



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

TEACHING EXPERIENCES IN CHONGQING, CHINA
AND BEYOND

Suresh Nanwani



Testimonial

by Dr. Marie Huxtable

“Learning is more than acquiring knowledge; it is an enriching experience that feeds the mind.” Professor Suresh Nanwani gives this phrase a rich meaning in this book about his educational journey teaching in the Southwest University of Political Science and Law, China. Whether you are looking for practical or theoretical ideas to improve your educational practice, this book offers a lot of food for thought.

As Suresh shares some of his physical, cultural, and emotional experiences, as well as his academic, intellectual, and scholarly journey, he brings to life his own humanity and that of his students and colleagues. With the use of images and words, he communicates his embodied meaning of integrity, professionalism, and spirituality; values that give meaning and purpose to his life as a researcher; and “the bond created in teaching to students in a foreign land, where barriers and impediments in language and culture are overcome in the pursuit of enhancing our values in life through living educational theory.”

His book provides rewarding suggestions and interesting reflections in establishing meaningful relationships with his students and colleagues in his journey. Suresh’s passion for improving his teaching and learning shines through the story of his exploration of the “implications of asking, researching, and answering questions such as ‘How do I improve what I am doing in living the values of human flourishing as fully as possible?’”

Marie Huxtable, PhD, Med (Ed Psych)

Visiting Research Fellow in University of Cumbria, United Kingdom

Bath, United Kingdom

January 2022

Testimonial

by Dr. Dolores M. Torres

I am truly blessed and grateful at having known Dr. Suresh Nanwani when first I sat as one of his dissertation panel members in 2019 at SAIDI Graduate School of Organization Development. His passion for Self-Awareness and Appreciative Inquiry/Appreciative Living served as my initial attraction to his writings and later his personhood. As a loving and caring son, his love and devotion for his mother are also very admirable for him. Also, valuing and appreciating everyone and everything around him, whether past or present, served as guiding lights in his life journey and makes him a fully integrated person. With his values and appreciation of fellow beings, we continue to keep in touch notwithstanding the pandemic.

I express deeply my appreciation of his passion and special and creative skills in writing. When he was writing his book *Organization and Education Development: Reflecting and Transforming in a Self-Discovery Journey*, I was constantly sending him words of encouragement. So, it does not surprise me that he is publishing another book, this time titled *Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond*.

This book vividly accounts Dr. Nanwani's teaching assignment in Chongqing, China, and how his students started learning from his teaching by first discovering themselves and becoming aware of their own strengths and weaknesses or mistakes that they have experienced, and recognizing that these can be their stepping stones in reaching their dreams. I consider the human flourishing gained by the students very important, as significant learnings and insights above all else.

During his teaching assignment, Dr. Nanwani did not use the traditional way of teaching. He beautifully shares his teaching style in a way that even the students can experience self-discovery and awareness and draw learnings and insights afterward. His introduction of continuously discovering oneself through his MICAI Intersection Model is a wonderful way to learn about oneself in relation to human society. This was affirmed and written by many of his students in postcards and in continuously communicating how their lives were changed because of his teaching.

I admire how Dr. Nanwani has personally documented his international teaching experience in China. The many photos, letters, and postcards he kept until the

opportune time to write and inspire readers have been captured well in the book. The book provides active engagement with its readers and is very commendable.

Most important, while reading the book, I felt like I was undergoing a self-reflection exercise as a student, a mentor, and a teacher. And, if I am given another opportunity to teach again the many women in Vietnam during my intermittent engagement from 1992 to 2005, I would love to follow the path that Suresh experienced in China so I can make my own discoveries, including making improvements in my teaching for a better impact on the students and for human flourishing.

Congratulations, Dr. Suresh Nanwani!

Dr. Dolores M. Torres

*Dean, Department of Business and Management,
CARD MRI Development Institute and Vice Chairman and Management
Senior Adviser at CARD Bank, Inc., Philippines
San Pablo City, Philippines
January 2022*

Endorsements

Good teachers inform their students; master teachers transform their students. They produce the love of learning even under the most trying circumstances. They change the world by learning to change the world. This book opens the path to mastery and meaning.

Prof. Robert E. Quinn

*University of Michigan, USA
Center for Positive Organizations*

Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond offers an original and inviting perspective on one person's reflection on their preparation, approach, and experience of teaching a group of students, with limited English, over one month at Southwest University of Political Science and Law (SWUPL) in Chongqing. For experienced university teachers, Suresh Nanwani's reflections are a gentle reminder that teaching and learning is a mutual relational experience and that the values and engagement we bring to that experience will be as important as the explicit content. Nanwani's multidisciplinary theoretical approach and incorporation of eastern values and thoughts provide a framework that encourages students and teachers to flourish holistically.

Nanwani's willingness to reflect on his and the students' experience is both open and deeply personal. And he is to be admired for his commitment to his students and the role of the teacher. Despite the professional experience and knowledge he brings to the classroom, he does not presume that only the students are there to learn.

Human Connections is a book that has its roots in experience and scholarly foundations, but it conveys this in a manner that is fresh and creative through the use of text, pictures, and student writing. As one who has taught some and spoken with many Chinese students in China (including SWUPL), this book had a special resonance as I recognized the eagerness to learn and to engage, as well as the anxiety of learning in a different language. However, one doesn't need

this experience to value and enjoy Suresh Nanwani's *Human Connections* or to recognize the value we all gain by crossing cultural and linguistic borders.

Lesley Hitchens

Professor of Law, FAAL GAICD

Present Acting Provost and Senior Vice-President,

University of Technology, Sydney

Former Dean, University of Technology Sydney, Faculty of Law

(February 2013–October 2021)

Suresh Nanwani has written a compelling account of his continuous journey of learning and educating others in *Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond*. His experience is guided by western and eastern values and a conceptual frame of appreciation and learning through action. It inspires us to reflect on our own guiding values and thoughts as we experience our own journey of learning and teaching. Thank you, Suresh, for connecting to us in a meaningful and growthful way.

Prof. Thomas Cummings

Professor of Management and Organization

University of Southern California (USC) Marshall School of Business

USA

Every year tens of thousands go abroad to teach and mentor students, resulting in closer contact and understanding between individuals, institutions, and nations. The benefits to all participants are individual and collective. Professor Nanwani's teaching assignment in Chongqing, China, provided both: He learned about the cultural values Chinese students use in study while also feeling firsthand the reverence shown to teachers. The experience also taught him about the history, geography, food, and people of the region, while the students gained insight into this foreigner's perspective on international law.

While Dr. Nanwani's specialties are related to teaching international law and global governance, he embarked on this experience with personal reasons to gain insights intended to make him a better teacher and humanist. Rightly so, teaching abroad is a wonderful way to learn about one's self, by challenging one to face entirely new experiences with only the aid of the local community. The book's narrative relates to experiences given and received that makes the whole teaching experience worthwhile. Suresh's use of photos, postcards, and matrix of reactions are interesting devices to document experiences.

The time spent in a foreign land provides many opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to cross-cultural understanding: something all too lacking in this age of critical social media perspectives.

The book is a very good read. It tells of the rewards offered to those who plan to undertake or have already completed such journeys. Each travel abroad allows comparisons and contrasts to activities both accomplished and for further learning,

which makes each experience a memorable treasure. I hope readers will feel the same, and I encourage them to try their hand at such an adventure during their lives.

Dr. William A. Loxley

Social Science Author on knowledge and development

Author of Changing the World through Personal Style and Social Networking (2014) and The Discovery of Knowledge Hotspots Round the World (2018)

Dr. Nanwani's book, made up of captivating images, personal insights, and human interactions, is a compelling read for all interested in education and understanding of Appreciative Living (AL). He uses AL to explore our conscious and unconscious mindsets to create better self-awareness, and I highly commend him on his quest to keep learning alive by sharing lessons on human flourishing with his audience.

The narratives from his teaching assignment provide useful examples of how we all can learn to improve ourselves as educators by opening our minds and hearts to share insights with our fellow humans. His story helps us to shift our conventional thinking to more authentic behavior that brings out the best in teachers, students, and community members.

Jacqueline Kelm

Author and Founder of Appreciative Living (2005)

Suresh Nanwani's story about his journey of teaching in Southwest University of Political Science and Law in China offers many practical and profound insights. To any educator who is about to experience teaching in a new or foreign cultural setting, Nanwani's story bears many useful questions to ask and things to notice. For teachers who value student-centered learning environments, this story vividly demonstrates what it looks and feels like to truly walk that talk, to be in search of helping others to learn.

What I appreciate most is Suresh's constant pursuit of what is giving life to his experiences. He remarkably embodies this question through his self-reflections, journaling, student interactions, and reasoning. Ultimately, he models going beyond teaching-to, educating-about, or doing a great course-for and lives instead in a state of sincere inquiry: What matters most right now? What is life giving in this experience, for me and for others?

Through his mentation, emotions, physicality, and aesthetic senses, Suresh fully embodies inquiry as if life – not merely educating – is a wonder to behold. He leaves us with an important proposition that the work is not just learning about the new/other culture but also to use the experience to learn more about ourselves.

Ronald Fry, PhD

*Professor of Organizational Behavior
Case Western Reserve University, USA*

and

Stiller Endowed Chair and Visiting Professor

David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College, USA

William Butler Yeats reportedly once said, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” A good educator, regardless of whether they are teaching children, adolescents, or adults, should therefore be someone who knows how to kindle such fire so that it may burn brightly for as long as the student lives. Teaching is more than a profession – it is a vocation to inspire the next generation. Few professors have demonstrated this better than Suresh Nanwani did in this book.

Building on his extensive background in practice as well as his scholarly skills, Suresh Nanwani is a walking and talking inspirational model. Moreover, and perhaps more important, his book is a clear expression not only of his love for teaching but also for meeting new people and exploring different environments (in terms of architecture, nature, and even food), which does not only allow students to grow intellectually and spiritually but also professors.

Freya Baetens

Professor of Public International Law, Faculty of Law, Oslo University

Teaching young adults in a university can be a daunting experience, even for the most experienced of teachers. This can especially be the case when a generational divide exists between the teacher and the student. Adding to that a mix of cultural differences and teaching in a foreign land as a guest makes successful university teaching one of the most challenging of all educational experiences. These are the challenges that Suresh Nanwani faced when he traveled to China in 2019 to teach at Southwest University of Political Science and Law (SWUPL) in Chongqing, China.

His teaching journey is recounted in these pages that reveal personal insights into Suresh and the teaching experience for both teacher and student. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a remarkable pivot by universities and colleges around the world to online teaching. The successful use of IT to make that transition has been stunning. Many ask whether learning remotely over video will eventually dominate higher education.

While online education is probably here to stay, what Suresh Nanwani’s personal classroom experience demonstrates is the enormous value of face-to-face learning and the rich educational outcomes and rewards for all engaged in that enterprise. An intensive in-person course with a dedicated, inspired, and gifted foreign instructor can be a life-changing experience for a student. These educational outcomes need to be cherished, nurtured, and not forgotten when the pandemic is behind us.

Prof. Donald R. Rothwell, FAAL

*Professor of International Law (2006–), and Deputy Dean,
ANU College of Law, Australian National University (2014–2017)*

In his quest to answer a fundamental appreciative question, “What matters most?” Dr. Suresh Nanwani takes us all on a journey of discovery and learning that lifts the spirit. His story – *Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China*

and Beyond – reminds us in these times of disruption and disconnection, where phrases like “social distancing” have become the norm – that what matters most is social connection. As he reflects, perhaps more so than ever, today “connectivity has taken on a new dimension” and remains core to creating a flourishing life.

Through his simple yet profound chronicling of his co-learning journey with his students, he reminds us that creating connectivity with others can be a simple act yet one with echoes that reverberate potentially across lifetimes.

As an educator myself, I recommend his story as a reminder that we often learn as much from our students as they do from us. As an appreciative Organization Development scholar and practitioner, I recommend his story as an illustration of how concepts like flow, creativity, Organization Development, Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Living, and ikigai look in practice. And as a co-traveler in this unique time and space we are all experiencing, I recommend his story as a testament to the generativity that is created when we dare to ask, “*What matters most?*”

Lindsey Godwin

*Robert P. Stiller Endowed Chair & Professor of Management
Academic Director – David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry
Robert. P. Stiller School of Business, Champlain College,
Vermont, USA*

With this message in a pre-pandemic bottle, Professor Suresh Nanwani takes us back to what now seems like another age. An experienced university teacher, Professor Nanwani presents us with a journey into a teaching experience in a university culture previously unknown to him – one where unfamiliarity was mutual, where teachers and students had the challenges and delights of using the classroom as a laboratory to learn each other’s language, and where the professor taught the students about international law and they taught him about Chinese life.

The impressions, challenges, and pleasures of spending a month in an entirely new place are all vividly recounted. Interwoven in this rich text are the strategies and disciplines used by its author to face the challenges, refine his pedagogic practices, and locate himself in a new academic community.

Perhaps it is only now that we can see that, pre-pandemic, we lived in a modern age of exploration. We, who were lucky enough to be able to do so, moved freely around the globe, bobbing in the currents of new experiences, swimming against the tide of own expectations and limitations, and floating in the tranquil waters of a job that we hoped had been well done. The pale pandemic imitation of this former life has left us treading water, becalmed in a two-dimensional world. But even with life reduced to a flat screen, the message in Professor Nanwani’s bottle is one that keeps alive the hope of sustaining the diverse and enriching global academic community until better times arrive.

Fiona Macmillan

*Corporation of London Chair in Law, Birkbeck University of London
Visiting Professor of Law, University of Roma Tre and
University of Technology Sydney*

Human Connections

Human Connections is about the author's integrative journey of teaching experiences in China and beyond, focusing on two central questions: *What matters most?* and *How to improve?* The author's narrative to answering these questions is expressed in dynamic values acquired through learning and teaching episodes. Organization Development (OD) theories from a western outlook including Appreciative Inquiry and Living, along with ikigai, yoga, meditation, and tai chi from an eastern perspective, are examined holistically to provide insights into meaningful relationships between teacher and students.

Student postcards, classroom presentations, and group photographs create innovative building blocks in traversing the teacher's journey of scholarship with students, friends, and colleagues. The lessons gathered contribute to the author's living educational theory research approach, culminating with a "living poster" extolling the values that inspire and give purpose to humans. By overcoming cultural and linguistic differences, all – teacher and students alike – gain from their personal experiences. Through fostering human connections, they generate and embellish their being.

This book will appeal to OD academics and practitioners, students, teachers, and readers interested in learning more about human connections and the optimal development of living fruitful lives.

Suresh Nanwani is Professor in Practice at Durham University, United Kingdom, and Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck University of London. He is an author, a writer, and an editor, and has more than 30 years of development work experience in international organizations.

Human Connections

Teaching Experiences in Chongqing,
China and Beyond

Suresh Nanwani

Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond
by Suresh Nanwani

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To

**my students, friends, and colleagues at the Southwest
University of Political Science and Law, China**

**for their invaluable human connections in my teaching
journey**

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Foreword

Suresh Nanwani has succeeded in his chronicle that serves as a testament to the bonds created in teaching students in a foreign land. Barriers and impediments in language and culture are overcome in the pursuit of enhancing life's values through living educational theory.

His story – *Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond* – embodies the author's passion for education and teaching. The narrative also provides evidence of Suresh's scholarship as he engaged with ideas from other researchers in order to improve his own educational influences in his students' learning. These ideas include flow, creativity, Organization Development, and other related terms such as appreciative inquiry, appreciative living, ikigai, and action research living theory. These are applied to the narrator's journey that began in 2019 – and updated to January 2022 – after his teaching period at Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing, China.

