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Learning powers the Human Spirit

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PQ + CQ > IQ

Passion Quotient + Curiosity Quotient can be more valuable than a high IQ.

Thomas L. Friedman

"Give me the kid with a passion to learn and a curiosity to discover and I will take him or her over the less passionate kid with a huge IQ every day of the week."

Thomas L Friedman

The past 100 days seen the world turning to digital solutions to live, learn, work, shop and play. Yet, digital is not king. The human spirit is! Learning powers the human spirit by unleashing our potential and honing our skills.

Many know that they live in an ever-changing world. Yet, what continues to catch them by surprise is the rapid speed of change and the need for prompt responses. CREATIVITY is the new literacy to navigate through the chaos, identify opportunities to tap and chart a plan to bring a dream to reality. If the human spirit is never static, then what kind of learning do we need to thrive?

In the late 1980s, I worked as a Polytechnic Lecturer in one of the only two polytechnics where I met academically strong and motivated students. Teaching was fun.

The Singapore government decided to build a third polytechnic and I left to join this clean slate. Being a new polytechnic with no track record, the student profile also comprised those who did not get into the polytechnic of their choice due to their less than stellar academic achievements. Yet, they made up for it with their pioneering, never-say-die spirits. Teaching was still fun. But, what shocked and disturbed me deeply was their poor performance at examinations.

At the same time, being a mother of two young kids taught me that no mother would ever give up on their kids. With that motivation, I embarked on the search for an alternative learning process that would bring out the best in my

students. The search connected me to the late Professor Howard S Barrows and Problem-Based Learning (PBL).

In a nutshell, PBL is about using real world problems that students care about to trigger their learning. At the onset of the learning process, students interpret what is given, and distinguish key facts from 'noise'. After this crucial step of critical thinking, they engage in creative thinking by exploring ideas. Magic happens when they also collaborate with one another to debate and further enhance their thinking. Based on their ideas, they identify their knowledge gaps and formulate their learning issues to enrich their knowledge before conducting self-directed learning. After learning, they assess and apply their knowledge to create real world solutions. Yet, their journey does not stop there. They seek feedback as part of the continuous improvement process to iterate upon their solutions.

The outcomes of PBL students are integrated knowledge that is applicable in a real-world context and 21st century skills comprising of critical and creative thinking, communication and collaboration. Hence, they are active citizens who learn, create and apply to ever-changing problems.

Blessed with an innovation grant from The Prime Minister's Office, my team and I adopted PBL at the Business School. Now, two decades later, I reconnected with these PBL graduates and am pleased to share that they are doing exceptionally well. They will be featured over the next few articles.

It really does not matter where one starts. It is where one ends up that matters. PBL as a dynamic learning approach spurs on the human spirit! How are you learning today?