in lifelong learning.

It helps to immerse yourself in your students’ world. Work with them as a team. I once had a student whose wife was fighting death when he was studying in my course. That instance, I learnt that knowing that someone cares is good enough for the student. He told me that it raised his motivation levels to do his best and he scored a B for his subject. His wife recovered. I believe that if you deal with your students’ study or life issues together as a team, you’ll really make a difference to their lives as well as your own.

In summary, motivation is a key factor in the success of students at all stages of their education. As instructors, we play a pivotal role in encouraging that motivation in our students. It is much easier said than done, as all students are motivated differently. It takes a lot of effort to get our students enthusiastic about learning so that they would work hard to pursue their goals.

I hope the above ideas can help you motivate your students to do well. The most obvious sign that you’ve been successful is when your students speak up and ask more questions in class. They will not quit easily and are more prepared for life from our interventions. This inspiring vision is definitely within our reach!

Cedric Chew teaches Business Strategy at UniSIM’s School of Business. He received a Teaching Merit Award in 2012 and a Teaching Excellence award in 2013. In this article, he shares a few teaching tips on how to motivate your students to learn. You can consider adopting some of his suggestions. Cedric can be reached at cedricchew002@unisim.edu.sg
One of the reasons why I chose to write for children is that I found a dearth in locally written children’s books in the English language. That was years ago. Today, there are a number of locally published children’s books. We need to build a legacy of books that are distinctively Singaporean in look and feel.

Why should children read? The most obvious answer is that reading helps in their language acquisition. The hidden benefit is that the more they read, they more they learn – about life and the world around them. Through stories, they also learn emotional intelligence by vicariously experiencing how other people like themselves live their lives, how they handle situations and challenges, and the lessons they learn as they grow and meet these challenges. Children learn from the successes and failures of protagonists in the stories; they learn to figure things out on their own through reading instead of being told all the time. The benefits of reading cannot be quantified but we know, from our experience, how we ourselves benefit from reading both fiction and non-fiction works.

Writing fiction is a challenge; and as an adult writing for children, that’s an even greater challenge because the books that children can relate to are those that do not talk down to children. These books are not that easy to write. Fortunately, that is a skill that can be learnt.

For ideas on what to write for children, observe children at play, when they interact with one another and when they are with the adults. Listen to what they say when they are among themselves. Most importantly, write.

Keep a notebook handy to record your ideas and observations. These form part and parcel of materials to be used later when writing that book. This is what I often say to would-be writers of children’s books – write from the heart, not from what you think will sell in the market. When you write only from a marketing perspective, it becomes contrived and the reader will detect it immediately. But when a book or a story comes from the heart, it will speak directly to the reader. It feels real; it becomes a ‘heart-to-heart’ sharing that is priceless and will always be treasured.

All teachers who teach writing should attempt to write their own story first. It is only when they have gone through the experience of writing a story that they better appreciate how to work with books in class, and to be a better teacher of writing. After having written your first draft, test it out in class with students – either through storytelling or by reading it out aloud. Using the story as a starting point, encourage students to write a short review. For the very young, encourage them to draw a picture that best represents the story. Their questions, after the storytelling or read-aloud session, are the best triggers for a follow-up activity such as writing or illustrating.

Recently, I contributed a story to a collection of short stories for children. My story came from a research I did years ago on the migration of the Hakkas from the north to the south of China. It was about how popiah originated; but I added a little more to it by linking it to spring roll. That was the trigger but the real story is about two sisters and their relationship. These become good triggers to use in a classroom situation. This is not rocket science. If you learn the basics of writing for children, you can write a story for children and use it for many different purposes in class.

Serene Wee is a 2014 Teaching Merit Award recipient with the School of Human Development and Social Services (HDSS). She teaches in ECE351 Writing and Publishing for Young Children with the Early Childhood Education with Management degree programme. Serene was the co-editor of Reading Plus, a children’s magazine for primary school children that’s published in four languages. As an author of children’s stories, Serene’s work is published in 25 magazines, 21 books, as well as in websites.

One of Serene’s short stories is being featured in Near and Dear, which was launched during the Asian Festival of Children’s Content in May 2014. For more information, check out www.bookcouncil.sg.

The first 3,000 copies of Near and Dear is being given out free to readers in Singapore and Perth. If you’d like to be one of the first 1,500 readers in Singapore to get a free copy of the book, contact Mr Rama, Executive Director of the National Book Development Council of Singapore.
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http://www.unisim.edu.sg/mobile/unisim-backpack.html

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http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/resources.html
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SEPTEMBER 13
Faculty Learning Symposium

NOVEMBER 8
Family Day

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<td>Examinations</td>
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