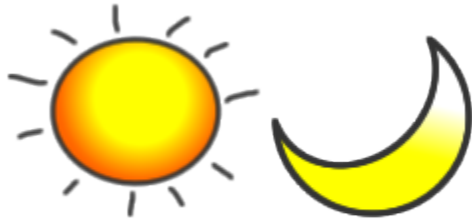


## Introduction to Passion versus Pragmatism



### **PASSION VS PRAGMATISM**

As Aristotle once said "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth". The truth within this statement cannot be doubted. The importance and role of education in society cannot be stressed enough. The scope that education encompasses has no boundaries: Science, mathematics, history, geography, literature, and just about any known subject in the history of mankind.

Passion and pragmatism are opposing forces to each other. A good education consists of a balance between the two, however in today's fast paced world, we feel that there is a distortion of importance and perception in this balance.

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#### **What is Passion?**

According to the dictionary, passion is 'a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything', such as a passion for music. It is a powerful emotion and is synonymous with devotion and dedication.

#### **What are you passionate about?**

What drives you and motivates you is very often your passion. Some of us live and breathe passion. We see our worlds through coloured lenses that excite us with brilliant colours beyond one's imagination. However, there are also others who doesn't have a passion for anything at all. They go through the motions of everyday life, not looking forward to anything and having nothing to look forward to.

#### **What would you do for your PASSION?**

It is a choice not everyone dares to make. The choice to walk down a path less travelled. The decision to pursue your passion wholeheartedly and forego your education or your job. What would make you choose one over the other?

## **What is Pragmatism?**

William James is the most famous philosopher of Pragmatism and he is the one who made Pragmatism itself famous. To him, Pragmatism was all about value and morality and he argued that ideas and beliefs have value to us only when they work. "Ideas become true just so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience."

## **Should we practice pragmatism?**

It is a question of being practical or idealistic. Should we choose practical options simply because we know they work so they have value to us? Or should we follow our ideals and take a chance in life?

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## **Passion vs Pragmatism**

In a world where paper qualifications adorn more than bling blings, many come to a cross junction in life where they wonder which way they should go. Is it to continue their education in a course acknowledged by the world as 'the right thing to do' or to turn their backs on society and shout 'I will not conform!'? There are many examples and testimonies of people whose lives are vastly changed because of their passion or their decision to be pragmatic about their education. What boils down is the fact that each is right in his own way, with their successes proving so. There is indeed no right or wrong in choosing passion over pragmatism and vice versa.

## **Differing Perspectives**

First and foremost, education is crucial to a nation's economy. The type of goods and services that a country produces would depend on how educated its people are.

Just look at technologically-advanced Japan as a fine example. Japan has one of the world's best-educated populations, with 100% enrolment in compulsory grades and 99.0% literacy rate.

While not compulsory, high school (kougou) enrolment is over 96% nationwide and nearly 100% in the cities. About 46% of all high school graduates go on to university or junior college. Hence, it is not difficult to see how a country that emphasizes on education would be able to produce high quality and technologically-advanced products.

Socially, education also plays an integral role in passing down of the morals and codes of conduct within the community from the old to the young. This passing down of social values is crucial to maintaining the moral fabric of which binds society together. The history of China shows us how through the teachings of Confucius and other great teachers, moral values are taught through the generations and still prevail in today's modern society. On the other hand, in a multi-racial country like Singapore, maintaining racial harmony and cohesion is a delicate task. However, through the well-structured education system, the Singapore Government has successfully infused the right values in its people .

At an individual level, education enables one to move up the social ladder and gain greater acceptance. For many, education opens doors that are otherwise inaccessible to them.

Education in its essence comprises of two things: Passion and Pragmatism. Passion is the fuel that drives imagination and creativity, the force that pushes against convention, the doubt that causes us to seek the truth. The Wright brothers were so passionate about flying that they invented and built the world's first airplane. They proved that human flight was possible despite criticism from naysayers. Pragmatism, in contrast to the idealism of Passion, focuses on realism and practicality. Pragmatism in education would translate to whether the skills and subjects taught are relevant and useful to the student.

Passion and pragmatism are opposing forces to each other. A good education consists of a balance between the two, however in today's fast paced world, we feel that there is a distortion of importance and perception in this balance.

Pragmatism is seen as the favorable among the two. Take for example a business degree versus a liberal arts degree. An employer would prefer to hire someone with the business degree as the skill sets related to business would be more relevant and applicable to work.

However, not everyone who has the right qualifications have the right attitude for the job. It all boils down to whether you have the passion for the job or not.

Being pragmatic may seem the right and obvious choice when it comes to education, unfortunately, that pragmatism is not enough to sustain the job. What will keep one going on and on is the passion that one feels. With that same passion comes the right motivation to constant seek to improve oneself and to persevere till the very end no matter how long and hard the path may be.

