

StoryTUMing

When I was a child, my grandfather told me we would calculate the height of our large tree in the garden without having to climb it! We measured the length from the living room window to the tree and the height of the window. Then my task was to position my eyes at the bottom of the window and move backwards until the tree fits exactly into the window. Once I reached that point, my grandfather measured the distance from my eyes to the window. Now we had all the values needed to calculate the height of the tree! Dividing the height of the window with my distance to it and multiplying that value with the distance from me to the tree gave us the height of the tree! For young me, this was an astounding experience to use math like that! The concept behind it, you might have guessed already, is Thales' theorem (Strahlensatz/Vierstreckensatz in German). Later in school, math-tasks related to this were super easy and exciting for me.

From talking to fellow students and friends, my impression is that the majority of us can tell these kinds of stories when being asked for moments of overcoming mental obstacles, moments of really clicking with something that might have been difficult to wrap one's mind around. I would love to bring more of these treasures out into the light to share and appreciate them! Helpful analogies, visual concepts, links to brilliant online resources, absurd practical examples... everything that helped you at some point in your studies to advance your understanding! In a lot of lectures, snippets like this are fortunately already included. However, for visual learners like myself it could be a lot more. Plus, crowdsourcing multiple "insight-angles" on the same concepts might turn out to be helpful for an array of different learning-types.

In that sense I want to encourage the conception of an (online) campaign inviting to collect these stories for creative display in an university-wide exhibition of some sorts. Turning the countless invisible cognitive nuggets floating in the underground of students minds inside out to illuminate them wide and far. All types of media should be supported in the submissions to allow each person to find their most suitable format for expressing themselves.

I believe focusing on the actual cognitive process of studying in that way would set a very constructive and personal tone - counterbalancing external stimuli like being in an excellence-university, getting good grades etc. TUM could show a seemingly soft side with this courageous act that can unfold so much vigour in the long term. Improving teaching seems to be something that is always happening in the background and universities have large budgets for it, rightfully so. But from a students perspective these processes might be perceived rather slow or not at all. A campaign like this would be a widely perceived event with positive repercussions into the social fabric and minds of students and university staff alike. Seeing, reading and hearing through these stories I imagine to be an entertaining and touching experience. The story from a fellow student might inspire me to talk more in depth about it with them. Other stories will add amazing aspects to things I already understood, others will help me out where I am currently blocked, yet others will be so compelling that I will want to read up on the subject. Parents-to-be might feel inspired to strive for creating more didactically valuable moments of insights for their children. Knowing that so many others also have funny ways to remember things might encourage me to seek more exchange about helpful cognitive resources. Lecturers might feel inspired to adopt some of the content for their lectures.