

BE THE BEST TEACHER THAT YOU CAN BE – USE THE ‘WaT’ APPROACH

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Abstract

Researchers and teachers around the world have been developing methods and tools for facilitating learning. Some institutions have even adopted certain methods for their teachers to follow. Often we try to address the problems through new policies and systems or by adopting a particular method. Whatever we do, at the end of the day, success depends on the people who facilitate learning. A method that works for a group of learners may not work for others. Efficacy of a teaching method varies with time too. Hence new teaching tools are developed. The teaching method should depend not only on the learners but also on the teacher. Effective learning is possible only when the adopted method suits both the learners and the teacher best. While many teachers succeed in facilitating effective learning, many do not achieve the best that they could potentially achieve. Studying the approaches adopted by many good teachers and analyzing the feedbacks from the students, the author infers that a good teacher is able to win the learners and she or he continually tweaks the teaching method to ensure that the teaching leads to meaningful learning. Whatever method the teacher adopts, basic approach essentially remains the same. The author calls it ‘**Win and Teach-for-learning**’ or **WaT**. In this approach, the teacher, consciously makes an attempt to win the learners and constantly evaluates whether the teaching is leading to effective learning. The approach is simple and flexible. This paper will elucidate the WaT approach. Various ways of winning the learners will be shared. Teach-for-Learning will be illustrated using the **Learning Triangle**, a concept developed by the author in his earlier work. The paper aims to expound learning in a way, which is easily comprehensible to the teachers with little or no pedagogical training. The author has been successfully using WaT approach in his teaching.

Introduction

Every teacher tries to do the best. But everyone does not always succeed in facilitating the best learning. Had we identified the best teaching approach, all of us could follow that and be the outstanding teachers. Unfortunately, there is no such best teaching method. Most of the teachers also like to teach the learners who possess all the outstanding learning attributes. Whether we like or not, many learners do not possess the qualities of good learners. If everyone wants to teach the so called best learners, then who will teach the rest? In fact, we need the best teachers to teach the weakest learners. When a teacher teaches a group of learners, he or she must accept the fact that he or she is the best teacher the whole world could assign to the learners. Also, the learners the teacher is assigned to teach are the best learners the teacher could have. The teaching method the teacher employs has to be then the best teaching method that the teacher could adopt.

Many outstanding teachers did not go through formal pedagogical training. On the other hand many with formal trainings are unable to deliver what is expected from good teachers. It is undeniable that pedagogical trainings greatly help a teacher to perform better. But the main prerequisite for a good teacher is the ability to create a learning condition whereby the learners will be willing and able to learn. Many teachers take the presence of good learning condition by default. Ideally, that is what it should be; unfortunately, it is often missing. Hence it is important that we make deliberate attempt to create a good learning condition. Creating a rich learning condition is what the WaT approach is all about.

Teaching and Learning

There are many words which are widely used and seem to be understood by even a lay person, but difficult to define. Difficulty arises mainly from the differences in views. *Education, teaching, and learning* are some such words. One may argue that definitions do not really matter! Definition helps us to get our mission right. Definitions are similar to the specifications of products. Clearly stated specifications help us design and produce high quality products.

Teaching

Socrates' idea of teaching does not base on direct transfer of information. Instead it facilitates students to see the truth by himself or herself through questions (Palmer, 2001). The Indian philosopher, Vivekananda(1962) said,

No one is ever really taught by another. We learn ourselves. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things. Then things will be made clearer to us by our own power of perception and thought, and we shall realize them in ourselves.

When we use the word 'teaching' it may mean to be from the teacher to the students: unidirectional. It may also appear to be a top-down approach. Some perceive teaching as transferring knowledge. Perhaps in the past, transferring knowledge was an important aspect of teaching. Today, we do not need a teacher for mere transfer of knowledge. IT tools can do this job more efficiently. Then why do we need teachers? How should we view teaching in today's world?

We need teachers to facilitate creation of a rich learning condition and start the learning fire. Teaching should be seen as a sharing experience with the learners. Experience can be direct or indirect. Direct experiences are the ones experienced first-hand by the teacher, while indirect experiences are the ones shared by others. Indirect experiences may be

the ones shared by various writers through books or journals or the ones shared by other people, may be by the teacher of the teacher. Inventors and discoverers share their experiences through research articles or other works. Sharing direct experience is not too difficult and it is also very effective. But most of the time we share indirect experiences. In order to make such sharing effective, the teacher needs to acquire and internalize the indirect experience in such a way that when shared with the learners, they will feel it to be the direct experience of the teacher.