Looking at the lives of Bruce Lee and Lance Armstrong (please refer to their biographies), in their own ways, they each sacrificed what was pragmatic in the eyes of society to pursue their dreams. Dreams which would eventually take them to heights never reached by anyone before, making them the legends they are today.

### Yin Hao's View



"As a regular individual living in the age of computers and multimedia, I was fascinated by technology as a kid. I wanted to be a part of it and learn how to create applications, assemble a personal computer as well as troubleshoot computer-related problems. I guess that as my parents are very supportive of me and grant me the flexibility to choose any path of education I desire, I end up enrolling in the Diploma in Information Technology. However, not everyone is as fortunate as I am. Many are forced to give up their passion to pursue practical skills, due to reasons such as family objections and living circumstances.

From this competition, I realised that I tend to only think in one direction. Many a times, I did not realise that there are many different point of view to a problem, neglecting other area of thoughts. However, after attending brainstorming sessions with my teammates, I managed to change, and start approaching our problem from different perspectives. In addition, I have learnt how to create and manage online surveys and polls, mingle with teammates from different classes and countries, and contributed ideas to generate a well-formed argument for the competition."

## Daniel's View



"Before I step into the IT Industry, I have studied for at least 10 years. Throughout these 10 years of education, just like most of the other students in Singapore, I have gone through at least the basic education, 6 years of primary school (elementary school) and 4 years of secondary schools (high school). I was asking myself why everyone needs spends at least 10 years of their life studying, base on the fact that I did not really apply most of what I have learn during the past years in what I am doing right now. My query was cleared when I asked my parents; they gave me a simple answer: "It's for your own good."

Coming to think of it, I began to realize the importance of this education. We need to build up our basic foundation and these foundations will help us not only when we start our career after education, and to have a better communication with different people in the work place. Now, that I have completed my basic education, my parents gave me the choice of choosing which path to go, as for me, I chose the IT industry because I have the interest in learning about the new technology itself and become a great technician in the future."

## Leo's View



"Passion or pragmatism? This is a question with no definite answer. No one can argue which outweighs the other. It is an individual decision, a decision that one makes bearing all costs and consequences.

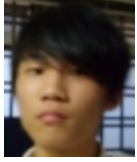
One cannot even start to measure the pros and cons of each. Should we pursue our passion, live and breathe on it? Or should we be more pragmatic and realistic and choose something 'wiser'? There are just so many testimonies of people from both factions who have found success in what they do. Eventually, it boils down to how long our passion can sustain us or how long our pragmatism can motivate us.

There is a saying that man does not live on bread alone. Can man live on passion alone? Or pragmatism? Questions after questions would be raised from one generation to the next. The conclusion? It is up to each of us to discover.

Personally, it is best to strike a balance between the two. To pursue a passion which somehow turns out to be a pragmatic choice as well. Can we all achieve the best of both worlds? Perhaps not all of us would be so fortunate to have the opportunity to run after our dreams where our dreams are most realistic and pragmatic. The few of us who do would perhaps find the flame burning strong year after year. But for some, their dreams will fade away, pushed into the deepest of their conscious, never to surface again.

Whichever path one takes, much consideration and thought have to be put in it. Time is unforgiving. We do not have the luxury of choosing again. We just have to live with our choices. Make the right choice today!"

## Chun You's View



"In my personal view, I feel that both *passion* and *pragmatism* are just as important as it would be either impractical or too unloving of yourself to do without any one of these two factors.

Take myself for example – I, for one can be definitely considered as a pragmatic person. Although web designing and programming are my interests, I am basically interested in learning any new skill that's able to benefit me financially.

For that, learning new practical skills to boost my earning power became both a hobby and a pragmatic approach. Eventually, I've picked up many new skills also due to interest. Now, I've acquired skills such as domain name registration and marketing, designing (it's never ending – still gonna learn Adobe Illustrator), web hosting, article-writing skills, basic laws and even more programming languages (PHP, Javascript, AJAX), and I enjoy doing so.

Vice versa and ironically, I exercise my favourite sports such as long-distance cycling and badminton **only when I feel the need** to take a break from stress – In a way, I consider this my pragmatic approach in carrying out my passion. Until today I'm not sure whether I'm more towards 'Passion' or 'Pragmatism'. Well, I guess it's still best that I'm thriving for a balance between this two. "

## Louis' View



"Passion VS Pragmatism in education, is it too much to ask for both? Personally I'm inclined to choose passion over pragmatism for a very simple reason: Interest. Why bother to do learn something that one does not have interest in? The fact of the matter is we live only once, why waste time doing the things that we dislike? The other side of the argument would take a practical stand and ask "Why learn something that cannot help you make a living? After all one still needs shelter and food." The problem here is that one's interest and passion will change over time, so do the skills required for work. Just look at the speed that which technology is advancing, some skills will undoubtedly be rendered obsolete.

