

TEACHER AS A MOTIVATOR

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Education, in its multidimensional form, is the basis for the “culture” of a civilized society. Developing one’s own intellect, mind and the spirit through proper education is every individual’s right, and even responsibility, towards becoming a contributing and productive citizen of a truly sustainable society. Imparting relevant information to a knowledge-seeker, the Vidyaarathi, enabling him to convert information into knowledge through experiential training, imbuing in him human and social values, and thus empowering him to positively transform himself and the society at large, is the duty of a true teacher, the Guru, the dispeller of ignorance and darkness. The Guru-Vidyaarathi interaction, basically the “teaching learning process” (TLP) is the foundation on which the superstructure of a sustainable society is built. The role of teachers in the development of a sustainable society is thus crucial. According to Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, knowledge is the supreme goal in one’s life and therefore teachers should consider themselves involved in a “sacred pursuit”, not just a profession or a business or a means of livelihood, but one of transforming the individual, with the sole objective of societal advancement through individual advancement. This stands in stark contrast to the modern attempts at referring to the teacher as a mere facilitator, trivializing the entire teaching learning process to one of dry cognitive intercourse. Mere availability and easy accessibility of information through all kinds of modern technology and the facilitation by the facilitator cannot lead to true learning. Comprehension and internalization of the information can happen only through intense, exciting and passionate personal interaction with a “live” teacher who has concern for the student’s learning.

It is a major responsibility, indeed the duty, of a teacher to make the teaching learning process Effective, Efficient and Enjoyable. Effectiveness refers to how much and how well the student has learned, efficiency refers to the time, effort and energy spent in the process, and enjoyment is the positive psychological and emotional state of mind during and at the end of the teaching learning process. One may call this the basic 3-E criteria of the TLP. The maximization of these three criteria is the goal of good teaching. There is a certain responsibility also on the part of the students to make this happen. This can happen only if there is a continuous “positive engagement” between the teacher and student throughout the teaching learning process, inside and outside of the classroom. Research has established that the two essential tools for such an engagement are motivation and appropriate teaching learning techniques/strategies.

Motivation is an invisible, inner, natural, and compelling urge to attain a desired goal and to excel in whatever that one is involved in doing. It is a psychological feature which arouses, sustains and regulates human behavior to accomplish a set objective. It is an intuitive feeling, an emotional characteristic inherent in a human being, and cannot be easily measured, if at all. But still one can speak of an intensity, a level or a degree of motivation, at least in a qualitative way.

It is easily recognized that in a class room, teaching and learning is a simultaneous process. It is said that learning can happen without teaching, but teaching cannot be said to have happened if simultaneously learning has not occurred in the student. Teaching not only helps the student to learn, but a great beneficiary of teaching is the teacher himself. It is the experience of all teachers that continued teaching of a subject over a period of time enhances their knowledge about the subject, sustained interaction with students of diverse intellectual and emotional characteristics in the class room being a great contributor.

Thus teaching by the teacher, learning by the student, and enhanced self-learning by the teacher is a three-in-one process. This continuous self-learning by the teacher in the overall teaching learning process should be an intrinsic motivator for the teacher who in turn can leverage it to motivate his students in the learning process.

The primary task of a teacher is to make the student learn. One of the most common and universal complaints about the students is that “they are not motivated to learn”. While this has some truth in it with different degrees of applicability to different student groups, a question that also needs to be raised is “Are the teachers motivated to teach”? Teaching to students without motivation is tough. But learning from a teacher without motivation is frustrating. One can argue about whether it is the responsibility of the student himself to be motivated for his learning or whether the teacher has a role and/or the responsibility of inculcating the spirit of motivation in students, especially as this is not related to one’s intellect but to feelings. But there can be no debate about the teachers’ motivation: s/he must be a self-motivated person, with marginal help, if at all needed, from the students and the teaching learning environment. This is so because the teacher is the prime controller of the teaching learning process, the student at best being an active participant and at worst a passive victim. And further, it is the teacher who has opted for teaching as his life-long pursuit, for whatever reason, but for students learning is a necessity. Just as the teacher expects the students to be motivated, the students have every right to expect the teacher to be motivated. The teaching learning process in a class room with a motivated teacher, full of motivated students, aided by a teaching learning-friendly environment and suitably designed teaching learning strategies, has the best chance of meeting the basic 3-E criteria of the TLP.