Sometimes, teachers perceive their roles to be more of assessors than of learning facilitators. Some teachers tend to become too judgmental right from the beginning and play greater roles as assessors. While a teacher will still have to play the role of the assessor, he or she has to first facilitate learning. When we share experience, we are accepted more easily. We are able to teach in a subtle way. Effective teaching should lead to total learning. It is not only meant for the learner but also for the teacher. A teacher should consider every teaching activity as a learning experience and continually adapt the teaching approach to enable the most effective learning.

Often the teaching approach is greatly influenced by the approach adopted by the teacher's teacher. Unknowingly, we disregard the changes in the learners and their learning needs. While all of us derive very valuable experience from our teachers, we need to adapt our teaching approach to suit our learners.

A good teacher should be able to raise questions in the minds of the learners and help them find the answers by themselves. The questions can be grouped under **what**, **how** and **why**. Often we have too much emphasis on **what** and **how** questions. Helping learners to explain **why**, not only help them learn better but also enhances their learning motivation.

Learning

Learning is explained by various theories. While *behaviourism* explains what learning is, *constructivism* explains how the learners learn. The paper does not aim to dwell on the theories of learning. Though it is very difficult to get a universally accepted definition of *learning*, the author prefers to use the following definition: *learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour potential brought about by practice or experience* (Morgan, 2002). The definition is based on what was suggested by Gregory A. Kimble in 1961. The change in behaviour is caused by intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, verbal information, motor skills, and attitude. Successful learning not only achieves the immediate learning objectives but also develops learning skills and learning interest. One of the important aspects of desired outcome of any learning is the development of learning ability and positive attitude.

Mere acquisition of knowledge does not lead to learning. It only means knowing some facts, terms, theories, etc. In order to translate knowledge into useful learning, the learner must be able to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the acquired knowledge (Bloom et al. 1956) and eventually be able to create new knowledge. This will lead to a change in behaviour potential. Unfortunately, the approaches taken to facilitate learning may sometimes lead to mere acquisition of knowledge, which may not result into any real change in behaviour potential.

Often desired learning outcome is measured mainly in terms of knowledge and skills. While knowledge and skills are important aspects of learning, it should ultimately lead to an attitude that enables the learner to make positive contribution. Attitude can be considered to be the direction of mind. If our mind is considered to be a vector, then knowledge and skills constitute its magnitude. Attitude gives the direction to the mind-vector. Two persons may acquire the knowledge and skills of using gun. One with the undesired attitude will use the gun to shoot an innocent person. While the one with the desired attitude will use the gun to

shoot the one who shoots the innocent people. Unlike knowledge and skills, attitude cannot be taught. Attitude has to be demonstrated through actions by the system and the people facilitating learning. Attitude is to be experienced by the learner.

Learning is like a journey, which has a destination and a course. A successful journey is one, which leads a person to the destination through a course, which will encourage him or her to undertake a similar journey again. A wrong course will not only cause a person to fail to reach the destination but also discourage the person from undertaking similar journeys in the future. Similarly, a learning journey should lead to desired learning outcome. The course of the learning journey should also develop learner's interest in learning. Hence it is of utmost importance to adopt the appropriate approach for facilitating learning. There is no one-size-fits-all method for teaching. Also, it is not right to claim any method to be the best one. In order to adopt the best approach, one has to have good comprehension of the issues related to learning.

The WaT Approach

The **Win and Teach-for-learning (WaT)** approach is not another method of teaching. It neither prescribes a set of steps for a teacher to follow nor dwell only on the traits of a good teacher. WaT works on the premise that every teacher has the potential to become an outstanding teacher. It empowers the teacher to use any established or new teaching tools to achieve the learning objectives. It encourages a teacher to work on qualities that can be nurtured. It constantly reminds the teacher about the mission and continually evaluates the efficacy of the adopted method, which enables the teacher to tweak the teaching approach as and when it is required.

WaT approach relies on continuous improvement. It involves three phases in a cycle: Planning, Execution and Evaluation (Fig.1). WaT does not involve only one lesson. WaT

planning and execution is to involve all the learning activities, including activities outside the classroom.

