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“Triumph The New Normal”



Career journey

I started my career as a radiographer at age 20 after completing my training and, whilst working as a radiographer, I studied law part time. I enrolled with the University of London and obtained my degree sometime in the mid-eighties. It was tough balancing work, studies and family. But law posed an intellectual challenge and I was determined to complete my studies despite the trials and tribulations I faced along the way. I completed my Certificate of Legal Practice (CLP) in 1986 and started practice in 1988. I practiced for about 3½ years and then joined Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM). I have always had a passion to teach and decided then that this was my calling even though the earnings were very modest. For about 6 years I taught A-Level Law at the Centre for Preparatory Studies, ITM. It was here that I taught the likes of En Adlan and Dr Hariati. The students were government scholars and were brilliant. I remember the results of my 2nd batch of students. Half of them obtained A's whilst the rest scored B's.

Sometime in 1997, I was absorbed into the Law Faculty at the main campus which at that time was headed by En Darbi. I enjoyed working with him. Initially I taught servicing subjects like company law and commercial law as well as subjects like Land Law. I obtained my LL.M from University of Malaya in 2001 and it was then that I was roped in to teach in the Advanced Diploma in Law (ADIL) programme where I taught Civil Procedure and Civil Trial and Advocacy courses, teaming up with Adjunct Prof Rajeswaran. I now teach both parts of the Civil Procedure subjects as well as Law of Evidence at the Masters of Enforcement Law (MEL) programme.

Style of teaching

I must confess that I am old school. It is brick and mortar teaching methods. To me, interaction with the students is the key. I give my students before the start of the course a study guide which I believe is very comprehensive. My lectures will explain and expand on the study guide. I have not used slides and I feel I don't need it to effectively teach. To me it is about the style of delivery. I try to be very energetic and vibrant and where possible I try to rely on anecdotes and examples to connect with the students. In a way, I let my emotions out and speak to the students in an honest way. I guess mastery of the subject matter is also the key. Even though I have taught the subject for many years I still spend a considerable amount of time preparing for each lecture to ensure I don't miss out anything important. I never take students for granted.

To me, the tutorial sessions are very important in the learning process. I make students present cases. I teach them how to frame the issues and address it as they would before a judge. It helps to build their confidence. I also give them a set of questions before the tutorial sessions which are discussed in class.

Reaction to Movement Control Order (MCO)

I was filled with anxiety on how to effectively conduct my teaching. It was particularly challenging to me as I have very basic computer skills and I was stressed and apprehensive having to work in a totally digital environment. I, however, managed to some extent, with the immense support and encouragement of our Dean and her team.

Challenges teaching via Open Distance Learning (ODL)

There are obvious challenges. The fact that you lose the live interaction with students is an immense setback. In a face-to-face session, the demeanor and facial expressions of students give you immediate feedback on whether they are with you. We have lost that. So, under the current environment, it is imperative that the students take total responsibility for their studies. It has imposed serious limitations on the ability of teachers and facilitators to monitor and guide students. The students are alone studying in their kitchen or their bedroom without their colleagues around them. The support system they were accustomed to has become virtual and distant. It is important that they are constantly motivated to face up to the challenges posed by the pandemic. I, on my part, have taken more effort than ever before to ensure the students study and understand the subject matter. I send them the study guide on the particular topic together with the pre-recorded lecture a week before they meet me online for lectures and tutorials. During our online meetings, we discuss the topic, the relevant case law and the questions I set for them on the topic. The meetings are duly recorded and sent to them. So, they have before them sufficient materials and it is for them to go through them and digest them. I also made myself available at all times to entertain their queries and request for explanations through the WhatsApp. Sometimes the communication can turn into a mini lecture. Fortunately, no student of mine has complained of any particular difficulty he/she has faced in his or her studies and they seemed to have shown fairly good understanding of the subject as reflected in their coursework and final assessment. I have huge respect for them and their ability to adapt. I believe they will emerge stronger and more resilient when this pandemic is over.

Message to colleagues

I am in no position to preach to my colleagues, many of whom are eminent academicians and experienced lecturers. For the young lecturers, my message is just this. Your effort to do research and achieve publications and carry out other academic activities is commendable and ought to be encouraged. That will no doubt determine your upward trajectory in terms of promotions and status. Having said that, my view is that, in the process of doing the above, you should not lose track of your core function of a lecturer in teaching and guiding students. The interests of students must always be paramount. Hence, a balance should be struck. As for the students, I have great faith in them that they will come out of these dark times stronger and more resilient.



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