What I find most inspiring in Suresh's adventure are his relationally dynamic values, as he demonstrates his evolving knowledge of his students in a matrix of his own reactions and the students' reactions written in their postcards. These values also include his relationships with colleagues in the university and the contributions they made to the generation of Suresh's Living Educational Theory Research approach, to his own continuing professional development with values of human flourishing.

Eastern values and thoughts are embraced in a holistic fusion of both western and eastern angles. Eastern values and thoughts include ikigai in relation to the meaning and pleasures of life. They include yoga as the unity of the individual as a system of physical, mental, social, and spiritual development within universal consciousness. The writer uses ikigai, yoga, meditation, and tai chi as a practice, with techniques such as mindfulness, to build awareness and achieve calmness and stability by weaving positive experiences into the brain and self. He practices vipassana as insightful meditation to see things as they really are. Tai chi is seen as an art form, embracing the mind, body, and spirit by giving a fresh perspective on life. His perspective also includes Organization Development concepts viewed from a typically western outlook.

Suresh's originality lies in the form and content of his account that twine together the simplicity, intensity, and probity of his passion for education and

teaching with the complexity of asking, researching, and answering his question: “What matters most to me?” and “How do I improve what I am doing?”

Suresh’s creative story captivates an individual’s imagination as to the opportunities that life permits for each person to generate their own story, from a passion to improve their own practice with values of human flourishing. His book is a treat to read with its many diverse pictures contributing to the depth and extent of his wonderful communication.

Jack Whitehead

Visiting Professor in Education, University of Cumbria, United Kingdom

Bath, United Kingdom

January 2022

Preface

I wrote this story – *Human Connections: Teaching Experiences in Chongqing, China and Beyond* – following an exercise on creativity through self-exploration to sharpen my ideas about Organization Development. My account uses the journey of teaching at Southwest University of Political Science and Law (SWUPL) in Chongqing, China, which commenced in March 2009 and is updated to January 2022.

My narrative uses the expedition as the pivot to influence my experiences and, in turn, my students and friends whom I hold dear and connect with three years on. Covid-19 surfaced worldwide in 2020, and despite the febrile times, connectivity has taken on a new dimension, involving a flourishing of humanity through interconnections. The journey, however, still continues, and I am kept refreshed and revisit the memories with new perspectives.

In this book, the main lessons I gained are that my life and the journey continue: I learn more when I connect with my experiences – professional and personal – in China (and elsewhere) to students and other university friends who are the leaders of the future. I have also learned that in continuing my professional development in teaching, the doors have opened wider to accommodate my reactions to change that contributes to the flourishing of humanity through living educational theory.

I thank SWUPL, my students, my friends, and my colleagues, including Associate Professor Yin Wei, School of International Law at SWUPL: She was the bridge connecting me with my teaching at the university. I owe them all gratitude for enabling me to learn and enrich myself with new areas I never thought possible before. With three years of continuous communication especially during the challenging times in 2020 and 2021, the connections provide me nourishment from the energy-giving values that sustain humanity.

This story serves as a testament of the bond created in teaching students in a foreign land, where barriers and impediments in language and culture are overcome in the pursuit of enhancing our values in life through living educational theory.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to the writing of this book and have supported me in many ways in these surreal times of Covid-19.

I apologize if I have inadvertently neglected some names but know that I will treasure these persons who shaped my journey in Chongqing, China, and beyond.

I thank the following, without any hierarchical order of importance:

All the students in my class at Southwest University of Political Science and Law (SWUPL)

SWUPL graduates, including Mr. Craig Leung, Mr. Xia Lin, and Mr. Li Changchen

SWUPL academic staff, including Associate Professor Yin Wei, Dr. Meng Yuqun, and Professor Zhang Xiaojun, Dean of School of International Law at SWUPL

Mr. Jagraj Singh

Ms. Audrey Hutton

Mr. Rodolfo Velasco, Jr.

Prof. Jack Whitehead

Dr. Marie Huxtable

Dr. William A. Loxley

Mr. Wee Pan Lee

Dr. Shahid Zahid

Ms. Low Gek Noi

Prof. Leslie J. Moran

Mr. Stephen Lees

Ms. Joshene Bersales

Mr. Ramachandran Vijayaraghavan, Director, 888DigiPub, India.

I thank each and every one for sharing their thoughts, insights, and views, and for encouraging and enabling me to write this story.

About the author

Suresh Nanwani, PhD, is Professor in Practice at Durham University, United Kingdom. He is a Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR)–Accredited Mediator and is trained and certified by the School of Change as a coach. He is also:

- Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck University of London;
- subject expert consultant for environmental and international law in the Green Climate Fund’s Independent Redress Mechanism; and
- an executive council member of the Society of International Economic Law.

He has more than 30 years of development work experience in international organizations, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Since 2008, he has lectured extensively in various countries including Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

He publishes on Organization Development, Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Living, international financial institutions, law and development, governance and accountability, Sustainable Development Goals, and Belt and Road Initiative.

His latest publications are *Organization and Education Development: Reflecting and Transforming in a Self-Discovery Journey* (author, Routledge, 2022); *Covid-19 in the Philippines: Personal Stories* (coeditor, Amazon Kindle, 2021); *Covid-19 sa Pilipinas: Mga Personal na Kuwento* (editor, self-publication, 2021); and *The Practice of Independent Accountability Mechanisms: Towards Good Governance in Development Finance* (coeditor, Brill Nijhoff, 2019).

He wishes we all improve ourselves in living purposefully and positively.

Dr. Suresh Nanwani

Professor in Practice, Durham University, UK

Member, Practitioners’ Board at <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/practitioners-advisory-board/suresh-nanwani#profile>

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Abbreviations

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AIA	Appreciative-Imagining-Acting
AL	Appreciative Living
Chengdu Panda Base	Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding
MICAI	Matter-Ikigai-Creativity-Appreciative Inquiry/Living
MOOC	massive open online course
NUJS	National University of Juridical Sciences
OD	Organization Development
PCUP	Pontifical Catholic University of Peru
POD	Positive Organization Development
SAIDI	Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Institute
SWUPL	Southwest University of Political Science and Law
Three Gorges Museum	Chongqing Museum

1 Background

I wrote this story following a paper I submitted for a module on creativity in 2019. The module was a requirement for my PhD coursework in Organization Development (OD) at the Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Institute (SAIDI) Graduate School of Organization Development in the Philippines.

My stimulus for writing this story about creativity was how it affects meaning in life. *What matters most to me?* It's a simple question but difficult to answer. Many things matter to me, so my answers are based on two things: (i) not just myself but others I care for, and (ii) the time when the question is framed. In my 2019 journey, I practiced creativity through connections with my students and friends in various ways, including postcards I received, which formed a unique collage for me. These connections helped me ponder on and improve in areas I had yet to discover more about myself.

In 1998, my answer to “What matters most to me?” was to give more of my time to my mother, who I felt would pass away soon. I had no scientific basis for this: Her health was not the best, but she managed reasonably with her medication. Yet I had a sense that she would pass away soon, though I didn't know exactly when. I was working in the Philippines, and she was in Singapore.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, I had accompanied my mother to India to see her guru. But after 1995, it became difficult for her to do so because her health condition was not suitable for rigorous travel with arduous rail journeys to rural places. So it was my mother's dream to reconnect and see her guru in the flesh at the prayer sessions held in Bangkok in 1988. In January, I managed to obtain a leave of absence and flew down to Singapore to fetch my mother and bring her to Bangkok to visit her guru (who had flown in from India). I then accompanied her back to Singapore, and then I returned to Manila for work.

In March, as I was making plans to visit my mother who had gone to India, I learned that she suddenly passed away. During that time, that feeling I had that she would pass away soon was stronger than before – and true enough, she passed away peacefully in a matter of days. I attended the funeral rites in Singapore and, together with my siblings, brought her ashes to India in April. We placed our mother's ashes in the holy river Ganges, which was her request. Although I wish I had visited India to see my mother in her last days, it gave me comfort to know that I made that special trip to Bangkok with her. I felt I have done my filial duty as her son.

2 *Background*

Moving forward to 2019, my answer to “What matters most to me?” was to complete my PhD study in SAIDI Graduate School of OD. But it was not just a matter of completing my studies. It was also about what I was doing at that time: teaching undergraduates at SWUPL in Chongqing, China. I had been to China several times, but they were brief visits to Beijing and Hong Kong for work and travel. On my first visit to Beijing for work, I did not have the time to visit places like the Great Wall of China – which I remember from my primary school days in 1967, when I studied about the enduring achievements by Shih Huang Ti.¹

In my secondary and pre-university days, I studied ancient and modern history: Chinese history from the Shang dynasty (1600 BCE) and various dynasties till the last imperial dynasty (Qing, 1644–1912 CE); and China’s history from 1912 to 1949, when the nationalist forces were defeated by the Chinese Communist Party. China’s rich history fascinated me and still continues to do so – not just the impressive list of dynasties but also the writings of Chinese philosophers like Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi. What also captivated me as a Singaporean living in Singapore, where majority of the population is Chinese, was the connection with multiple Chinese linkages – my friends, teachers, schools, food, culture, roads, and geographical places.

Note

- 1 Shih Huang Ti was the founder of the Qin dynasty (221–210 BCE) and the first emperor of a unified China, who introduced the Chinese script as one language and one communication system for all of China, as well as the building of the Great Wall of China.

2 Framework

I completed my dissertation on “Self-Awareness and Self-Change: Becoming a Fully-Integrated Person and a Better Professor” and obtained my PhD degree in 2020. Two years later, I authored the book *Organization and Education Development: Reflecting and Transforming in a Self-Discovery Journey*, which is about my life-learning journey of self-discovery, partially based on my dissertation. I also introduced new OD models and paradigms I developed from my journey and the impacts of Covid-19 through mental maps, to show how we can reinvigorate ourselves during challenging, febrile, and surreal times.

As part of completing my studies, I had to undertake a module on creativity. I needed to be grounded on creativity that offers new insights into traditional approaches of OD. So I spent some time researching on this area, as well as other forms of new approaches, such as appreciative inquiry and appreciative living.

The module was an exercise in creativity and exploration of myself through a fuller understanding of the subject of OD that links the generative and creative drive to my own self-learning. My supervisor, Dean Rosalina Fuentes, informed me that she enjoyed my paper, including the experiences I provided, the narratives I articulated, and my exposition of concepts. Her congratulatory words inspired me to write this book, using my journey of teaching in Chongqing, China, where I taught at SWUPL in March 2019. My premise of self-discovery was that I had the greatest potential to be creative and to create my own flux in being, doing, and having. Creation and creativity take place at two levels: thought/ideation (mental creation) and manifestation/action (physical-relational-material creation).

The module on creativity was a pathway to learn – at my initiation, direction, and self-organization – how I would execute my activities and create my own flow in my being, doing, and having. This framework also served as a story to capture my experiences and then broaden and deepen them, employing various methodologies including immersion, reflection, self-study, connecting, and feedback for my improvement. The framework is a vehicle to study my growth and human development.

In my story, I first explain the terms *flow*, *creativity*, *organization development*, and other related terms such as *appreciative inquiry* and *appreciative living* and action research living theory. I then apply them to my journey in March 2019,

4 *Framework*

which I then updated to January 2022 – a journey of about three years after teaching in SWUPL. This journey still continues, and I am refreshed as I revisit my experiences with invigorating perspectives. The main lessons I learned are that my life and the journey continue; I learn more when I connect with my experiences – professional and personal – in China (and elsewhere) and with my students and other university friends who are the leaders of the future.

3 Terms in Organization Development

OD is an evolving subject, from its first stage of socio-technical studies in the 1930s to its present fourth stage where it's at a crossroads in its evolution, giving rise to new developments in thinking worldwide. These developments include *flow* and *creativity* (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), *appreciative inquiry* (David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva), positive organization development (Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Robert Quinn), and *know yourself* (Yuval Harari). From the early days in the 1930s, where OD was formally practiced in a few countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, OD-type activities such as appreciative inquiry are now practiced globally.

In 2009, the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences* published a special edition that showed OD-type activities were increasing worldwide, especially in economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China. In its fourth stage, eastern values are brought into the picture, fusing with western thoughts and values, for a more holistic understanding. With the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we revisit the fourth stage with concepts of *new normal* and *social distancing*. We reexamine personal and corporate values like resilience, health (physical and mental), adaptability, grit, compassion, and awareness of health and safety standards.

The academic aspects of flow, creativity, and happiness are extremely useful and invaluable for me to understand the practical application of terms in OD. Also relevant are terms like *appreciative inquiry* and *appreciative living*, which are frequently used in OD. The classic OD 101 book, *Organization Development & Change*, states that OD “is both a professional field of social action and an area of scientific inquiry” (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 1).

In simple terms, OD is an evolving subject that is multidisciplinary in nature, drawing on sociology, psychology, learning, and personality to plan and manage an effective change in the organization, team, or an individual. My focus here is on the individual (me), the team, and my interrelationship with human society as I live in it. I also want to show that human beings are social animals and that OD terminology is universal.

Eastern values and thoughts include ikigai (Ken Mogi), yoga, meditation such as *vipassana*, and tai chi. Ikigai describes the meaning and pleasures of life. Yoga means the unity of the individual with universal consciousness within a system of physical, mental, social, and spiritual development. Meditation is a practice by

6 *Terms in Organization Development*

an individual or group using techniques, such as mindfulness, to build awareness and achieve calmness and stability, weaving positive experiences into the brain and self. *Vipassana* or insightful meditation means to see things as they really are. Tai chi is an art form embracing the mind, body, and spirit, which benefits the mind and body by giving a fresh perspective on life.

The blend of western and eastern values and thoughts provides a rich fusion in thinking and practice. OD terminology is universal: Concepts are viewed from a typically western perspective as the ideas are expressed through western concepts. But when drawn from eastern perspectives, we derive more meaning through a wider lens that enables us to see refreshing perspectives we might not have been aware of until we apply them in our daily lives. We see a palette of avenues and ways to frame mindsets, plan our lives and organizations, and create a vigorous process for ensuring effective change.

4 Core elements of my framework

There are several core elements of my framework: creativity, flow, and happiness; appreciative inquiry and appreciative living; ikigai; and action research living theory. These elements are distinct but are richly interwoven as they serve the primary aim of giving meaning and purpose to our daily organization of activities and to our pursuit of enhancing the flourishing of humanity. To make things as simple as possible, I briefly highlight these theories and then incorporate lessons and key points to questions stemming from my journey.

How flow, creativity, and happiness give purpose to our lives

There is considerable literature on theories relating to creativity, flow, and happiness. These elements are key areas given focus in the works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*; *The Evolving Self: A psychology for the third millennium*; *Creativity: The psychology of discovery and invention*; and *Living Well: The psychology of discovery of everyday life*. Another source is Howard Gardner in *Changing Minds*, who Csikszentmihalyi (1993) cites as “the kind of stimulating colleague one always dreams of having at one’s side” (p. 297).

Csikszentmihalyi is noted for his work in the study of happiness and creativity and is best known for being the architect of the notion of flow and for his years of research and writing on these topics. He is a leading researcher on positive psychology. Positive psychology is widely accepted in contributing to positive organization development, and just like AI, it views humans as continuously striving to do what is good for themselves and for others.