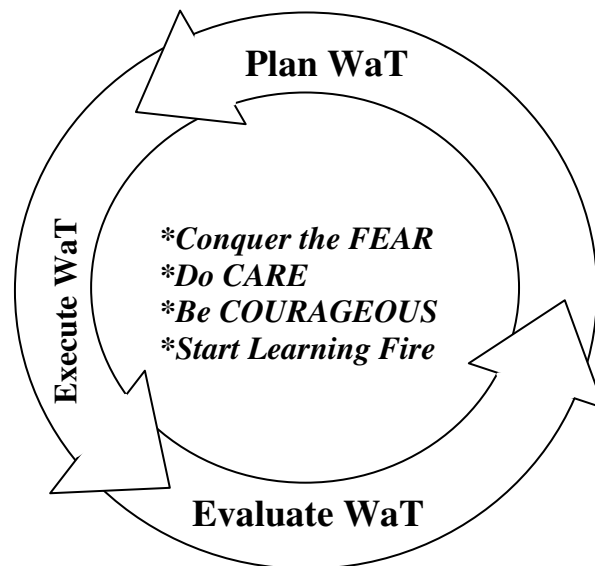


Figure. 1. WaT Cycle

Plan WaT

This is the pre-delivery phase. Prior to delivery, we need to plan the activities to facilitate learning. The main considerations for planning are the desired learning outcome, motivation and abilities of the learners and the available resources. Desired learning outcome should be based on the needs for holistic development of the learner, which should include not only the domain related outcome but also general attitude and ability of the learner. Resources include physical resources, human resources and learning delivery tools. Previous experience of teaching the similar mix of learners would be very useful. WaT planning should also consider possible pitfalls during delivery. The teacher must also be comfortable with the selected tools for delivery.

The output of the planning process is a Learning Delivery Plan. Learning Delivery Plan should include a lesson plan, assessment plan, classroom management strategy, teaching materials, individual and group activities, supervised and unsupervised learning activities, visits to facilities within or outside the learning institution and any other useful activities. It should also include a plan for encouraging learners to join some identified activities, which are already available and are considered to be able to contribute towards achieving the desired learning outcome. While some of the activities may be targeted towards mainly winning the learners, others should facilitate effective learning. In fact, there should be many activities which will help to win the learners while facilitating effective learning. A very important aspect of facilitating effective learning is to start the learning fire. The Learning Triangle approach (Chanda, 2007) can help to achieve this. The section on Learning Triangle describes this approach.

An important aspect of Learning Delivery Plan is the effective management of learning content. Appropriate delivery of learning content will enhance both learning ability and learning motivation of the learners. In formal teaching, it is mainly through learning content that a teacher communicates with the learners. While delivering the learning content, the teacher has to consider both difficulty level and the importance of the learning content based on desired learning outcome. Use of the *content management matrix* (Chanda, 2005) may help in effective management of learning content.

Learning conditions vary with learning ability and learning motivation. The quantity and the difficulty level of learning content should depend on the learning condition. Hence the learning content has to be the response to the prevailing learning condition.

If learning ability, learning motivation, and learning content are measured in the scale of 'low-medium-high', then the relationship between ability, motivation, and learning content may be expressed by the learning condition table (Table 1).

Table 1. Learning condition table

Learning Condition	Learning Ability	Learning Motivation	Learning Content(Response)	
			Quantity	Level of Difficulty
1	Low	Low	Low	Low
2	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
3	Medium	Low	Low	Low, Medium
4	Low	High	High	Low
5	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low, Medium
6	High	Low	Low	Low, Medium, High
7	Medium	High	High	Low, Medium
8	High	Medium	Medium	Low, Medium, High
9	High	High	High	Low, Medium, High

Combination of learning ability and learning motivation make up a learning condition. Learning content is the response to a given learning condition. Conditions one, two, and three of the above table may be referred to as poor learning conditions. Conditions four, five, and six can be considered as medium learning conditions. Conditions seven, eight, and nine create rich learning environment. As the ability and motivation of learners change, learning content must be adjusted.

Execute WaT

WaT is to be delivered as per Learning Delivery Plan. While delivering, a teacher needs to work towards winning the learners and facilitate effective learning. This also entails gathering feedback for immediate and future improvement. Every learner or a group of learners is unique. Every learning activity is different from the other similar activities. Hence in spite of all the planning, things may not work as desired. What worked well in the past

may not repeat the same way in the future. The teacher should make conscious attempt to find whether the learners have been won and learning is taking place. Often this is achieved through informal feedbacks, which may include spontaneity of participation of learners in the learning activities, compliments and complaints from the learners, performance in the assessments etc. If necessary, even a formal feedback may be collected. Every feedback must be taken positively and seen as an opportunity to improve. Greater importance is to be given to the so called negative feedbacks. Instead of justifying our approach, we need to make an attempt to identify the real issues. Accordingly, we need to make necessary changes to the WaT plan and execution.

