Trading Teaching for Research?  
A Personal Testimony

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Torn between two lovers

“Torn between two lovers,  
feeling like a fool.  
Loving both of you is breaking  
all the rules.”

-- Excerpted from the song “Torn Between Two Lovers”
My 1997 story

• Low in research, and high in teaching and administration

• My lowest SFQ experience
  – Learning outcomes: 4.4/10
  – Interaction: 5.8/10
  – Individual help: 5.3/10
  – Organization and presentation: 4.9/10
  – Motivation: 4.5/10
  – Feedback: 4.5/10

One voice saying

• Teaching is a hindrance to my research progress.
• Teaching is not as highly valued as research.
• It does not worth my effort of teaching those who did not even care for themselves.
• The best strategy is to maximize research and minimize teaching.
Another voice saying

• I love and enjoy both teaching and research.
• I believe that teaching is a very powerful and effective means to help people.
• I am good at teaching, and could become a highly effective teacher if I want to.
• My academic integrity would be compromised if I trade teaching for research.

I was tired of teaching

• Symptoms of tiredness?
• Not because
  – There were too many courses to teach.
  – Teaching was not considered important.
  – The quality of the students was dropping.
• But because
  – I was overwhelmed with different demands.
  – I was losing the meaning of teaching.
  – I had not renewed my passion for teaching.
Renewing my passion for teaching

• Conviction reaffirmed: teaching can make a marked difference in people’s lives.

• Secure enough time for quality teaching (and research).
  – First things first
  – Best tasks verses good tasks

• Persevere and mature throughout the process.

The immediate turning point

• Took up all the tutorials.

• Divided students into two groups: weak (35) and not-so-weak (24).

• Conducted additional 2-hr weekly tutorials for the weaker group.
  – Made up for the term 1 material.
  – Supplemented for the term 2 material.
My second lowest SFQ experience

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Exam results

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Impact on my teaching

- Deepened my conviction for teaching.
- Developed and articulated my own teaching philosophy, style, and approaches.
- Enjoyed my teaching and my students (SFQ-free teaching)
- Impacted on my students in various ways.

A final note to my students

- Some of you have done “unexpectedly” well in the exams, ...
- Overall, I am very pleased with your participation and effort put into this class.
- I hope I can do even better next year and your feedbacks will definitely help me do that.
- I hope that the effort and time that you spent in this subject mean something to you.
- I also hope that you remember the importance of the I word.
- One thing I would like to request from you: say hi whenever we meet on campus or elsewhere.
A student’s response to my note

• “You are the first lecturer, as far as I know, who remembers all the classmates’ names and really concerns students.”
• “You are also the first lecturer who ‘dare’ to make an open book exam.”
• “You are also one of the lecturers who can keep my attendance throughout the semester.”
• “Keep on your good work and make an even better lesson next semester.”

Impact on my research

• “Slowed down” my research.
• “Slowed down” my research for a healthy, long-term growth.
• Attracted like-minded RS and RA.
• Enjoyed teaching my RS and RA.
• Two CERG grants awarded, and steady research publications
Discrepancies between the two

- Different sets of skills (internal)
- Different kinds of motivation (internal)
- Different levels of control (external)
- Different evaluation criteria (external)
- Different types of recognition (external)

Harmonizing the two

- Teach and research in the “same” field.
- Teach thoroughly
  - Discover research problems.
- Teach fundamentally
  - Build up a solid foundation for further research.
- Teach non-defensively
  - Open to new ideas and criticism
- Teach honestly
A postlude

• What is teaching?
  – Teaching in research
  – Research in teaching
• Not one for the other, but two for each other.
• The two will get along better, not worse.
• Harmonizing the two does not imply an equal time allocation.
  – Strategies to excel in both

Torn between two lovers

“I couldn't really blame you if you turned and walked away.
But with everything I feel inside,
I'm asking you to stay.”

-- Excerpted from the song “Torn Between Two Lovers”