Aside from Csikszentmihalyi, other leading authorities on creativity include Jeanne Nakamura, Maria Wong, Giovanni Moneta, and Anne Wells.¹ It is interesting that Csikszentmihalyi is invariably cited and covered in new areas, such as the 2009 research article on “Creativity and Flow Theory: Reflections on the Talent Development of Women” by Margaret Botticchio and Wilhelmina Vialle.²

Csikszentmihalyi’s four books – *Flow* (1990), *The Evolving Self* (1993), *Creativity* (1996), and *Living Well* (1997) – were written in chronological order. From these books and other works, I highlight the following guide as I prepared my module on creativity.

8 Core elements of my framework

- His interest on enjoyment began in 1963, during his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, with his thesis focusing on a central issue of creativity.
- He did many studies and research, including observing artists at work: (1) Experience Sampling Work (ESM), which involved asking people to wear an electronic paging device for a week and to write down their feelings whenever the pager beeped; and (2) interviewing 91 highly accomplished creators from a variety of disciplines, including arts and humanities, sciences, business and politics, and inventors, as the groundwork for *Creativity* (Nanwani, 2022).
- *Happiness*: This is not something that happens, and it is not the result of good fortune or chance. It is how we interpret events. Happiness is a condition that each person must be prepared for, cultivate, and defend. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close to being happy.
- *Flow*: On rare occasions when we are in control of our actions, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment. This becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like. This state is *flow*.
- *Definition of “flow” by Csikszentmihalyi*: “The state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so *enjoyable* that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4) (emphasis added). He developed the theory of optimal experience based on the concept of flow.
- *Relevance of flow to various areas*: Flow is used to generate ideas and practices in clinical psychotherapy, the organization of activities in senior citizens’ homes. The impact of this theory is going to be stronger, given the impetus on positive psychology and the new wave of thinking in OD in the 21st century.
- The time we spend in flow makes our lives happier and more successful.

By understanding the theory of flow, we understand ourselves better and give order and purpose to our lives in the future. To know ourselves is the greatest achievement of our species. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) develops this contention of knowing ourselves better and concludes with a fellowship of the future where he emphasizes the following tenets: (i) we are a part of everything around us: the air, the earth, and the sea and the past and the future; (ii) we should not deny our uniqueness as we are the only center of consciousness in our space-time location; (iii) we are responsible for our actions; and (iv) we are more than what we are, meaning the self is a creative construction.

This positivism augurs well for the development of our purpose in life, which can be translated into creating energy and flow. We have the greatest potential to be creative and to create our own flow in our being, doing, and having.

Csikszentmihalyi highlights five steps of the creative process: (1) period of preparation in issues that are interesting and arouse curiosity; (2) period of incubation when ideas churn around; (3) insight (also called the aha! moment); (4) evaluation, where the person must decide whether the insight is worth pursuing; and (5) elaboration, the hardest part, which is akin to Edison’s reference to creativity consisting of 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Finally, as mentioned by Kathryn Britton (2008, September 7), a teacher of positive workplace concepts, flow is not just valuable to individuals; “it also contributes to organizational goals. For example, frequent experiences of flow at work lead to higher productivity, innovation, and employee development” (para. 3).

How appreciative inquiry and appreciative living generate positivity and well-being

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is the study seeking to highlight the positive core of the matter under inquiry. By positive core, I mean the essence of the matter that gives life to the subject under the study. The drive for AI is to generate new knowledge and life, focusing not on the problem but on the strength. For example, when one views a matter or individual, AI shifts the focus from finding out what the problem or weakness is to what the solution or strength is.

Put simply, I focus on my strength in carrying out a task (e.g., my ability to do long walks without panting) than my weakness (e.g., my wish to stop every so often during a long walk and take short breaks). AI works in a 4D cycle: discovering (appreciating and valuing), dreaming (envisioning), design (constructing the future), and destiny (learning and empowering) (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Appreciative living (AL) is “simply applying Appreciative Inquiry in everyday life” (Kelm, 2015, p. 4). It is a journey, not a destination. It requires deliberate effort over time to shift our automatic thinking and open our minds and hearts. Through a reflective approach, we need to overcome the negative bias in many of us, where we overfocus on the negative and close the curtain on the more positive aspects (Nanwani, 2022).

The net result is that we need to “pull the curtains wide open” so that we can see the complete view of our lives – both positive and negative, with a focus to rewire our brain to pay more attention to see the positive side. There is a three-step Appreciative-Imagining-Acting process in AL: Appreciate what is (to feel good), Imagine the ideal (getting clear about what I want), and Act in alignment (taking action in moving forward) (Kelm, 2015).

How ikigai invigorates and refreshes our mindsets

Ikigai is a blend of AI (including AL), flow, and creativity. What is striking about ikigai (“iki” is “to give,” and “gai” is “to reason”) is that it resides in the realm of anything, small or big: over a cup of coffee or over a complex work project. Through ikigai, we recognize the spectrum of things in life and the richness of ideas to appreciate and enjoy life. Ikigai has five pillars: starting small, releasing yourself, harmony and sustainability, the joy of little things, and being in the here and now (Mogi, 2017).

What I find fascinating about ikigai is its refreshing mindset, viewing matters from an eastern perspective (Japanese) and using this lens to see positivism, as a welcome addition to the western practices mentioned earlier (Nanwani, 2022).

How action research living theory enhances energy-flowing values and understanding

Action research was initially popular as a social science in the United States in the 1930s but went into decline in the 1950s. In the United Kingdom, it received a revival with Jack Whitehead and other researchers who developed a new approach with the central question, “How do I improve what I am doing?” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Jack Whitehead is the leading authority on action research living theory, and in his seminal book, he explains living theory as an approach to research, while “living-theory” indicates an individual’s explanation of their educational influences in learning.

What is important to realize is that education is not restricted to what happens in schools and universities. He refers to the richness in our continuing contributions to living theory research as a social movement by enhancing the “energy-flowing values” and understandings that carry hope for the “flourishing of humanity” (Whitehead, 2018).

Using action research living theory and methodology to improve myself as a teacher

I use the theories of flow, creativity, and happiness; AI/AL; and ikigai in action research living theory, which serves as the basis for me to answer the question: How do I improve what I am doing to find additional avenues and options in mapping out values and understandings for the flourishing of humanity? My inquiry involves determining the guiding lights in my story to arrive at an understanding of how to interpret meaning and reality.

Notes

- 1 To learn more about their works, see:
 - (a) Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Nakamura, J. (1989). The dynamics of intrinsic motivation. In R. Ames & C. Ames, (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation theory and research. Vol. 3, Goals and Cognitions* (pp. 45–71). Academic Press.
 - (b) Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Wong, M. (1991). The situational and personal correlates of happiness: A cross-national comparison. In F. Strack, M. Argyle, & N. Schwartz (Eds.), *The social psychology of subjective well-being* (pp. 193–212). Pergamon Press.
 - (c) Moneta, G., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). The effect of perceived challenges and skills on the quality of subjective experience. *The Journal of Personality*.
 - (d) Wells, A. (1988). Self-esteem and optimal experience. In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. Selega Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *Optimal Experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness* (pp. 327–41). Cambridge University Press.
- 2 Botticchio, M., & Vialle, W. (2009). Creativity and flow theory: Reflections on the talent development of women. *University of Wollongong Research Online*. Retrieved January 10, 2022, from <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2313&context=edupapers>

5 Guiding lights in my story

The following guiding lights illuminate my story by stimulating reflections I gained from analyzing my framework to better participate in understanding humanity, including the flourishing of it:

- What matters to me most?
- What has been generated by creating and exploring my passion for teaching at SWUPL?

What matters to me most in this story?

For purposes of this story, I find what matters to me *most* is my passion for teaching and learning, including my teaching experience at SWUPL in Chongqing, China, in March 2019. I had 31 students whose ages ranged from 18 to 21. (Of the 31 students in the class, one student did not continue to complete his undergraduate studies.) I will generally use this figure of 31 students in this book. I was particularly pleased that there were 22 female students in my class, as I am very supportive of gender issues stemming from my development work.

The students' learning language was Mandarin with limited knowledge of English, while my subject was taught in English. My native language is Sindhi (the language of Sindh, a province in Pakistan), and the medium of instruction in school is English. I am reasonably proficient in other languages such as Hindi, French, and Malay, and have a limited knowledge of Mandarin. So I needed to find ways to solve the communication challenge and see how I could best deliver education within the one-month period, resulting in a win-win situation for all (students, university, and me).

I thank SWUPL, my students, and my colleagues, including Associate Professor Yin Wei, School of International Law at SWUPL: She served as the bridge connecting me with my teaching at the university. My encounters, intersections, and reflections provided the platform for the flourishing of humanity – for myself, my students and colleagues, and for all in the journey. I owe them all gratitude for enabling me to learn and enrich myself in new areas I had never thought possible before. With the passage of three years of communication and in these

challenging times, their friendships continue to provide me with the nourishment of energy-giving values that flourish humanity.

What has been generated by creating and exploring my passion for teaching at SWUPL?

In creating and exploring, I provide a matrix of my own reactions and my students' reactions from their postcards, class photographs, and visuals. I was pleasantly surprised and in fact quite taken aback when I received the postcards. These were handed to me at the end of the one-month class by two students, Bi He and Liu Yanling, selected by Associate Professor Yin Wei to be class monitors to assist me in my teaching assignment, such as coordinating with other students on teaching matters. (They also went out of their way to make me feel at home, which I greatly appreciate, as it was initially very difficult for me to settle in. But more of that later.)

6 Matrix of my own and my students' reactions written in their postcards

I provide a matrix based on my reactions during the one-month class and the students' reactions through their postcards. I organized the matrix by framing my own reactions based on my thoughts and feelings and grouping my students' reactions into three broad categories: learning, experiences, and development. I will explore these categories based on the matrix and then refer to specific instances that exemplify these responses, including photographs and events. See Table 6.1.

The matrix summarizes various issues with my personal reactions and questions, followed by the students' reactions from their postcards. I use this matrix as it neatly encapsulates the students' reactions at the end of our one-month class. Additional reactions, such as feedback from the students, friends, and colleagues after the class till January 2022, are covered in the next chapter, as they also answer my reactions and questions on how to improve myself as a teacher. The feedback takes the form of photos and communications during this period. The Covid-19 pandemic provided a window of opportunity for us to connect better in different ways – such as email and social media like WeChat – following our one-month class.

To summarize my reactions in the matrix, I'd like to say that I needed time to adjust in my new environment, and I found ways to engage myself to appreciate and find purpose in my activities, including teaching and learning about the students and Chinese culture at the same time.

Table 6.1 Matrix of my own and my students' reactions written in their postcards

My reactions	Students' reactions on		
Learning	Experiences	Development	
Both excited and afraid of staying and teaching in a new environment for one month	I learned "not only the knowledge [of the subject] and other things, but also the <i>ability to think in a different way</i> ." (emphasis added)	"During the month, I've learned a lot. It is an <i>unforgettable learning experience</i> . Though I didn't do well, I will always try my best to improve myself in the future." (emphasis added)	"To be honest, I'm nervous to have this kind of class because <i>I'm too shy to talk with others</i> ." (emphasis added)
Help offered when I felt unwell	"You <i>make me know more about the world</i> . The WB [World Bank] only existed in my history book before but now I have a deeper understanding about it." (emphasis added)	"Although to be honest, the course does not interest me anymore (because I'm more interested in politics and constitutions or other social sciences), <i>I think I have learned some skills of learning</i> ." (emphasis added)	"In the class, I learn so much about IFIs [International Financial Institutions], and in my work, I [gain] more experience and skill to deal with things smoothly and successfully."
Culture and other differences such as food and lifestyle	"Chinese teachers give lessons and answer questions but they'll never make sure that everybody is clear."	"Really a nice experience." "Work done by the MDBs [multilateral development banks] is very meaningful. I really hope someday I can offer my service to the poor."	"I will always cherish the time you and us spend together. Before the course began, I was afraid that I would not catch up because I am not good at English and <i>I am an introvert</i> . Now I look back the learning process, I find it fruitful though it's a little challenging." (emphasis added)

<i>My reactions</i>	<i>Students' reactions on</i>		
<i>Learning</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Development</i>	
Learning from rich cultural experiences outside the campus	<p>“I enjoyed your course and have learned a lot. I not only learned knowledge, but also a truth: <i>it's not terrible to make mistakes and it's important to learn from them.</i>” (emphasis added)</p>	<p>“I felt you paid more attention to me from the fact that you chose to ask me questions in the class. And when answering the questions, I found that actually I could say something. After several times being asked, I gradually gained my confidence in speaking in English and I could even ask a question.”</p>	
Experiencing the joy of sipping soya milk from my balcony	<p>“Thank you for teaching us <i>patiently</i>. I will remember the <i>fabulous experience</i> permanently.” (emphasis added)</p>	<p>“You said that we are the generation for the future. I want to become a lawyer who fights for justice in the future but you told us that we have more choices. Maybe one day I could work in an international organization.”</p>	
“The peach and the plum do not speak, yet a path is born between them. It's a Chinese saying means You are a good teacher.”	<p>“Thank you for an amazing and challenging journey.”</p>	<p>“I'm very glad to . . . have this kind of class. Although I felt [the class was] a bit hard at the beginning, but now I think I can accept it.”</p>	

(Continued)

Table 6.1 (Continued)

<i>My reactions</i>	<i>Students' reactions on</i>		
<i>Learning</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Development</i>	
<p>“Not only have I learned a lot of knowledge, but also now I know a lawyer can help people worldwide and play a role in the process of development of a poor and undeveloped community rather than just fight for one person in court.”</p>	<p>Student had a “beautiful experience” from the one-month class.</p>	<p>“Your rich experiences broadened my horizon. And your teaching style is different from what I had in the past. You taught me how to learn, how to think, and how to explore the world. And you showed me your principles. I want to be a fair person like you. I hope I can make steady progress.”</p>	
<p>“What I mostly want to say is that I am less shy than ever before (at least I think it is). <i>You are not only just my teacher, but also my sincere friend.</i>” (emphasis added)</p>	<p>“You are the first foreign teacher I met in the college and you are impressive.”</p>	<p>“Now I know as a lawyer I can have a different life pattern to help people in the world.”</p>	

7 Students' reactions

I categorized the students' reactions by learning, experiences, and development. These three areas are discrete but, as seen from Table 6.1 in Chapter 6, could be woven together, resulting in wholesome feedback. There were general and innermost thoughts; for example, the student is an introvert, something she'd never express in front of a class of so many students. Significantly, this student felt comfortable expressing her sentiment after class, as all students have bonded and learned to share their feelings with one another. There was also an honest perception by students that Chinese teachers give lessons and answer questions, but they don't make sure that everybody understood things clearly. There were also anecdotes that reflected what students felt individually and as a group.

Most important, I learned from these feedback. I found the medium of postcards interesting as a communication tool, as the students were able to express what they normally would've bottled up inside. Through the postcards, they were able to set free and express what they wanted to say. From these postcards, I got a rush of feelings, seeing various responses from the students and a diverse range of views that I had never before considered deeply.

Becoming more conscious and aware of students' reactions

The students' reactions made me more conscious and aware: There was an amalgam of thoughts and feelings, deep and open, accompanied by drawings or emoticons that enhanced their messages. One student's comment struck me like a bolt from the sky. "I felt you paid more attention to me from the fact that you chose to ask me questions in the class. *And when answering the question, deeply, I found that actually I could say something. After several times being asked, I gradually gained my confidence in speaking in English and I could even ask a question*" (emphasis added).