Evaluate WaT

After we are done with the delivery, many of us do not evaluate our teaching. It is very important that we evaluate our teaching after every teaching event. The third phase of the WaT approach is to evaluate after each execution. Evaluation is mainly a reflection of the activities during the execution. It helps us revisit our teaching activity and identify the areas of improvements. As far as possible, such evaluation should be done immediately after the execution. Outcome of the evaluation should include identification of the areas of strengths and weaknesses along with the measures to be taken for future WaT planning.

Win the Learners

In any relationship, it is very important to win the other party. This is the first step to success in any relationship, be it parent-child, superior-subordinate, teacher-student. Any success we get without winning is apparent and not sustainable. A sustainable success comes from mutual win.

A teacher may be assigned to teach a learner or a group of learners but the learners may not accept the teacher as someone they would like to learn from. The first step for

effective teaching is to win the learners and get their acceptance as a teacher who the learners would want to learn from. We also need to accept the learners as who they are, not as what ideally they should be. These are essential prerequisites in any successful teaching for learning.

Instead of winning, our teaching approaches sometimes cause us to lose the learners. It is of primordial importance that we do not lose the learners. In order not to lose our learners, we must conquer our FEAR(**F**ear, **E**go, **A**nger, **R**eaction).

Everyone of us has fear, ego and anger. These are qualities of every human being and to certain extent, these are required. But if we are not able to manage our fear, ego and anger, we are likely to react in a way which may damage the relationship and cause us to lose our child, friend, colleague, student etc.

While fear is mainly caused by our concerns, it may act as an inhibitor in resolving issues. According to Freud, ego is the psychic mechanism that controls all thinking and reasoning activities. However, a personality consisting ego and id only is completely selfish and will create barrier in the relationship (Morris & Maisto, 2006). Anger is an expression of dissatisfactions, which is often perceived with negativity. If we are unable to manage our fear, ego and anger we may react inappropriately to the behaviors of our learners, which may cause us to lose the learners. If we are able to manage our fear, ego and anger, instead of reacting, we would reflect and respond appropriately. Hence we need to conquer our FEAR, which implies that we manage our fear, ego and anger to turn our reaction into reflection and positive response. This will help us diminish the possibility of losing our learners.

After taking measures to prevent losing the learners, we need to take the steps to win them and it is done through CARE (**C**are, **A**dapt, **R**elate, **E**njoy). It is natural that a teacher cares about the learners, but sometimes our actions may not demonstrate that. It is important that we care and also demonstrate that we care. Every learning condition is unique. We need

to take deliberate steps to adapt to the prevailing learning condition. Teacher and learners may have many differences, which include, age, level of education, culture etc. Teacher has to take initiative to close the gaps and relate with the learners so that learners feel comfortable with the teacher. Finally, the teacher must enjoy teaching. There may be many reasons to feel otherwise, but there are always reasons to enjoy teaching. If a teacher is unable to find good reasons to enjoy teaching, he or she will not be able to give the best.

Teach-for-learning

It is obvious that we teach for learning. But do our teachings always lead to effective learning? A good way to ensure that our teaching really translates into effective learning is to constantly ask this question to ourselves. In order to facilitate teach-for-learning, one must be COURAGEOUS. It is a mnemonic for: have *Courage*, be *Original*, *Understand* the content and the learners, *Reward* the learners, be *Approachable*, *Go* extra-miles, *Evaluate* your teaching, Learn from *Others*, Learn from the *Universe*, and *Simplify* the concepts.

Have Courage

When tasked to teach, a teacher tends to follow the teaching approach used by his or her teacher, who taught the same subject. We tend to refrain from trying something very different. Also, teachers may be overly concerned about the performance of the learners in the examinations etc. While, these are natural considerations, we should not be afraid to try something different, which may lead to a better learning. Teacher should also have the courage to acknowledge failure, when teaching does not lead to effective learning. This will help the teacher make necessary changes for improvement, which will eventually lead to success.

Be Original

While we should learn from successful teachers, we should not try to emulate another person. Every teacher is different. This brings variety, which enriches the learning experience of the learners. We should remain original and build upon our learning experiences to become outstanding teacher in our own right.