All of us, teachers and students, have different levels of intrinsic/internal motivation when involved in the teaching learning process. Apart from satisfying the need of livelihood, three important drivers of motivation for a teacher are self-satisfaction, feeling of enhanced self-worth, and approval and appreciation by his students. While all are important, one may like to venture to say that the last mentioned driver is special since it also results in gaining respect and affection, two natural cravings of a human being, that too from those he has taught. The sense of happiness and fulfilment that a teacher feels when a former student, long forgotten, acknowledges the teacher’s contribution to his own success in life is truly invaluable and immeasurable, as experienced by many teachers. A few other drivers of intrinsic motivation would be the need for recognition by peers and society at large, and a sense of duty of paying back to society.

There is a school of thought that motivation cannot be taught, that it is one’s personal choice. However there is some evidence that extrinsic/external drivers may also play an important role in a teacher’s motivation. Some of these would be increased or extra salary, an award based on peer/student feedback, a higher position of authority and power in administration and/or academics, and incentives/greater autonomy in teaching activities. All of these are “bestowed” on the teacher by an external agency based on uncertain and ever-changing criteria, and have their own positive and negative consequences. It is also possible that under some conditions, an external motivation might be internalized by an individual because of its clearly felt advantages and then it can turn into an intrinsic motivation in the long term.

While students also have their own intrinsic/internal motivation drivers, a great external driver of motivation for them is a motivated teacher himself. They are in intense contact with the teacher for about three to four hours a week in the class room, involved in learning activities which control their professional and personal life. In fact, a teacher has a great opportunity here to be a motivator and a role model for the students through his mastery of the subject, his communication abilities, the excitement and passion he brings to teaching, and the concern he shows for students' learning. Whatever the teacher does in the class room through adopting appropriate teaching learning strategies, creating a conducive environment, giving timely and helpful feedback on their performance, and guiding them towards their goal of achieving the learning outcomes set by himself, will be highly appreciated by the students while at the same time generating respect for the teacher. Such a relationship is mutually motivating, raising the chance of achieving the 3-E criteria of good teaching.

There is a large body of class room research conducted in some countries which point to the teacher as an ideal motivator and a role model, especially at the school and undergraduate levels where the learning skills are still in a developing stage among students. While this is universally true, it has a special significance in residential institutes like ours with a large number of teenagers, whose relations are restricted, by and large, to other students in the class room and hostels, and the teachers in the class room. A good number of them are minors and a large number of them are in their mid to late teens. They have been plucked out of their safe and secure family environment with its advantages of parental guidance and sibling interaction, and are thrown into a wholly new and complex environment of academic pressure, a growing self-awareness and self-guidance, emotional relationships, unbridled competition, and unsure goals in life. Added to this for the digital generation are the technology-inspired values and life style, causing friction with existing norms, in and out of class rooms. Who do they have to relate to and look up to? Of course it is the choice of the teacher to be a motivator or not in the non-academic aspects of life, but it is incumbent on him to try to become the motivator in the academic pursuit of the students. And there are many research based strategies available to the teacher to train himself to become a motivator.

There is no one ideal way of teaching, a one size fits all model. A teacher develops his own teaching strategy depending on many variables. But he should try to meet the basic 3-E criteria of good teaching, namely Effectiveness, Efficiency and Enjoyment. Additionally unless he is a born motivator, he should attempt to train himself to be a motivator. And these two are not entirely unconnected, the ideal of being an inspiring teacher and an igniting motivator is a goal all teachers should pursue for the benefit of their own selves, their students, and their Institute and for the benefit of a sustainable society at large.

The oath that our graduands take on the Convocation day, starting from Saha Nau Avathu...is an enlightening reminder that the teaching learning process is a collaborative effort (Saha) between the teacher and students (Nau) , without animosity, but with mutual enjoyment, energy , and intellectual nourishment. This can happen only with motivated teachers and students in a motivating teaching learning environment.