Did I know that some students were shy and introverted? Did I know some students were nervous? Memory fails me now, nearly three years after the event. But I did find during the one-month class that some students spoke less, some more, and I could discern a pattern. I made it a point to have a class sheet of names and scribbled notes of what they said – this initial piece of information was invaluable as it was my building block to know the students. I took this platform to newer heights in the course of our class, checking on what students said, and in the process, I got to know them better.

A clear case was the revelation by a student in her comment: “What I mostly want to say is that *I am less shy than ever before (at least I think it is). You are not only just my teacher, but also my sincere friend*” (emphasis added). Her frankness touched me. I remember this student well: She hailed from Inner Mongolia and was shy. I remember informing her to contact Bi He and Liu Yanling, who would stand ready to assist her if she had questions arising from what we discussed in class.

I informed her that she could also approach me with her list of questions, and we would go through them in the class for the benefit of all. I assured her that other students might well have those questions in mind but were afraid to ask, so she should see herself as a brave student willing to ask and learn. She told me she was reassured and became confident when she realized she would now be the brave student.

Even if she made mistakes in her questions or did not know the answers, that did not matter: This was what the class was about – learning from mistakes and improving oneself. This assurance resonated with a student, who commented, “I enjoyed your course and have learned a lot. *I not only learned knowledge, but also a truth: it's not terrible to make mistakes and it's important to learn from them*” (emphasis added).

I was happy that the students viewed mistakes as stepping stones to better learning. I reminded them that I myself learn from mistakes and that learning is a continuous process where we can always improve ourselves. I let them know that in my school days, I made many mistakes, but it was from those mistakes that I became a better student. I think the students appreciated my candor and realized they were not alone if they made mistakes.

I spent about one hour on my first session covering what I called “meet and greet” or “getting-to-know-each-other” before formally starting the course. This was something I learned in my previous teaching engagements. It is time well spent when kicking off a class – for me to introduce myself and for students to give a short summary of themselves, such as their names (and how to pronounce them correctly!), their provenance, their interest in the subject area, what they expect to learn – for all to share and get to know each other better. I viewed the first session as an icebreaker, so we all could relax and feel as comfortable as possible.

I vividly remember one student proudly telling me he was from Hangzhou in the Zhejiang province, where the Group of 20 (G20) had their 11th meeting. That was a good cue for me to follow up and expand briefly on G20 meetings, which I would cover in my course. That also created awareness among fellow students of where their counterparts come from.

The matrix made me aware of the impact teaching has on the students: building confidence; knowing better their career roles as lawyers who can play a role in the development process to help the poor (rather than “just fight for one person in court”); knowing that challenges await them when they are better prepared; and getting inspired by the course, with possible options of working in international development organizations. I was struck by one feedback. A nervous student once asked a question, and I answered her in a way that made her feel comfortable. She informed me later that my response mattered a lot to her in making her feel confident.

In retrospect, I asked myself: Could I have done even more for the student and how? I could have asked the student more questions to make her feel self-assured, but for the student to ask me questions, that's something different. It

does not change the lesson, but it changes the atmosphere where students can be brave enough to ask more questions. This is a relevant takeaway for me.

Another time, there was a student who felt I paid more attention, by asking him or her to answer questions, and after being asked several times, “gradually gained confidence in speaking in English and I could even ask a question.” There was another student who stated, “You taught me how to learn, how to think, and how to explore the world.” This could be the real lesson – when students blossom from their space (or cocoons for the shy ones) and gain space and confidence in so many ways.

One student, Li Mengxuan, candidly wrote that although she had a nice experience, grasped lecture points from me, and gained some learning skills, the course did not interest her anymore as she was “more interested in politics and constitutions or other social sciences.” I am happy that she expressed herself clearly as it makes me aware that not all students would find the course their cup of tea, if they have other interests. I was glad that the course made her more keen of her real interest in other subjects and that the course opened the doors wider for her to pursue her own study interests.

Postcards and visuals and class photographs

Some postcards on which these comments were written are provided in the following pages. These will give a visual image of the comments, including the emoticons and other representations the students used to explain more about themselves, thus making me feel more at home. I found it touching that I received these postcards as through them, I have gained rich experiences.

For example, Huang Xianwen displayed her hairstyle, showing that her hair in the picture was shorter than when she was a student. She shared with me a cartoon version of Xie Zhi, a mascot in SWUPL, which is the symbol of fairness and justice, and said she expressed laughter (hahaha) in liking the mascot because it is cute. Yet behind this veneer, there was a current of seriousness:

She is a shy girl “always sitting in the corner and never asking questions.” She was “seriously ill for two weeks and still suffer[ed] from sore throat [till she wrote the card, when I finished teaching].” She apologized for not showing passion in her class participation. She explained to me the meaning of her name – Huang (yellow) Xian (to show) Wen (clouds with patterns of good fortune). What an awesome card touchingly written by a “girl of shyness” who opened up when the class ended!

I experienced a gamut of wondrous feelings. I was touched by her openness, and certainly, she seemed better now (and I’m glad she did reasonably well in the course despite her illness). She managed to give her presentation, which was one of the assessments for grading – the other two were multiple-choice questions and answers and an essay (students had to choose one of two questions). Her postcard told me a lot about her, and I was sorry I did not reach out to her as I should have.

I did ask the class monitors, but they said she was shy. I should have done more, but because I did not, I regret not having done enough to engage with her. I asked her questions and she answered, and I made it a point to remind my class to not hesitate and always ask questions. By asking, I said it would make

them confident to speak up (and it did not matter if the question sounded odd because it was only by asking that they would learn). Her postcard told me many mini-stories and experiences that I treasure to this day.

There was another postcard I received from Ye Siting, which has a leaf design (her surname, Ye). She expressed her nervousness because she is “too shy to talk with others. So when you let me answer questions, I always say sorry, I don’t know even though I know the answer. This embarrasses me very much.” She expressed hope that she could introduce herself confidently if I ask her someday. She reminded me that I “always forget [her] name (maybe it is too hard to pronounce),” followed by a happy emoticon. She informed me that Ye is a rich cultural surname.

I checked and found out Ye is “leaf” in modern Chinese, but the name arose as a lineage name referring to the city of Ye about 500 BCE. I learned a lot from her – a bit late – but I took note of how I could improve myself. Maybe I should devise ways of checking with students the meaning of their names. I had done a bit of that, so I know Xia Jing, another student, means “summer.” But I can do more! A student said I was the first foreign teacher she had met in the college, so she didn’t know what to expect. This shows that there could be a wide array of mixed feelings and experiences.

Anna’s postcard showed her frankness and artistic nature. I remember her well as she was one of the students who smiled all the time. She displayed a pictorial representation of her face and mine and apologized with a *dui bu dui* (meaning “sorry”). Her picture and note of “sorry” evoked fond memories. I remember using the word *sorry* a lot, especially when I didn’t understand what a student was saying. I replied with “Du bu qui, wo bu dong, qing man yi dian, rang wo ming bai” (which roughly translates to “Sorry, I do not understand, please say slowly so I can understand”). Sometimes they smiled and laughed when my tonal accents went awry, which fostered a warm connection in the class.

Her postcard brought memories of her – her cheerful self and candor. So it was no wonder she told me in her card: “If I meet you again in SWUPL someday, I will say ‘Hello! Mr. Suresh’ aloud with a smile to you as same as what I did in the first day.”



Photo 7.1 Collage of some students' postcards

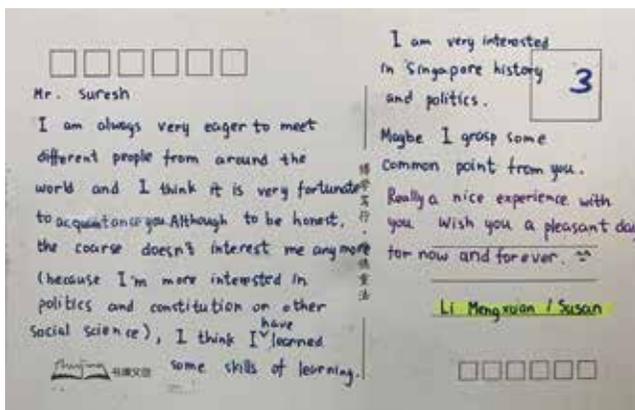
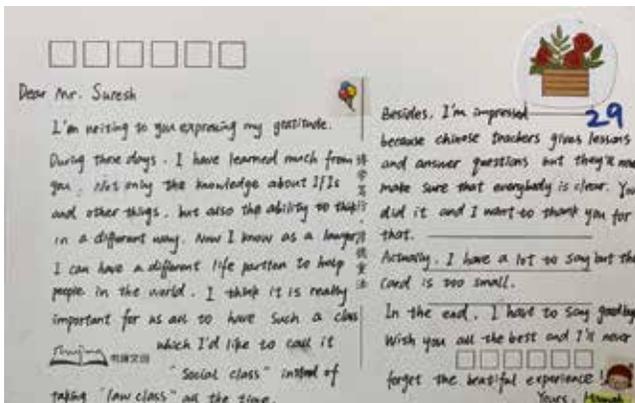
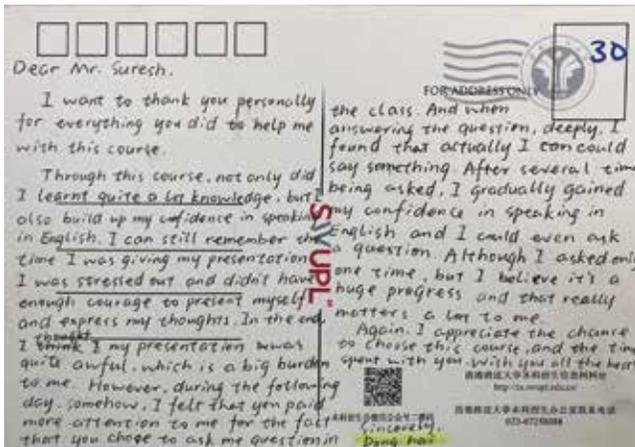


Photo 7.1 (Continued)

22 Students' reactions

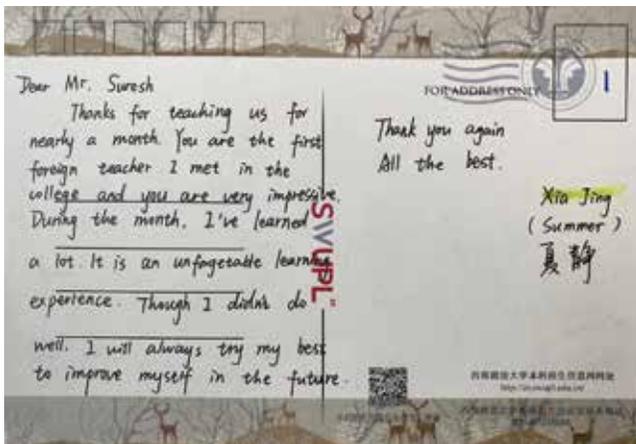
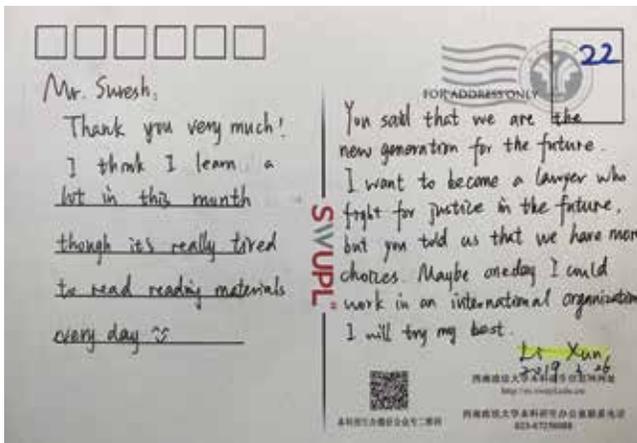
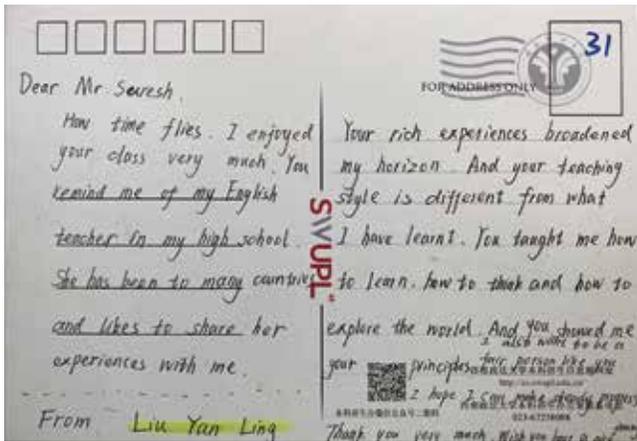


Photo 7.1 (Continued)



Photo 7.1 (Continued)

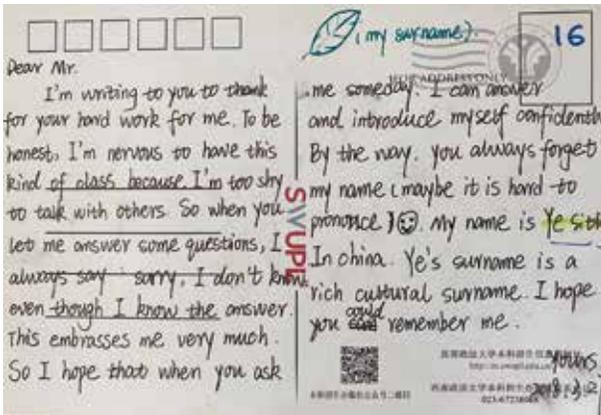


Photo 7.2 Postcard from Ye Siting

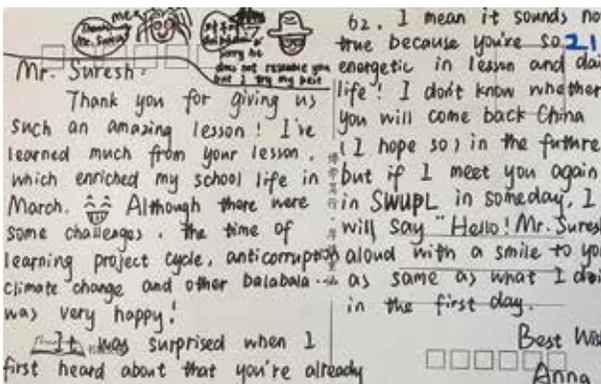


Photo 7.3 Postcard from Anna

Pictures are worth a thousand words

The young students (between ages 18 to 21) came from all corners of China, as far away as Tieling, a city in Liaoning province in northeast China, about 1,500 miles (or 2,500 km) from Chongqing! The students, colleagues, and friends whose faces appear in the photographs here and elsewhere in this story have given their permission to use the photos. I'm grateful that they allowed me to use these pictures, as they give added dimension to my narrative.

The students were shy at the beginning of the class, but in time, they grew confident and joined me for lunch after the class if they were free. This allowed us to have more exchanges on work and nonwork matters. They were curious and wanted to communicate more to learn more. This became apparent to me one day, when a small group of students from my class and I were having a discussion on the 5-foot path, and we suddenly found students from other classes listening to us intently. It was my turn to be embarrassed, and I made it a point that we should converse in private rather in the open public space.



Photo 7.4 Lunch with some students in the canteen



Photo 7.5 With students in the class and Dr. Meng Yuqun, a postdoctoral colleague, presently a staff member (extreme left)



Photo 7.6 Together with students, outside the classroom building in SWUPL

Despedidas

Bi He and Liu Yanling organized a despedida (a going-away party) for me. They contacted the other students and arranged a get-together to mark my departure after my teaching assignment ended. When they held the despedida in a coffee shop in the university campus, I was struck by the students who no longer seemed reserved and were chatting away merrily.