Understand the content and the learners

For a teacher, nothing is more important than a good command of the domain knowledge. Every attempt must be made to reinforce this. Knowing a subject is not enough for a teacher. Teacher's command of the subject should be similar to that of a sculptor who can shape clay into desired forms. To a good teacher, knowledge is like clay. Along with the good understanding of the content, a good teacher must also have good understanding of the learners, especially about their ability and motivation.

Reward the learners

Our teaching approach should also enrich learning condition. A rich learning condition is a result of high learning motivation and learning ability of the learners. A teacher should avail every opportunity to reward a learner when the learner deserves it. Reward helps to motivate learner to do better. It also enhances learner's self-esteem, which in turn improves learning ability of the learners.

Be Approachable

Learners should feel comfortable to approach the teacher, whenever they need. This gives the opportunity to the teacher to make up for any deficiency that may remain during the formal delivery of the content. An approachable teacher also gets the opportunity to gather informal feedback and suggestions for improvement of teaching.

Go extra-miles

Generally, there are scheduled meetings for the teaching and learning activities. A teacher cannot confine her or his commitment to the scheduled meetings only. In order to facilitate effective learning, we need to always go extra-miles. We know that there are many teachers who often go many extra-miles to help their learners. Going extra-miles is not just spending extra time. It also means the additional initiatives the teacher may need to take to benefit the learners. Learners may need help in the areas which may not be directly related to the domain knowledge, but it may indirectly influence their learning. A teacher needs to identify such needs and act accordingly.

Evaluate your teaching

Every teaching episode is a learning opportunity for the teacher. However, this learning is possible if we evaluate our teaching ourselves and take the learning points. While every teacher is conscious about her or his teaching approach, often we do not critically evaluate our own performance. Even a simple evaluation, may be a reflection after every teaching episode, will help teachers improve teaching. We can do better only when we know what we did not do well.

Learn from Others

We learn while we teach, through our successes and failures. This is true for all of us. Hence through sharing our successes and failures with others can multiply our learning experience. Findings of many researchers and teachers help us learn about the issues concerning learning. Many tools developed by others may help to deliver teaching better. Learning from others does not confine to only the teachers and other experts, it practically includes anyone and everyone. We can learn from our colleagues, students, friends, children etc.

Learn from the Universe

Here the universe implies the nature. All our learning is derived from the nature. Our knowledge is based on the happenings around us, which is governed by the laws of the nature. Some of us discover these laws using our commonsense and formulate them into theories, methods etc. These theories are based on observable facts. As the universe evolves, we are able to observe new things and may need to change the theories. In his famous work “A Brief History of Time” Stephen Hawking(1998) has said,

Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is only a hypothesis: you can never prove it. No matter how many times the results of experiments agree with some theory, you can never be sure that the next time the result will not contradict the theory. On the other hand you can disprove a theory by finding even a single observation that disagrees with the predictions of the theory.

Contents of teaching include theories and their applications, methods etc. We know that many theories have been proven wrong or needed to be refined. Many new methods have been introduced over the years. New knowledge is continually created. While we should still continue to teach what we know thus far, it is very important that we help learners experience the knowledge on their own from the nature. Teachers can learn from the nature and derive useful analogies to explain various concepts. Understanding of human body and mind can help us explain many concepts in both physical and social sciences. As an engineer, the author derives many analogies from the creations of the nature e.g. human body and mind, trees, water, birds, fish etc. These are very powerful tools to explain various concepts of science. Such analogies also help to develop interest of the learners and take the learning to higher level whereby learners are able to create new knowledge. It helps learners discover the ultimate teacher ‘the mother nature’.

Simplify the concepts.

The author regularly conducts surveys to gather feedbacks for improvement of teaching. In all the surveys, learners have identified *approachability*, and *ability to simplify concepts* as the two most desired qualities of a good teacher.

We all try our best to explain the concepts in the simplest possible way. But unfortunately, such attempts may not always yield expected results. While planning delivery of lessons, we need to constantly change our shoes. When we are in the shoes of the learners, we think differently and we are able to envisage whether the learners would be able to comprehend. A good teacher will take the learners from known to unknown. In order to simplify concepts, we need to be aware of the learning ability of the learners. Analogies and metaphors are very powerful tools in simplifying concepts. Sometimes, we may need to provide a quick recap of knowledge, which the learners supposed to have acquired earlier.