In today's world, where everything is changing rapidly, I believe that an education should reflect the changing times, striking a balance between passion and pragmatism. The only question is how? Society's preference for the prestigious and lucrative jobs has to change. In my opinion, an ideal education should provide a basic core set of skills that would allow an individual to sufficiently work and earn a living. Students should be given ample exposure to various subjects so that they can find out what they prefer. Education institutions could also help match students' passions with suitable work. I strongly believe that it is possible for an individual's passion and work to be aligned together."

## Interviews

In an attempt to know more about public's opinion, we have conducted interviews with several of our school lecturers to find out more about their opinions on Passion vs Pragmatism.

### Mr Yeak Shaw Wen

Temasek Polytechnic IT course coordinator, working in TP going to 10 years  
Born in Malaysia, currently Singapore Permanent Resident

**Interview title:** Education – Passion vs Pragmatism

#### 1) Can you tell me about yourself? (What you enjoy doing? Passion?)

- Love to try out new things
- Seeing happiness in others, seeing others succeed
- Love collect stamps, taking photos

#### 2) Do you choose your choice of studying | working for pragmatic or passion reason?

- Took computer science when young because didn't have any other choices
- Now teaching IT related subjects because that's what his trained for
- If stop working for TP, may still be looking for a job related to teaching even though it's not IT, reason because like to see students learn something useful for their life

#### 2b) If you're jobless, you will still find something related to teaching even though the pay is awesomely low?

- Stated that started teaching with a RM880 a month teaching in KL after he graduated
- Continued working in college he graduated from, next job was also teaching, however 3rd job was not teaching because he had to get to his 4th job, and had no choice but to get some industrial experience
- Teaching in TP is his 4th job

If 2) choice is passion,

#### 3) Why do you pursue your passion? Is there anyone or factor that prompted you to make that choice?

- Enjoying seeing students learning useful things for their life, after starting teaching career, seen many happy faces, many successful individuals, makes him feels that he have serve a good cause in his life, doing something useful in life.
- Father, was a teacher, reason is because he want to do a better job than him

**4) Do you think that pursuing of your passion has paid off? Why and why not?**

- No end to this path, have seen 27 pointers graduate with gold medal, seen repeaters graduate, seen students found job successfully, doing well in their career, with these, his job has been fruitful.

**5) Do you think that passion is dominant over pragmatism nowadays?**

- For many people, bread and butter is important, however he is fortunate, not the only sole bread winner of the family, wife has a higher pay than him, so he can continue with his passion. Not everyone is lucky
- As from a teacher point of view, he feels that students nowadays, took up courses they had no choice, based on his own care group
- Taking his care group C195 into consideration, they are highly motivated and mostly chose IT because they believed in IT; however he feels that they may not be that passionate, but under circumstances have to force them to take it.
- Most importantly, they believe they can do well and work hard to make sure they reach their goals and they believe IT is the path to go.

**6) Do you have any advice for those people pursuing their own passion?**

- Do what you like, if those people have interest in what they are doing, then they are not working, they are just doing something that they like.
- Same goes for pragmatism.

**Ms Feng Yeli**

Temasek Polytechnic IT School Lecturer

**Interview title:** Education – Passion vs Pragmatism

**1) Can you tell me about yourself? (What you enjoy doing? Passion?)**

- Interest – IT development / financial investment
- Hobbies – Gym, body shaping, online surfing

**2) Do you choose your choice of working for pragmatic or passion reason?**

- Both pragmatic and passion, feels that passion as stand alone, not so simple, yet not so complicated, no distinction between passion or pragmatism, aim for balanced, mainly the job must be of her interest and have some earning power
- Interest – have interest in part of the work, (working as IT lecturer, interested in IT development)
- Survival – a reasonable income for personal lifestyle
- Economic & job marketing environment – During the financial crisis, one cannot heavily depend on the type of job if you are pursuing your own passion. Try out other different type of jobs, if really no choice, go for any one of the jobs that are available and wait for the crisis to turn over. Slowly try out different type of jobs until you get one that you really like and stick with it.
- Side: Neutral

**3) Do you think that pursuing of your passion has paid off? Why and why not?**

- Teaching is still rather new to her, she has accumulated experiences over few months of teaching
- Learn how to communicate well with teenagers
- Know more about local culture

**4) Do you think that passion is dominant over pragmatism nowadays?**

- Balanced, no side is dominant over any side.
- During early 20s, 30s to 40s, many different people has different focus, people tend to choose

**5) Do you have any advice for those people pursuing their own passion?**

- Case by case basis
- When you're young, there's financial support, go ahead for passion before the time where you don't have the chance to go after your own passion.
- If passion is unrealistic, and you need to invest a lot of time in it, neglecting your work, it's a risk path, so choose wisely, identify interest never choose a job with no interest in it.

**6) Do you have any advice for those people pursuing pragmatism?**

- Don't want to give wrong direction
- Low personal interest = tendency to give up
- General advice – for work and for money
- Consider reasonable factors which satisfy your personal interest (which must be acceptable realistic)
- **Final quote – Luck + hard work = success, you reap what you sow.**