I was touched by a small snack gift of dried tofu that one of the students gave me. She must have remembered my fondness for tofu, as I had commented on that and had tofu drinks (hot or cold) when I could (easily available in the three canteens in the campus and in the convenience stores like the 24/7 Lawson convenience store, which was just outside my apartment hotel). I thanked her for her kind thoughts. During our conversation – we were discussing about the different types of tofu – she explained that her mother had given her the dried tofu packets (a delicacy from her province) for snacking. Tofu is a wonderful food



Photo 7.7 Despedida with students at a coffee shop

item I have been brought up with in Singapore since my childhood days: I have always enjoyed it as food, drink, and dessert.

I was touched by the genuine thanks and sentiments from students who seemed to sparkle like shining stars. I had a flashback of the song “To Sir, with Love” (sung by Lulu at the end of the movie with the same title, which was one of my favorite films). The despedida was nostalgic for me, as the students expressed hopes that I return soon.

My second despedida was a farewell dinner organized by Dean Professor Zhang Xiaojun; my course coordinator, Associate Professor Yin Wei; and Dr. Meng Yuqun before my departure. It was good to connect with them before leaving. I had several meetings with them during my teaching period and enjoyed our interactions, including our massive open online course (MOOC) sessions. They suggested I conduct MOOC sessions during my classes, with a view to deliver learning content online about the course or a subject matter to any person who wants to take the course.

I was glad I took up the offer to do MOOCs, which required technicians to film the sessions, as these helped me reflect on how I could improve myself. Modern technology and the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown may limit face-to-face teaching, and that would be sad because the personal teacher-student relationships would be lost.

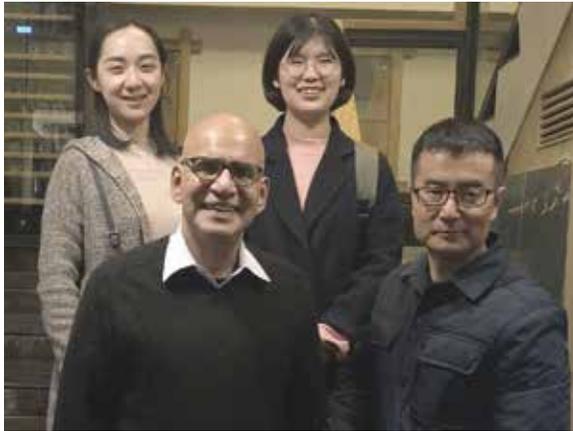


Photo 7.8 Farewell dinner with colleagues (from top left, clockwise: Dr. Meng Yuqun, Associate Professor Yin Wei, and Dean Professor Zhang Xiaojun)

8 My personal reactions

After one month of teaching, I left Chongqing and flew back to Manila, armed with postcards, pictures, brief visits made to nearby areas of interest, meetings with colleagues, and lots of memories. I then embarked on my mental journey with reflections and journal notes. Covid-19 struck in the early months of 2020, and my 2020 and 2021 visits to SWUPL were put on hold. During the intervening period, I took the opportunity to reflect, connect with, and discover myself. I still maintain contact with students and colleagues, and this keeps my research alive.

I embarked on a mental journey to address my personal reactions. These included (i) both excitement and fear of staying and teaching for one month in a new environment, (ii) help when I felt unwell during my first days, (iii) culture and other differences such as food and lifestyle, (iv) learning from rich cultural experiences outside the campus, and (v) experiencing the joy of sipping soya milk from my balcony. I sometimes drank my coffee with minibars of deliciously wicked dark chocolate, and feeling in a good state, I reflected. Sometimes, I had my favorite drink – soya milk – and relished it for its flavor and texture, which also brought back fond memories of my soya milk in Manila and Singapore. Sometimes, I wrote notes and journals and penned my thoughts and reflections.

Both excitement and fear of staying and teaching for one month in a new environment

I felt excitement in teaching for one full month, coupled with the fear and apprehension of staying and teaching in a new environment. Would I be able to survive for one straight month? The only person I knew when I arrived at SWUPL was Associate Professor Yin Wei, who met me at the airport (together with some students). I was very grateful to be welcomed by her. Every step after that first arrival was an experience in itself, for example, buying fruit, bread, soya milk, or coffee. Every step I took provided a narrative that took me by surprise (pleasant or otherwise), for example, communicating with passers-by when I was lost in the huge campus on my way to the classroom during my first days there.

Education and teaching are my passions, my activities. As poet Charles Lamb said, “Lawyers, I suppose, were children once,” which logically extends to teachers who were also children once. Although people are not born literate, many of us have parents and teachers who taught us to speak, read, and write. Education is important as it empowers minds that will conceive good thoughts and ideas. Education enables students to carry out an analysis while making life decisions. Nelson Mandela stated that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mandela, 1990). For me, the beginning of life is education or training. There is no end to it.

My teaching opportunity in SWUPL, Chongqing, was a decisive moment for me. I considered it a challenge I needed to undertake. I’ve been teaching elsewhere courses on Global Governance, and International Financial Institutions and Economic Development. My courses include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the New Development Bank (NDB). I teach in other countries like Australia, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Peru, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. However, for the first time, I taught this course to a Chinese-speaking audience, where students have Chinese as their main language of learning instruction.

So SWUPL in China was a new experience for me, with breaking frontiers, as the undergraduate students did not have English as their main language of instruction, though they were selected from a larger group that had better knowledge of English. Also, it was the first time the cohort had a foreign teacher (meaning non-Chinese) teaching in a language that was also foreign to them. Some students came from thousands of miles from Chongqing (in southwest China), as far away as Tieling in northeast China, and have to face major adjustments living in a city of more than 15 million people and sharing student accommodations for the first time at a young age of 18.

The combined excitement and fear of a new environment was an exhilarating and rewarding experience: the rich and foreign culture; the splendid and foreign food; the sociopolitical system; the excellent internet access, though I missed my access to Google, which I’m used to; the climate; and the young and eager students. I say foreign culture and foreign food because Chinese culture in China and Chinese food in Chongqing and Sichuan are so different from those in the Philippines, Singapore, and elsewhere like the United States.

I live in Manila, although I was born in Singapore and am a Singaporean. China is a huge country and is resplendent in many ways: In a way, it is a continent, with its sheer size and population (as the world’s most populous country). Development in China was incremental 30 years ago, but now it is spectacular. I speak some Mandarin, but again, Mandarin in China is very nasal and different from the Mandarin I hear in Singapore and Manila.

I have to be honest: I had initial settling-in problems. It was a comfort to confide in my coordinator, Associate Professor Yin Wei, and colleague Dr. Meng Yuqun, both of whom provided encouraging support. It was after a day or two that it hit me, and I realized I had to get out of my apprehension and look at

myself and my surroundings. Although I've felt lonely before, that was only a state of mind: I had no reason to be lonely and alone on this occasion. I had to interpret my new circumstance – being and teaching in Chongqing – with hope and positivism.

The university arranged my stay at Zhigu Yashe Hotel Apartment, but I had a room without a view. I felt stifled looking at a wall, but this problem was easily solved with the help from some friends and colleagues. My daily long walks were a sheer delight – they opened my mind and gave me an inner experience with nature, where I was part of everything around me. I dismissed my initial fears over teaching and how best to communicate by focusing on my strengths to discover and appreciate, dream and envision the best modes of teaching, design the teaching and connecting with students, and figure out how I could learn more and empower myself and others in the process.

It was also difficult to settle in SWUPL with the cold weather in March. I am used to warm weather and had not expected that it would be so cold as it was nearly spring! For the one month that I was there, I decked myself with thermal wear and, on many occasions, had a scarf and woolly hat to keep myself warm. Thankfully, with help from my colleagues, Craig Leung and Xia Lin (the postgraduate students), and Bi He and Liu Yanling (class monitors), I was assigned to a room with a delightful view. It was indeed a treat to have my room changed to one with a balcony! Even though it was cold in the balcony, I got some days of glorious sunshine and a spectacular view to marvel at from the 20th floor.



Photo 8.1a With Bi He (left) and Liu Yanling (right), two class monitors – initial days of my teaching



Photo 8.1b With Bi He (left) and Liu Yanling (right), two class monitors – final days of my teaching



Photo 8.2 (from left) Bi He, Craig Leung, Xia Lin, and Liu Yanling – the “Fabulous Four” who helped me settle in SWUPL



Photo 8.3 View from my room balcony overlooking part of the sprawling campus



Photo 8.4 Balcony of my room, feasting on the spectacular skyline of SWUPL and Chongqing



Photo 8.5 Panoramic view of the campus from my room balcony

Help when I felt unwell during my first days

I was ill for several days after my arrival in Chongqing. I had forgotten to bring my medical kit of backup medicines like paracetamol and imodium. Thankfully, Associate Professor Yin Wei and her colleague Dr. Meng Yuqun (now a staff member of SWUPL) checked with their medical friends and provided me with Chinese traditional medicine. Because I was cautious in buying medicines over the counter, it was a comfort to be able to check my medication with them first. I felt much better after a few days. Their care and concern touched me.

Culture and other differences such as food and lifestyle

The culture and other differences such as food and lifestyle also had an impact on me. Chongqing food, as exemplified by the pictures of hot pot and chili over fried pork, is unique from the rest of China. The hot and spicy food and the brains and eyes of the duck are eaten with relish (something that I am not used to, though I did try eating the brains!). If anything, I realized how eating exotic but delightful delicacies can vary from country to country.

For instance, in Singapore, spicy fish head with eyes and goat brain masala are eaten with great gusto (again, I avoid these popular dishes because of my sensitive palate, after having lived in the Philippines for more than 30 years). However, I loved the delicious and ubiquitous soya milk and other nonspicy food, such as the sumptuous, steamed broccoli and leafy green vegetables with steamed rice.

With my sensitive palate well primed, I became a great fan of many other local foods in the three very big student canteens on the campus. I enjoyed the Hong Kong-style wonton noodle soup and congee in my favorite Guangdong restaurant in SWUPL. I was one of their regular customers during my one-month sojourn. Almost every day, I made trips to Lawson, a ubiquitous convenience



Photo 8.6 Duck with brains and eyes and hot pot – some famous food sampled in Chongqing



Photo 8.7 Spicy food reigns supreme in Chongqing



Photo 8.8 A scrumptious food spread and the ubiquitous soya milk drink in Chengdu (food ordered by Li Changchen)



Photo 8.9 Simple and palatable food – steamed broccoli and steamed rice with turnip and soup

store found in many places in the sprawling campus, including one just outside my accommodation, for a quick fix of delicious soya milk (hot or cold). Chinese food was my power fuel: I loved its simplicity, variety, and flavor. More important, the food brought me back to my fond childhood days in Singapore, and the different and delicious types so easily available made me feel at home.



Photo 8.10 My favorite food dish – wonton noodle soup



Photo 8.11 Delightful congee – plain, tasty, and filling



Photo 8.12 Appetizing and delicious food ordered by Xia Lin in a Chongqing restaurant

Because the weather was very cold – the daily average ranged from 5 to 20 degrees Celsius – I was not able to swim (my favorite activity) at the closed swimming pool. I did not relish the thought of jogging either. When I looked for alternatives, I discovered that I enjoyed brisk walks in the campus grounds, as I could feast my eyes, body, and mind on nature and the infrastructure provided on campus. I also took the opportunity to resume my yoga and tai chi in my hotel room, and at times, I would practice in the balcony with a fantastic view beckoning me.

It was a sublime experience bestowing on me energy, spirit, and vitality to help me practice my sun salutation (*surya namaskar*) yoga pose: facing the sun and greeting it. In quiet moments, I simply reflected and meditated in the balcony and shut myself from the outside world. When I opened my eyes, I felt calmness overflow within me, and I brimmed with positive energy.

For my walks, I chose different routes in the sprawling campus to observe interesting sights such as the formal entry gate of SWUPL (which had the words in Chinese and English emblazoned on a big rock) and the huge, amazing book sculpture in front of the library. The book in stone had opened pages etched with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) in Chinese and English. I was equally impressed by the imposing statues bordering the library, including Roscoe Pound¹ and Montesquieu.²

I thought it was very empowering to have these persons singled out, as I had never seen anything like this before in my universities and in the other universities I taught in. I was curious and spent considerable time walking around to look at the various statues and remembering them for my reference. This small quest opened my eyes wider to learn more enjoyable experiences that fed and nourished my senses.



Photo 8.13 SWUPL library



Photo 8.14 SWUPL (in Chinese and English) carved on a rock at the campus entrance



Photo 8.15 The massive stone book fronting SWUPL library



Photo 8.16 Roscoe Pound, one of the statues surrounding SWUPL library

I loved walking the long and sometimes winding roads lined with trees, which were often deserted in the early hours of the morning or in the evening, and where flowers along the lake bloom in the spring. This scene brought me back memories of the host of golden daffodils beside the lake in William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." I felt at peace and calm, and I thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of nature that nourished my eyes.

I was also struck by the huge swimming pool (which was closed back then), the stadium, and the open-air arena that commanded a magnificent view of the campus. Although the official name for this open-air arena is Olympia musical square, the students lovingly call it Roman Square because they think its structure looks like the style of historic Roman architecture.³

The three big canteens were a sight to behold with their sheer size, and one of them was stunning – its flight of steps to the second floor gave the canteen a feeling of coziness for students to mingle and discuss. I enjoyed my meals at the canteens while savoring the local atmosphere. One night, I returned to my apartment and met some student colleagues who greeted me: I had not recognized them at first, and that meeting made me realize how easy it was for my students and others to know me!



Photo 8.17 One of the three spacious canteens in SWUPL campus: smartphones and orderliness prevail



Photo 8.18 Another amazing student canteen – doubling as a student study center



Photo 8.19 Resplendent trees in the campus – excellent pathways for walking and reflection



Photo 8.20 An enchanting stroll in the evening on the spacious campus grounds



Photo 8.21 Delights of SWUPL campus – gardens, pagoda, and lake near the library



Photo 8.22 Swimming pool in the campus – closed as the water was too cold



Photo 8.23 The grand open-air arena in the campus



Photo 8.24 Chance meeting with Craig Leung and his fellow students outside the 24/7 Lawson convenience store during my evening walk

These walks afforded me the tranquility I needed to just wander about, relishing the delights of the campus and simply viewing people and places. On one occasion, I came across a building that had many ping-pong tables, with many students playing table tennis. These walks filled me with pleasure and joy, because I could taste and imbibe the local flavor and appreciate the beauty of the campus that provided students with education and living.

The pleasures I got from my meals, walking tours, and the short trips outside the campus had an immense impact on me. I was uplifted. It also made me enjoy teaching, which is my passion, and, in the process, eradicated my initial fears. I found newfound joy in my new teaching opportunity, which by itself gave me an inner experience to make me happy and whole. Now, I have taken a step further and crossed boundaries, not just relying on traditional teaching to English-speaking students. It made me want to enjoy the experience. For me, that flow was so important for the activity I engaged in. Nothing else mattered.

By engaging in flow/the optimal experience, I became myself, I knew myself, and I creatively constructed myself. Of course, I did not do all this alone all at once – I needed to validate what I have done and the process I worked with. The feedback I got from the students was useful in preparing me to take stock and improve myself. Yoga and tai chi practices, regular meditations, and daily walks boosted my overall wellness and being, giving me a positive outlook to teaching.