Learning Triangle Approach

For meaningful learning to take place, it is imperative to start the learning fire. It is the fire which brings about relatively permanent change in behavior potential of the learner. Fire will start only when the learning content is commensurate with the learning ability and the learning motivation. Without the fire, desired learning outcome cannot be attained and the result will be similar to a mixture of some fuel and oxygen in presence of inadequate heat.

The concept of Learning Triangle is based on the concept of Fire Triangle (Fig.2). Fire Triangle explains the components necessary for fire to occur. For a fire to start and continue burning, it needs three ingredients: oxygen, fuel, and heat. These three ingredients represent three sides of a triangle. Just bringing the three ingredients together will not start fire. Fire will start only when an appropriate mixture of fuel and oxygen is subjected to required heat.

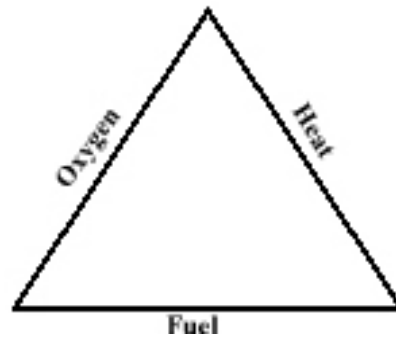


Figure. 2. Fire Triangle.

It is also important to understand fuel, which is basically a combustible material. It is generally composed of carbon and hydrogen and can be in different forms: flammable gases, flammable liquids, and flammable solids. Flammable gases are the ones, which burn readily. Solids or liquids actually do not burn. Liquids need to be vaporized to burn. When a solid, such as wood is subjected to heat for prolonged period, it will decompose and produce carbon products. These carbon products will then combine with oxygen and eventually ignite.

For learning to take place, we need to bring three important learning ingredients, namely *learning ability*, *learning content*, and *learning motivation* together. These three ingredients represent the three sides of a triangle. This triangle is called the *Learning Triangle* (Fig.3).

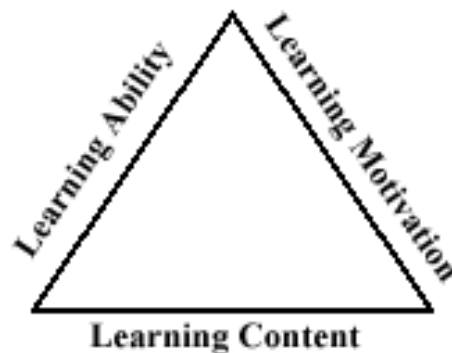


Figure. 3. Learning Triangle.

When the three ingredients are brought together in appropriate proportion, the learning fire will start. The learning facilitator is to ensure that the three ingredients are present in appropriate proportion. In order to do this, the facilitator needs to first understand the three ingredients well and then assess the presence of the ingredients in the given learning condition.

Fire can never be started, when we have a match stick to provide heat and charcoal as fuel. When heat is provided by a match stick, we need to have easily flammable fuel to start the fire. Once the fire is started and is sustained for some time, the heat generated from the fire will be able to burn even charcoal. Similarly, we will not be able to start the learning fire if we deliver difficult learning content to learners with low learning motivation and ability. In fact, it may even diminish learner's motivation. To start the learning fire, we need to provide interesting and easy-to-understand learning content first.

Conclusion

Through this paper, the author attempted to share with the readers what he learnt from his failures and successes over many years of active teaching. The author has deliberately avoided a prescriptive check list approach in describing the WaT. Based on the concepts shared in this paper, an interested teacher can develop his or her own tools for planning, execution and evaluation of the WaT. This will be more effective, as it will suit the individuals most.

For a change, the author summarizes the main issues affecting learning in a poem. The poem is dedicated to the teaching fraternity.

The WaT

Learners have changed over the years;

We need to shift our teaching gears.

Many do not understand what we explain;

We just need to make things simple and plain.

Learners do not like if there is no fun;

But we have to always ensure that they learn.

We are here to teach the Generation Y;

We should never give up but try.

While we need to conquer our FEAR;

We should never forget to CARE.

Success will always come to us;

If we remain COURAGEOUS.

When we share our failure and success;

Our pain is bound to become less.

You have done your best and deserve a pat;

Next time, you may like to try the WaT.

Finally, the author would like to share the following thought, which he found to have positive impact when he shares with his learners:

'Yesterday' is the reality; 'today' is the opportunity; 'tomorrow' is just a possibility.

Learn from the reality; grab the opportunity to turn a possibility into the best reality.

Acknowledgement

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