Connecting with nature and the cherry blossoms in spring constantly triggered in me William Wordsworth's lines from "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud": "Then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils [cherry blossoms]." In Csikszentmihalyian terms, I feasted on the beauty of nature, foliage, and flowers, to have inner experience with nature, which made me happy. There was a visceral awakening in me, knowing I was present, in the here and now, and connected with nature and the world.

Learning from rich cultural experiences outside the campus

The few short trips I made outside the campus gave me an added stimulus. I'm glad I went out instead of spending the whole month within the huge campus. These trips provided a much-needed getaway and a pleasurable break from teaching. It also increased my awareness of Chinese history and culture and gave me a better understanding of the context I was situated in. Before this, my knowledge of China was limited to history books from my young school days in the 1960s and 1970s. I realized I knew so little of China!

I met new friends in SWUPL during my one-month stay in China who changed my life. These included Craig Leung, Xia Lin, and Li Changchen, who were postgraduate students at SWUPL. They were helpful guides whom I got to know better, and they introduced me to places outside the SWUPL campus: Chongqing, Chengdu, Dazu, and Leshan. I spent two weekends visiting these places. Other than these times, I was in SWUPL, happy with the huge and sprawling campus that bowled me over.

Chongqing offered me its magnificent Three Gorges Museum – or the Chongqing Museum. I was amazed to see its display of the Ba-era boat coffins, as Chongqing is believed to have been founded as the capital of the state of Ba in about 1000 BCE. Equally impressive, the city of Chengdu boasts of the Ba-Shu era, with 3,000 years' worth of history, becoming a capital during the Three Kingdoms (221 CE). My knowledge of Chinese history from early school days

44 *My personal reactions*

starts with the Shang dynasty (1600 BCE) and the famous oracle bones that I still remember because of my penchant for learning history, especially Chinese history. My thirst for Chinese history stems from my connection with Singapore, a melting pot of races and cultures.



Photo 8.25 The magnificent façade and entrance to the Three Gorges Museum, Chongqing



Photo 8.26 With Xia Lin (left) and Craig Leung (right) in Chongqing City Center outside the Three Gorges Museum

Chengdu delighted me with views of the world-famous Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding (Chengdu Panda Base); Wuhou Ci (a shrine from a military strategist from the Three Kingdoms period about 220–589 CE); and Du Fu Thatched Cottage, a famous Chinese poet from the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), which has been visited by many Chinese and foreign luminaries. I was struck by the Chengdu Panda Base and spent hours at this research and breeding facility for giant pandas and other rare animals. The facility opened in 1987 with six giant pandas from the wild. It has now raised over 100 giant pandas, with the aim of returning these animals to the wild.

My senses awoke to see the pandas alive and well (some were sleeping) and chewing arrow bamboo. Wuhou Ci has a pathway of bamboo trees by the side, and I loved the lined-up bamboos, as they brought me memories of the painting *Les Alyscamps* by Vincent van Gogh – a painting set in Arles, lined with poplars and stone sarcophagi. There is something dramatic with this simple setting that resonated with me: The mesmerizing walkway led to an amazing shrine.

Dazu dazzled me with caves and grottoes dating back to the Tang dynasty in the 7th century. Many statuarics came from the monk Baoding Shan shrine built



Photo 8.27 An unforgettable encounter with nature and learning about pandas in Chengdu Panda Base



Photo 8.28 Famous Jin Li Alley, Chengdu, and delectable mixed fried rice in a pineapple (with Li Changchen)



Photo 8.29 Dramatic pathway in Wouhou Ci, Chengdu



Photo 8.30 Du Fu Thatched Cottage, Chengdu (with Li Changchen)

in the 1200s. These statuarys combine elements from Confucianism, Daoism, and Indian Tantric Buddhism (which I am a little familiar with). The synthesis of these philosophies and religions fired up my imagination and recollections of other places I had visited elsewhere in Asia with similar environments including Cambodia, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia.

It was a sight to behold the 230-foot Dafo (Great Buddha) in Leshan, carved about 713 CE in sandstone cliff overlooking the confluence of three rivers. I walked up to the top to get a better view of the colossal statue and gawk at the three rivers meeting below, bathing the feet of the statue. Both Baoding Shan Dazu and Dafo Leshan are World Heritage sites, and I came across these places through a stroke of serendipity!



Photo 8.31 Mount Baoding Shan Dazu between Chongqing and Chengdu



Photo 8.32 Carvings in Mount Baoding Shan Dazu

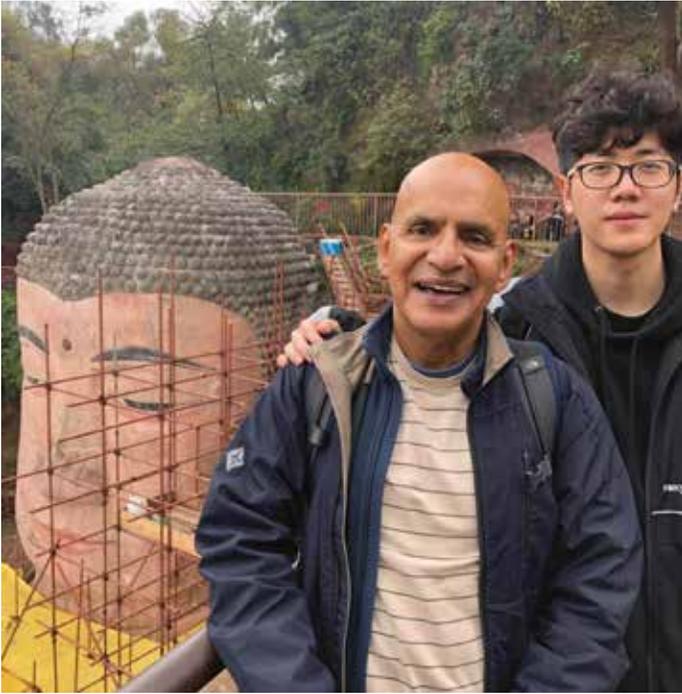


Photo 8.33 The towering Buddha (Dafo) statue in Leshan – with Li Changchen

Experiencing the joy of sipping soya milk from my balcony

I never experienced sipping soya milk from my balcony and viewing the panoramic setting of the campus before. It was pleasurable, and the simplicity of the activity astounded me. Changing my room to one with a view made such a difference to my frame of mind. Even though it was cold, it was far better to have a room with a balcony, where I could at least have fresh air if I wanted. I could soak in sunlight, sitting in my balcony chair, preparing my notes and marking papers, doing yoga and tai chi, or enjoying the panoramic and glorious view. I sat down in my balcony chair, sipped hot or cold soya milk, and admired the scenery while absorbing the atmosphere. This ambience helped me be in a state of calm, peace, and purpose.

It's probably from this balcony that I began to develop my model of what it was to feel the best of myself, seen through creativity, appreciative living, and *ikigai*, so I could bring out the best in me and make myself complete and purposeful. It was like finding the intersection of these three models – creativity, AI/AL, and *ikigai* – and in that intersection, I was immersed in a new light. This was the stepping stone that laid the foundation for my Matter-Ikigai-Creativity-Appreciative Inquiry/Living (MICAI) Intersection Model (see Figure 8.1).

The MICAI Intersection Model

There are five steps to use the MICAI Intersection Model: (1) focus on the matter (activity), for example, sipping soya milk and looking out at the panoramic view; (2) peeling the onion, for example, making new discoveries, such as the texture of the soya milk and the sights in front of you, such as the clouds, the weather, and the scenery; (3) using a toolkit of techniques to help you peel the onion, such as reflecting, feeling, and thinking; (4) using any or all of the three models – AI/AL, ikigai, and creativity – and merging the silos to enrich your experience; and (5) finding the intersection as large as you can to enjoy more positivity and well-being. I found that sipping soya milk and viewing the scenery in front of me gave me pleasure. I treasure this even though it was a small pleasure, as seeing the goodness of simple things wraps me up with positivity and well-being.

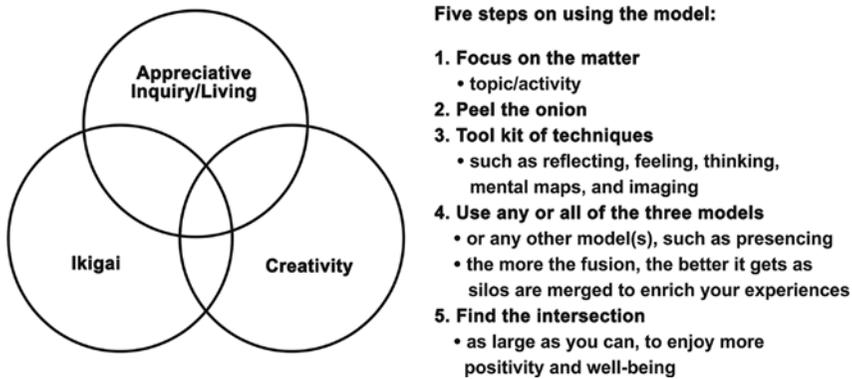


Figure 8.1 The MICAI Intersection Model (Suresh Nanwani)

There were other occasions I could also employ the five steps of the MICAI Intersection Model – sitting on the steps of the open-air arena in campus and marveling at the scenery, or sitting in the gardens at the lake next to the library and admiring the calm waters and the trees with flowers while focusing on a particular object. Because these delights nourished me, I'm glad SWUPL opened my eyes to a different world of looking at myself. There was an occasion when I asked a friend to do something similar, and I remember his elated feelings in carrying out this activity of focusing on a subject or matter such as a topic or idea. The five-step process requires concentration, but over time, this activity becomes easier and more enjoyable.

Notes

- 1 Roscoe Pound was the American legal scholar and educator, also a jurist and botanist. He was also a dean of Harvard Law School.
- 2 Montesquieu was a French political philosopher, judge, man of letters, and historian.
- 3 Email from Bi He to the author on December 26, 2021 (on file).

9 Stimulating reflections I gained from analyzing my framework

Armed with creative juices to teach well, I was in the flow after settling into the campus life. I realized I had to pull the curtains wide open to see my better self in my new surroundings. I needed to know I am in the “here and now,” and Chongqing and its environs captivated me. I appreciated feeling good; I was becoming certain about what I wanted to do (teach, enjoy the new surroundings, meet people) and acted in alignment by taking action, such as teaching and communicating more with students to understand them better and see how in turn I could improve myself.

I was a little “c” in creativity in this experience, nothing compared to the likes of Da Vinci and Botticelli, along with Csikszentmihalyi and Howard Gardner. But I went through my own creative process of (1) preparing for the new environment that arouses my curiosity and fear; (2) churning ideas around (what kind of pedagogy skills should be used to transmit knowledge effectively, etc.); (3) having insights and the aha! moment when I find I have struck the right chords in teaching; (4) evaluating whether the insight is worth pursuing; and (5) elaborating, which is akin to Thomas Edison’s reference of 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

I engaged in streams of consciousness in the sense that I narrated to myself happenings in the flow of thoughts in the minds of the students – for example, what would students say if I teach in a particular way, or how would they react if I teach in another way, similar to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (Literary Devices, n.d.)? I needed to change the mental model and see this alternative approach as an opportunity to change ideas, such as the view that “Chinese teachers give lessons and answer questions but they’ll never make sure that everybody is clear” and a non-Chinese teacher “taught me how to learn, how to think, and how to explore the world.” This view may have originated from the so-called traditional teaching style in China. While this model may work for some students, I believe it’s good to dispel stereotype perception by generating new and positive thinking.

I gave considerable thought to various models and theories. For example, should I follow the action research model (Kurt Lewin) of problem identification, consultation and data gathering, joint diagnosis of problem, joint action planning, data gathering and action, and feedback to client group? Or should

I adopt another approach? Although the client group was the university/school administration, I also needed to check with my students to see what we could do to make sure the lessons in English were successful and effective.

Alternatively, I could consider the general model of planned change by Cummings and Worley, which has four stages: (i) entering and contracting, (ii) diagnosing, (iii) planning and implementing change, and (iv) evaluating and institutionalizing change. However, I decided against this traditional approach of OD. In my view, it is better to focus on newer approaches, such as AI or Positive Organization Development (POD). These focus not on the problem but on the strengths and give rise to positive contributions for a win-win situation. My situation here was not that of the classic OD company scenario. It involved innovations to make changes better and more positive rather than reforming or changing the organization.

Other thoughts came to my mind. I could examine organizational power, communication, motivation, and leadership aspects, as this is an effective way of analyzing and synthesizing the issues. In this scenario, I am the teacher and the expert power broker. Although communication could be downward, I'd make sure it's also horizontal (lateral) for an effective delivery of lessons. My motivation would be self-satisfaction – that I am enriched in communicating with students whose main language is not English and be satisfied that they have benefited from my class. I would exercise leadership as a teacher and an active participant by encouraging student interaction to maximize benefits for the entire class.

Using Charlotte Shelton's quantum skills approach, I could strive for dynamism, continuous improvement, and constant learning, for example, devise plans, in coordination with the students, on finding ways to enhance the delivery of my lessons (Shelton, 2011). Maybe I should have asked the students to provide more PowerPoint presentations, thereby giving them more confidence in public speaking in front of their classmates. This would improve their English-speaking skills and, in the process, make them articulate and more confident.

Yet another thought came to mind – monitoring and evaluating through surveys, interviews, and other methods might be the best way to assess myself. By obtaining feedback, midway through and at the end of the seminar, I could improve myself in the future, when I teach in English to students whose main language is Mandarin (or another language). A sample student subject questionnaire could be used. I could also check with students, formally and informally, during the teaching assignment period, as this would be a good way to improve myself and make adjustments along the way.

The surveys might be informal or formal. I would make sure that the results of the surveys are shared equally with the students so that everyone would participate. This is also for the better delivery of education for the school administration, students, and myself. At this point, I am going beyond my teaching in SWUPL and looking at a wider picture, so I could refocus my attention on my teaching assignment at SWUPL. The questionnaire feedback I received was positive overall. My biggest takeaway was from the various student feedback, in the form of postcards and email communications. This is helpful, as there were some aspects that might not have been covered in the questionnaire, despite suggesting

Student Subject Questionnaire

International Financial Institutions

University:

Please fill in this questionnaire form **without indicating your name**. It will take about 10 minutes.

Please use X when answering the questions. You can provide more comments in page 2.

Please submit this form to the leader assigned in your class who will hand all the forms to the lecturer. The results are to help improve the subject delivery.

Thank you for your participation in taking the time to complete this form.

Best regards,

Suresh Nanwani, 15 February 2019

Please indicate program: Masters <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> PhD candidate <input type="checkbox"/> Others <input type="checkbox"/>	
If Others please indicate the program:	
Please indicate if full-time or part-time student :	Full-time <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time <input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
1. The structure of the subject was good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content of the subject was good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The pace of the class was good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Lecturer encouraged student participation and group discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Lecturer explained concepts and ideas in the class.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Lecturer helped my ability to learn independently in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Lecturer helped my understanding and skills in the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Lecturer stimulated my interest in the subject matter.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The quality of the lecturer's teaching was good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The structure of the course materials was good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The content of the course materials was useful.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The materials posted on the online learning resource e.g. Moodle, etc. were accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The teaching room and the teaching facilities were good.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The administrative staff were helpful.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/>

Photo 9.1 Sample student subject questionnaire

Comments

Please indicate any other comments about structure/content/pace of the subject course.

Please indicate any other learning experience for this subject course.

Please indicate any other comments about the lecturer.

Please indicate any other comments on the course materials, teaching facilities and administrative support.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Photo 9.1 (Continued)

topics and constructing a “model template” that I culled from the various universities I taught at and adjusted for my course subject.

A further thought excited me: to use AI and perform an AI-based SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) framework based on AI’s main proponents, Cooperrider and Srivastva. Using AI, I understood the organization to be a living, human construction, and I focused on positive outcomes for it to have a vision for the future, by identifying strengths rather than problems and deficiencies. The strengths support the positive stance of the university in ensuring that the *crème de la crème* (the best of the students) are given an opportunity to study in English and exposing students to a new and challenging environment with an inquiring mind instead of focusing on the problems (such as some students may have initial difficulties in speaking English).

The positive affirmation of these research tools builds on strengths – the students are motivated to learn more, and they will collaborate with one another and help one another study better as a team. The process benefits the students as a whole. It benefits the university, too, as it could offer a unique opportunity to students to study a subject in English. Students open their minds to a wider spectrum of learning, not just by the traditional rote of learning the answers without necessarily understanding, but asking and inquiring so they can think and also know or find the answers.

A final thought considers POD. POD seeks to understand what represents approaches to “the best of the human condition,” and the search is for best outcomes by viewing the organization through “appreciation, collaboration, virtuousness, and meaningfulness” than by “selfishness, manipulation, secrecy, and a single-minded focus on winning” (Cameron et al., 2003). POD includes positive psychology, with its main proponents Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and in this instance, the flow and creativity following Csikszentmihalyi.

Through flow and positive development such as AI, I wish to see my SWUPL activities result in innovation and enhanced student development, a win-win situation for all (students, university, and me as the teacher/OD practitioner). This would also contribute to the flourishing of humanity, which is the goal I see my teaching is headed.

10 Lessons I learned in the flourishing of humanity

I had extensive discussions and interactions with students and the academic staff at SWUPL, as well as academic colleagues, on creativity and other OD processes like AI. Through these interactions, I was able to enhance my experiential action research living theory. The following comments or ideas emerged during our discussions. While I agree with them, I have this caveat: There is always room for improvement, so getting feedback during and after each teaching assignment is valuable.

Process, delivery, and impact on the students

The students were apprehensive about second language learning because their first language is Mandarin and their knowledge of English was limited. It was a unique experience for them to be exposed to English instruction, to think in English (they had to think in Mandarin first, translate their thoughts into English, and use the dictionary or computer to find the equivalent word or expression), and to express themselves in English. It was also a learning experience for me to provide instruction and education to these students in English. I carried out, together with my students, an AI experience using the 4D cycle below. The outcome was that there were overall positive effects for us.

Discovery: Discovery was about appreciating that life is, and will be, better with the course taught in English, to improve the Chinese students' skills and knowledge. For example, some students wished to extend their horizons and work in international organizations where English or other languages are required or a distinct advantage. For me, it was a discovery on a journey to see that a subject can be taught in a language that is new to the students. The strengths included my will and the students' – we would communicate in English despite my limited knowledge of Mandarin and their unfamiliarity with conversational English – and our faith that both teacher and students would succeed in learning, with English as the mode of communication.

Dream, destiny, and design: The impacts, sustainability, and collaboration are summarized below. We realized that both sides had to learn from each other – patience was required on both sides – and the teacher/OD practitioner and the students all rose to a higher level, like doing a rock-climbing activity. While we

were hopeful, we had to tread carefully to give each side space, time, and patience in the process.

During the seminars, we used references and guides to help us. For example, students would refer to the computer for translating expressions from English to Mandarin, and I would choose keywords in Mandarin to make communication and teaching easier. I also had to learn, so I engaged with the students to find the Mandarin equivalent of certain keywords for the subject. I drew Table 10.1 as a guide, with my appreciation to Bi He and Liu Yanling, who worked out the tonal accents.

Using tonal accents sharpened my delivery of the keywords, which the students appreciated: In turn, I saw them more engaged, seizing opportunities to discuss more and cover other words not in the table but still relevant to the course. At times, I mispronounced some words, generating student laughter. This was good as it constituted engagement, and the students saw I was making an attempt to learn their language. Learning is more than acquiring knowledge; it is an enriching experience that feeds the mind.

By encouraging students to stand in front of the class and make PowerPoint presentations, I helped them gain confidence in speaking English before an audience. Some students were nervous and spoke haltingly in the beginning mainly because of fear and consciousness in speaking in front of the class, but by the end of the course, they were able to speak English with confidence. As this was the first time for almost all students to do so, it became an exhilarating experience for them. For example, a student commented, “I felt you paid more attention to me for the fact that you chose to ask me question in the class. And when answering the question, I found I that actually I could say something. After several times being asked, I gradually gained my confidence in speaking in English and I could even ask a question.”

Table 10.1 Keywords used to teach the subject (English and Mandarin)

<i>English word</i>	<i>Mandarin in Hànyǔ Pīnyīn</i>
lawyer	lǚ shī
law	fǎ lǚ
Asian Development Bank	yà zhōu fā zhǎn yín háng
poverty	pín qióng
project	jì huà
highway project	gāo sù gōng lù jì huà
corruption	fǔ bài
economic	jīng jì
World Bank	shì jiè yín háng
environment	huán jìng
president/chief executive officer	zhǔ xí
board of directors	dǒng shì huì
civil society	mín jiān tuán tǐ
civil society/nongovernment organization	fēi zhèng fǔ zǔ zhī
international	guó jì

Selecting students who needed extra help went a long way in bringing out the best in them: Some needed more help than others for a variety of reasons, like shyness or nervousness. If the net result of this effort was that the students broke out of their cocoons, then this is a positive development. I informed the students that I myself am not able to speak fluent Mandarin, so this gave them encouragement. To inspire them (and I meant it, too), I informed them that the students of today are the leaders for the future. This message made an impact on many students and inspired them to see their attitude to learning English and the subject as critical for their learning development and their life careers.

The students' PowerPoint presentations were amazing. I had mistakenly thought it would be difficult for them to make presentations, but how wrong I was! Technology was the students' forte, and I was struck by their presentations, train of thought, and delivery. They demonstrated passion, such as the animated display of a female student (Photo 10.1) and the seriousness of a male student (Photo 10.2).

Writing in English was also a challenge for the students. It became easier for them when they used the computer to understand how to use English expressions and express their thoughts in English. It was constructive and purposeful to meet up with them during meals and teatime. Not only did these allow



Photo 10.1 An animated student presenting in the class

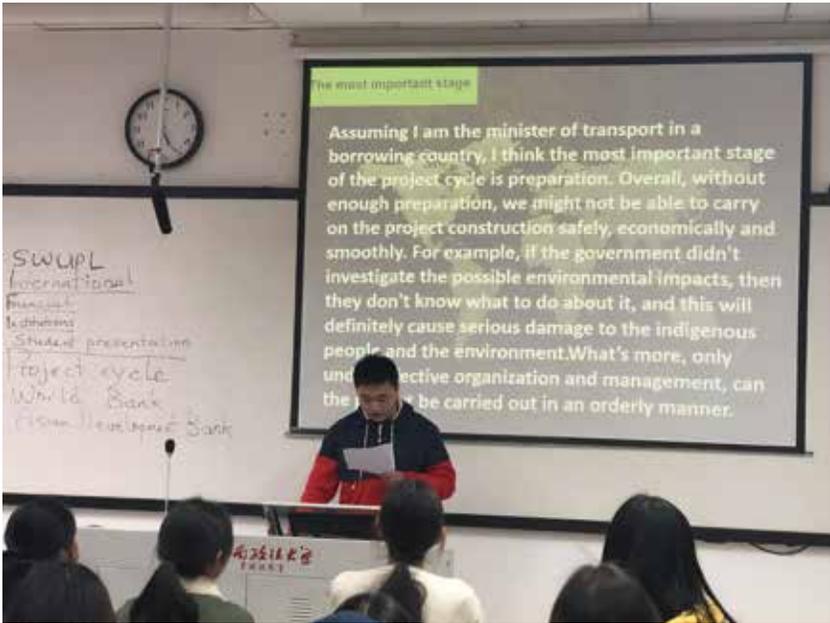


Photo 10.2 A student role-playing as the minister of transport in his presentation before his classmates



Photo 10.3 Another presentation by a student



Photo 10.4 Students listening attentively to a presentation

discussions but they also provided other venues to break down barriers and better engage with each other in order to build teacher-student relationships. I, too, had to learn some Mandarin to better communicate with them so that both students and I could empower ourselves. These occasions provided social bonding, hope, and inspiration. I had a student from Inner Mongolia who had problems in communicating – she was unable to follow the flow at the start of the class – but by coaching her, I helped her gain confidence. As seen in her comment: “I am less shy than ever before (at least I think it is). You are not only just my teacher, but also my sincere friend.”

Some students were better in English than others. There was a positive environment where these students helped those whose English knowledge was more limited, by encouraging them not to be afraid to speak up using English in class. The ensuing fellowship resulted in the removal of barriers among the students. They were ready to help one another, and this generated social bonding.

While the ideal was to teach the class fully in English, I realized that might not be the right approach – change is incremental, and over time, change can, and will, happen. Taking baby steps in implementing change was for the better – a win-win situation – for myself, the students, and the law school. More positive outcomes lay ahead after this experience, empowering me as a teacher and preparing me for more challenges. It also helped the students achieve greater heights and opportunities for more learning. One female student informed me in 2021 that she wished to start learning French, as she was inspired by her confidence in

speaking English the previous year. She hoped that by learning a new language, she could position herself better for a job in an international setting. I encouraged her to do so and, at her request, provided contact information on good French teaching schools in China, such as Alliance Française.

Being a change agent empowered me because I learned to see change as open-ended, complex, and a continuous process, given the social structure in China and the student-teacher relationship. Confucian principles, in China and elsewhere, are upheld with their application to social relationships, ethics, humanity, politics, and education. As Confucian approach to learning and education emphasizes humanity, the teacher-student relationship should be a two-way process. The teacher should engage with the students and, in the process, learn, just as the students learn through their interactions. Learning is a continuous process for me, even as a teacher – and learning can never be completed.

Using flow and creativity

I treasure these concepts of flow and creativity as I've been using them since my youth without realizing the significance of my thoughts and actions. These include my passion for reading in school, my love for literature and history, and the accompanying thirst to read more books of my favorite authors, poets, and playwrights (like Jane Austen, William Wordsworth, and William Shakespeare). I enjoy my work at international development and teaching and associated activities, focused on tasks in my own being, doing, and having. This passion continues through various channels – revising student course outlines, using styles of teaching to suit the context (seminars rather than lectures, interactive sessions, having more presentations from students for active learning), and redrafting sample student questionnaires – the experience is enjoyable, and it makes me happier when I see the students engaged and empowered.

Having an appreciative audience that gave positive feedback provided me more energy and flow. The student feedback “I not only learned knowledge, but also the truth: it's not terrible to make mistakes and it's important to learn from them” encouraged and stimulated me to engage in my flow and creativity.

I learned that I do not experience a state of flow alone because in an educational setting, communication and connection can work both ways (teacher and students). An example of this is a student's email to me on July 15, 2019, four months after I'd left China. She stated, “Bi He [a class monitor] sometimes sends your messages to us. I really appreciate that you are still caring about our study and life. Hope you will come back and give us another course in the future.”¹ Flow can also have a better impact if students in the class engage together and enjoy the flow better. This made me realize that connectivity was important – it was important for me to keep the students motivated and help them carry on with their remaining undergraduate years through regular contact.

With my increasing interest in flow and creativity, I learn more each day. I've found that my research supports observations that students achieved flow experiences more frequently in Montessori settings. Montessori is a method of education based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning, and collaborative play. In Montessori classrooms, children make creative choices in their learning, while the classroom and the highly trained teacher offer age-appropriate activities to guide the process (Montessori Northwest, n.d.). An article by Kevin Rathunde and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2005) illustrates this, supporting the observation that students achieved flow experience more frequently in Montessori settings than in traditional school environments. I am inspired to know more about research on flow and creativity and perhaps will try to assess in my future classes, through surveys or interviews, how flow is generated by my students.

Longer-term connections with Associate Professor Yin Wei (2019–2022)

I received positive feedback from my course coordinator in SWUPL in her email dated July 15, 2019. She also stated, “In addition, I received a message from the tutor of the 2018 pilot class. She kindly asked me to be invited again to teach them since she received very good feedback from her students. And many students missed you and said you teach very well! They have learnt a lot from you.”² Aside from supporting me during my teaching period in China, she also interacted with me in other ways through international law conferences that we participated face-to-face in 2019 (in Sydney). In 2020 and 2021, we maintained contact on SWUPL teaching and the students despite the challenges brought by Covid-19, and we had virtual meetings in conferences on international economic law (Sydney in 2020 and Scotland in 2021).

Rehearsal preparation for MOOCs

The rehearsals I taught for the MOOC program were interesting. I was fortunate to have the technicians guide me with their expert cues. I was very glad that both Associate Professor Yin Wei and Dr. Meng Yuqun provided me their professional views on how they found my presentations on topics selected to attract students to that specific topic or subject. I also watched myself on the video recording monitor to help me focus on various aspects: course topic, interpersonal communications, and effective communication and coordination between me and the listeners. This made me more aware of how I could better present myself while teaching. There were also simple cues I needed to remember (but were quite easy to forget), such as not folding my hands across my chest, not placing my hands in my pockets, keeping eye contact from one end of the class to the other, and not focusing on just a particular student (or students or area).



Photo 10.5 Friendly and helpful technicians at a trial MOOC session

Connecting with students and friends

My friendship with Craig Leung, Xia Lin, and Li Changchen has strengthened and continues till now. In March 2019, Craig Leung and Xia Lin were very excited to attend their first-ever student exchange program at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. They asked me many questions as they knew I came from Singapore and have visited Malaysia many times. I was happy to assist them with their queries. They were nervous because it was their first-ever student exchange program and foreign travel. They were thrilled to participate in the student exchange. They shared with me their experiences, including Xia Lin's memorable visit at the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya.

In June 2020, Craig and Xia Lin graduated from SWUPL with a Master's degree. Li Changchen graduated with his Master's degree in July 2021 because he took a different program. Craig now works as a lawyer in a private law firm in Guangzhou, while Xia Lin works in Chongqing in the law department of a state-owned enterprise (he initially worked in Wuhan right after his graduation). Li Changchen works in the legal affairs section of a company in Xian and has traveled to Kazakhstan for a business trip in December 2021 to work on contracts. His assignment there will be for about six months.

I am delighted that we still keep in touch with each other – we discuss their career paths and major celebratory events, such as the Chinese New Year and the Autumn Moon Festival. Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021 has brought us together, even though I didn't get the opportunity to go back to Chongqing.

In January 2022, I connected with Li Changchen by WeChat and inquired how he was doing in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, given the wave of violent unrest in the country. He assured me that he was managing fine and that he was still working from his office (which also serves as accommodation). He informed me that he keeps regular contact with his parents, especially his mother. As it is his first trip out of China (he is now 26 years old), I am very relieved that he is keeping well.

I was equally pleased to hear from Xia Lin that his four-month probation was successful. He was happy to be regularized as a staff member in the law department of the state-owned enterprise in Chongqing. He had to work very hard in the previous months, and I share his happiness that he now has a regular job and will be taking on more tasks to improve his work and career.



Photo 10.6 Craig Leung (holding the prize) and Xia Lin, with their female colleagues at the student exchange program



Photo 10.7 Xia Lin (extreme left) and Craig Leung (next to him) with their colleagues during the student exchange program



Photo 10.8 Xia Lin at the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya, Malaysia



Photo 10.9 Craig Leung (left) and Xia Lin (right) presenting in the student exchange program



Photo 10.10 Xia Lin during his graduation ceremony from SWUPL (June 2020)



Photo 10.11 Xia Lin in his office, Wuhan (July 2020)



Photo 10.12 Craig Leung attending his law firm's annual meeting in Jiangmen, Guangdong (January 2021)



Photo 10.13 Craig Leung at his law firm in Guangdong (December 2021)



Photo 10.14 Li Changchen enjoying the scenic delights of Xian on his day off (July 2021)



Photo 10.15 Li Changchen outside his office in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan (December 2021) – the office and accommodation are in the same building

As one student did not complete his undergraduate studies, the remaining 30 students will graduate in June 2022. I am happy to hear from Bi He, Liu Yanling, and the other students that they are doing well in their final year of undergraduate studies. We have maintained regular contact, and over the past three years, I observed that they are now more proficient in English. I am pleased that they continue to contact me to share their updates. Our discussions in 2019 was mostly focused on studies.

In many ways, Covid-19 has brought me and my students closer in 2020 and 2021. My students have offered to help me via WeChat on what I should do and what exercises I could do. One of my great takeaways from our discussions is “to do some exercises every day if I can, even if it is just for 20 minutes. Do not go out unless it is absolutely necessary to buy groceries. Wear a mask, always. Eat well especially vegetables and fruit.” I am touched by their words of encouragement and support. In March 2020, Elma, an academic colleague from Northwest University of Political Science and Law (NWUPL) in Xian,

offered to send me face masks if I needed them, as there were no stocks in Manila then. I knew I could somehow manage and did buy them later when stocks were available. But I was overwhelmed by her generous and thoughtful gesture.

Elma's action and the students' concerns struck a chord with me: I was grateful for their genuine and heartfelt reactions. There is compassion. This core quality also resonated in many peoples' stories on how they managed themselves together with their families in the Philippines during the first year of Covid-19 in 2020 (Nanwani & Loxley, 2021).

Broadening of my connections, including exchanges and career paths

In 2020 and 2021, my discussions with the students broadened to include professional, personal, and cultural exchanges. In 2021, there was a marked shift of discussion about our career paths. The general sentiment was that the students learned a lot and improved their English and appreciated the attention I gave them (WeChat text from Bi He of June 13, 2020). With the Delta coronavirus active in 2021, a student advised me: "I know the new Delta coronavirus is rampant overseas and makes the number of cases soar. I don't know whether you are safe and healthy but keeping social distance and wearing masks are always the urgent measures."

I was struck by Bi He's WeChat comment about 2020, something I agree with: "[The year] 2020 was a terrible year, full of pain, fear, but also hope and love." I think that is a fair summary of what happened during a "lost" year between the students and me: Although there were missed opportunities, there are hope and positivity that things will get better. It's very encouraging that many students will be carrying out postgraduate studies after graduating in June 2022 and have applied or are applying for places in various universities, within China and overseas.

The students I still regularly connect with (by WeChat and email) are Bi He, Liu Yanling, Li Xun, and Li Mengxuan. In May 2021, Li Mengxuan asked if I could support her application to pursue a Master's program in the United States or Europe (Leiden) with the same support I gave her during our class. I said yes – it was a pleasure to see that my students are mapping out their journeys and that I could help them choose their routes. She informed me: "I learned a lot from this course – about the functioning of various international financial institutions and so on. It was a great pleasure to take part in your course and it totally raises my interest in international law. Since then, I have done much additional study in international law and I think I have passion for research in international law. Therefore, I am planning to further study in LLM program in the U.S."

I submitted letters of recommendation supporting her applications to Johns Hopkins University and various universities in the United States and Europe.

I was struck when Li Mengxuan had written on her postcard that the course didn't interest her anymore (because she was more interested in politics and constitutions or other social sciences). But I'm glad she found her own path now. I'm very proud of her, as well as the other students, many of whom are applying for a Master's program in China or overseas.

In the last quarter of 2021, Liu Yanling was admitted to carry on postgraduate studies majoring in public international law in 2022. I am pleased to be part of what made her decide to apply for the course: "Your classes helped me broaden my horizon, and I know there are a number of international organizations which offer good job opportunities for students who are familiar with international law. That's why I chose international law as my major."³

Bi He informed me that in October 2021, he provided his study experiences at SWUPL to the new batch of first-year students at SWUPL. He said he felt great that he'd learned a lot over the past years and that he found my teaching has made him more confident in addressing "new students" that he was part of before.

Bi He will be heading to China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL) in Beijing in 2022 to major in economic law, with focus on domestic financial law. Joining him are other students, including Yu Xiaofeng and Li Xun, who will major in international economic law. Li Xun mentioned, "Looking back to the days in SWUPL, the course you gave is still unforgettable memory. Much knowledge you taught was mentioned in other courses later, and I found it will be much easier to learn that again. . . . Your course also influenced my choice in postgraduation education to some extent."⁴

Zhang Zhihan will pursue her postgraduate studies in Fudan University after her graduation in June 2022. Wang Lizhen, Lin Hai, and Zeng Xiaohan will, after their graduation in 2022, pursue their postgraduate studies in Tsinghua University, East China University of Political Science and Law (ECUPL), and Sichuan University, respectively. While Wang Shu has been admitted to SWUPL to continue her postgraduate studies, she also submitted applications overseas, such as to British universities.

As of January 2022, 9 of the 30 students in my class will carry out postgraduate studies in universities in China, and a few, including Li Mengxuan (Susan) and Li Xudong (Zeke), have applied to overseas universities. I have also helped other students who wished to discuss their options on postgraduate studies. I'm pleased that our connections are strong and vibrant. The students had their Chinese New Year celebrations in the end of January and early February and returned to SWUPL at the beginning of March. The future for all these students is very bright: They are eager to pursue their career paths, whether by postgraduate studies or working as lawyers in law firms or in companies or with the public authorities.



Photo 10.16 Students relaxing in the impressive open-air arena (December 2021)



Photo 10.17 Students giving the thumbs-up on their acceptance to postgraduate studies (December 2021): (from left) Bi He, Yu Xiaofeng, Liu Yanling, Li Xun, and Zhang Zhihan



Photo 10.18 Cheerful students at the open-air arena (December 2021)

Notes

- 1 Email from Li Xun to the author dated July 15, 2019 (on file).
- 2 Email from course coordinator, Associate Professor Yin Wei, to the author dated July 16, 2019 (on file).
- 3 Email from Liu Yanling to the author dated November 23, 2021 (on file).
- 4 Email from Li Xun to the author dated November 23, 2021 (on file).

11 Conclusion

I addressed the central question, “What is my key concern?” when it comes to my passion for teaching and learning, using my teaching experience in SWUPL in 2019. My one-month teaching assignment, followed by connections with students, colleagues, and friends from 2019 to January 2022, provided me with insights and lessons that I appreciate very much. I have generated my theory of learning to find “me” and “us” (my students, colleagues, and friends) in the community. My research and experiences answered the question: “How do I improve what I am doing in enhancing my educational influences in my pupils’ learning?” (Joy et al., 2019).

I found the process of spiraling referred to in the article by Joy, Huxtable, and Whitehead useful and relevant in enabling me to understand myself, what motivates me and my beliefs and values, and how I want to contribute to my own life and that of others. The seven areas highlighted by these writers encouraged me to creatively explore the aspects that define me (even though I read their article after my teaching assignment): community, inquiring mind, active learning, creativity, self-identity, problem-solving, and adventure.

My critical takeaway in this story is all about human connections. As I relate more with my students, colleagues, and friends, I see ourselves contributing our living values and understandings to the global communities who are also concerned with the flourishing of humanity. The Covid-19 times have in effect provided a hidden opportunity for everyone to bond more and not be trapped in our own worlds, by inquiring, learning, and studying more through intercultural understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect.

It turns out that action research has been carried out in China’s Experimental Center for Educational Research in Foreign Languages Teaching in Ningxia Teachers University in Ningxia, China, in December 2003. There has been some collaboration between the educational institutions there and other international groups, such as Professor Jean McNiff and Professor Jack Whitehead from the United Kingdom. However, the focus has been on work done as of June 2006, by English teachers of varying experience, who were helping students major in English and other languages to improve their learning. This includes Professor Moira Laidlaw’s teaching methodology class in educational action research in foreign languages teaching (Laidlaw, 2006).

There has been some action research between Professor Moira Laidlaw and Ningxia Guyuan Teachers College, and I hope that my story could be useful for furthering action research studies in China and for use in other areas, such as moving action research to activism with living theory research.

A living poster

I provide a living poster of the participants in my journey (students, friends, and colleagues) as global citizens who share photographs and comments to sustain and enlarge the entire community, to spread values and understandings that carry hope of human flourishing. These values and understandings include (1) active class participation and confidence-building during presentations; (2) social interactions and friendly connections; (3) the school motto – be learned and earnest, cultivate virtue, and think highly of law, which has been proudly recited to me by many students; (4) moving on to new pastures, including pursuing postgraduate studies (so far at least 9 of the 30 students, and many more are expected in 2022); and (5) different and additional values and understandings surface in unusual times such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

I use the living poster to understand myself, and I recognize the importance of the symbiotic “I-we” relationship, like the one between my students and myself. Another purpose of the poster is to improve myself as a teacher, with my core values of integrity, professionalism, and spirituality. Lastly, the living poster can show me how I can improve myself and others through encouragement and support, in the pursuit of human flourishing as our canopy.

I look forward to updating the living poster as the students continue to connect with me and one another while pursuing different career paths and options. In Covid-19 times, I can see different and additional values and understandings surface, such as (1) demonstrating empathy and compassion, (2) being aware of health and safety standards, and (3) displaying care. Online learning has changed the mental map in these disruptive times. We need to show resilience and adaptability due to health, safety, and internet connectivity issues through Zoom or other modes, for students who may be studying in areas with limited internet connections.

Also, if a student is unable to send in the essay due to valid health reasons, teachers should factor this in with care and compassion, as new values and understandings need to be accommodated. Nothing is static, more so in surreal times. I use these new yardsticks in current times in my online teaching, such as at the University of Wollongong, Australia; National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), West Bengal, India; Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PCUP), Peru; and University of Pretoria, South Africa.

In my online classes at the University of Pretoria in 2021, I was struck that human connections could also be strengthened by other modes of communication such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp. Ms. Joyce Mbaluto, a student I taught, thanked me and other teachers in her LinkedIn post of December 14, 2021. She

had graduated from the University of Pretoria upon successful completion of the LLM studies in International Trade and Investment Law. She found the LLM studies her most rewarding experience in 2021.

She informed me that she enjoyed her internship with a civil society organization after her graduation and that she is considering pursuing further studies on a PhD degree. I am delighted to have been both a teacher and a contributor to her future career path. The overall effect is the flourishing of humanity where we can now also connect through email and social apps. Human connections strengthen, and the student-teacher bond continues during the new normal.

80 Conclusion

A living poster from Suresh Nanwani, January 2022: Chongqing, China: Teaching at Southwest University of Political Science and Law (SWUPL) – values motivating and giving purpose for human flourishing

(1) active class participation and confidence-building during presentations



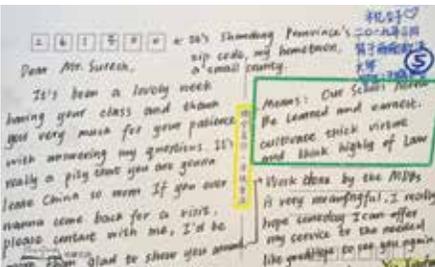
(2) social interactions and friendly connections



(3) School motto – be learned and earnest, cultivate virtue, and think highly of law (postcard)

(4) Moving on to pursue postgraduate studies

(5) Different and additional values and understandings surface in unusual times such as the Covid-19 pandemic



This story ends with research and findings that place emphasis on exploring the implications of asking and answering questions, such as “How do I improve what I am doing in living the values of human flourishing as fully as possible?” (Whitehead, 2020). With more scholarly research, I hope that there will be discussive and explorative themes offered to contribute to the spreading of global educational influences of living theory research.

I recall informing my students that knowledge should be shared with a wider audience, and a student (Liu Yanling) remarked that she was touched by my idea. This is important to me because it demonstrates that when a simple idea is put forward, it can be felt by the listener who agrees, and then it creates a ripple effect across the class. There is sharing and consensus, where many (or all) students are onboard, and this demonstrates a symbiotic relationship that is learning in life, and life-affirming, which in turn contributes to the flourishing of humanity.

For me, learning goes beyond the boundaries of teaching a specific subject or course. It is connecting with students and giving them reasons and opportunities to think further because the course does not end with the examination or assessment. The course lives on in their minds, as it may make students remember about the subject one day in their lives or propel them to pursue a further degree or a career with flashbacks on what they learned at school.

I do not view my classes merely on teaching quality but rather how I can improve my educational practice and provide educational influences to my students and friends and, in turn, contribute to the flourishing of humanity.

How I improve my practice as a teacher is a learning process, always with room for improvement, depending on the challenges. Covid-19 imposed barriers, but those impediments can be overcome through communication using social apps and, in other instances, by offering to teach online, which I did in 2021 for several universities.¹ Teaching requires patience and two-way communication. Although Covid-19 has disabled face-to-face teaching, it can still provide new opportunities for teaching and learning through dimensions not used in the traditional sense, such as Zoom and whiteboards.

I end my experiences in teaching with a quote from Csikszentmihalyi (2004): “A leader will find it difficult to articulate a coherent vision unless it expresses his core values, his basic identity . . . one must first embark on the formidable journey of self-discovery in order to create a vision with authentic soul.” The journey he refers to reminds me of a student’s comment: “Thank you for an *amazing and challenging journey*” (emphasis added). This amazing and challenging journey is not only the students’ but mine as well.

“While we teach, we learn” (Seneca). On learning, Confucius said, “I have never grown tired of learning, nor wearied in teaching others what I have learned.” Confucius viewed education as a means of transformation and the discovery of human nature. To improve myself, I must continuously learn by myself and with my fellow human beings for the sake of humanity.



Photo 11.1 Spacious walking paths in the campus decked by tall, stately trees



Photo 11.2 Feasting on the delights of nature during an evening walk



Photo 11.3 Splendid and striking front of SWUPL library

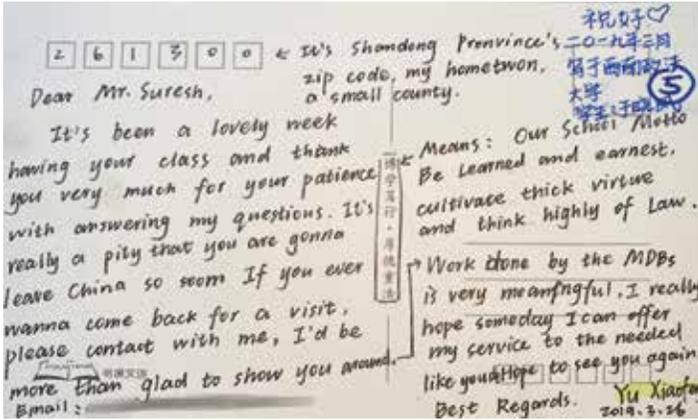


Photo 11.4 Postcard from Yu Xiaofeng

Note

- I taught online at Durham University in the United Kingdom, University College London, the University of Wollongong in Australia, the University of Pretoria, NUJS, and PCUP.

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Front cover photos: Southwest University of Political Science and Law library, and student class group

Back cover photos: from top, students at a social event, SWUPL campus, students in the open-air arena