

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING - SOME HOME TRUTHS REVISITED

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Note:

1. In this article the word “Teacher” is liberally used to denote all levels of Teachers in different avocations and Institutions
2. This article deals with conceptual and inspirational aspects of Teaching and not aspects like Institutional excellence, the nitty – gritty aspects of practical class room Teaching, the pedagogical aspects etc.

Synopsis

It is true that excellence in Teaching is achieved by the juxtaposition of many varied factors-like the knowledge of the teacher, his personal qualities, qualities of the students, characteristics of the Institution, the standards of the university (like the syllabus, marks awarding pattern etc), the orientation of the society towards academics etc. Out of these, this article focuses on the role of Teacher only.

Unique Features of Teaching in Contrast to other Careers

1. It is the only job, which does not have a financial relationship with the beneficiary/ customers. In all other walks of life, say in any trade or business, such a relationship is present. A doctor or lawyer earns money from his clients. Even in the case of an agriculturist, he has a pecuniary relationship with the land. It is only in this profession that the giver of the service (Teacher) has no direct benefit - relationship with the receiver (Students). In simple words, he does not have scope to get **any direct benefit from the students** except appreciation or may be gratitude. Therefore it is ideally suited only for people who have a high propensity for service.
2. The personality profile required for a Teacher is that he should be **high on intellect** but **low on ambition**. If he is low on intelligence, he won't be able to understand the subject, much less face a class of students. On the other hand, if he is high on ambition, he would not have continued in Teaching! He would have become a businessman! ,
3. A Teacher always orients himself to the position of the other party (student). Whenever a Teacher speaks, it is accompanied by a concern whether

the students would understand it. The teacher's life goes on by realigning himself to the needs, moods and capabilities of the students. Even in a family gathering, one could find a marked difference between a Teacher and other relatives because the former keeps on asking during his conversation, questions like “ Do you understand? Is it clear to you?” etc. Thus a Teacher will not be able to interact without bothering about the reception of the other party

This aspect of “**bothering for the other man**” is not there in many other professions - or if at all – it is present in a small degree. For example, a factory boss who gives orders to his subordinate does not think much of his convenience or other wise. His life is “I – centered”. The same is the position of a businessman, a bureaucrat or trader etc. On the other hand, a very high degree of “you – centered” approach is the core Teacher's of life.

4. A Teacher is on **24 hours duty**. A factory boss does not have to behave like a boss after office hours. But a Teacher has to behave a Teacher whether on duty or off duty.

The same thing can be said about a few other professions also, like a doctor or a policeman, in varying degrees.

5. Anything in a Teacher's career is **qualitative**, abstract and has long-term implications. It is not comparable to the profile of say, a Marketing Executive who can relate his increased efforts immediately with proportional increase in his earnings. Even assessing the performance of a Teacher is quite complex. For example, if the Institution wants to find out whether the Teacher is doing his job well, they have to wait for results of at least 2 or 3 batches of students trained by him.

Certain advanced interpretations of the Teaching career

Teaching is an intensely inter-personal activity. So all concepts of **Human Resources Management** – like motivation, leadership, communication – apply with suitable modifications .

Referring to the Maslow's Need- Hierarchy theory of Motivation (brief description at Annexure-I), a Teacher has a very high degree of **Esteem need and Self- Actualization needs**. He has very high degree of affiliation needs also, going by Mc Clelland's theory. Because of these, he is more motivated by the students' appreciation than by any other factor. - for example, he would feel very glad, if an old student who has studied 10 years ago, happens to meet him during a alumnus function and tells him that his classes were wonderful (esteem as well as affiliation needs)- rather than a news that his Institution is going to give the him 10 days extra holidays in this semester! He would be more glad to hear that his theory/thesis has been accepted (**Self-actualization need**) than the intimation that he would be the leave-sanctioning authority for one more Department (**Power motive**)

The Teacher must balance two considerations – **dignity for himself and importance for the**

subject. If he displays overriding importance for himself, it will lead to a situation where obedience, compliance and discipline become more focused than transfer of knowledge;

On the other hand, if he lays an all-pervading emphasis on the subject, the students would feel dry and bored in a short while.

Of course, if he displays no importance of himself, the students will reckon the subject along with the Teacher as some thing being frivolous and trivial. But there is a strong correlation that if they like a Teacher, they are favorably disposed towards the subject too.

Whatever be the behavioural pattern of a Teacher in his other activities, he is quite wholesome during his interactions with students. In fact that is when the **best part of his personality comes out**.

A Teacher has the unique boon of seeing only the **good side of people**. A factory executive is placed in such a position where he must squeeze work out of others; a business man has to deal with people who are constantly ready to out-wit him- whereas a Teacher sees only the good side of people whatever be their position otherwise. To cite an extreme example, a Teacher going for literacy training to prison inmates will still be seeing only their "good" side. They will also relate with him as "students" only.

Certain common innuendoes passed by the society on the Teaching profession

The Teaching profession, in principle, has been held in high esteem by the society, which is manifest in the following trends:

In the Indian tradition, the Teacher is placed in a very high pedestal in the order of evolutionary hierarchy i.e., **Mother, Father, Guru and then God**

Even today, in the rural heartland of India, a Teacher is held in such a high esteem that his signature as a witness is generally sought after and accepted, in all the written documents. In most villages the humble school Teacher is also a permanent member in the panchayat, to be seated with the other panchayat members who are high and mighty in the society. Even the village burglars exclude the temple priest and the school Teacher from their itinerary, by convention.

But, in the day-to-day world of stark realities, certain remarks made against the Teaching profession particularly from the affluent members of the society, have gained currency and have come to stick. Perhaps they have seeped into the Teacher's psyche also and might have impacted diffidence in their thinking. Some of the reproachful remarks we hear from career- Teachers are listed below. The positive responses to them are also attached.

Remark: The Teacher spends his life in an imaginary and unreal world; those who can do, those who can't do –teach.

Response: A Teacher is in a **creative world** (not imaginary).

The question of competence (can and can't) is not the only dimension that determines success. The personality profile required for a Teacher is that he should be high on intellect but low on ambition. If he is low on intelligence, he won't be able to understand the subject, much less face a class of students. On the other hand, if he is high on ambition, he would not have continued in Teaching! He would have become a businessman! (also refer to response at para 2 below)

Remark: The Teacher is detached from the field – he is not a practitioner – he is a dummy manager, dummy engineer etc.

Response: Theory is nothing but practice crystallised over a period. All theory takes-off

from where practice has concluded. If a person starts off practice without studying the concepts well, he would be spending lot of his life in re-inventing the wheel, the metal and so on. Therefore the Teacher contributes to the practical field in his own inimitable way. If he is good at his job, he would be creating excellent engineers and managers!

So, it is a matter of suitability to the profession. **Everyone can't be and need not be field executive.** When the person's profile matches the job-requirements, we get best performances indeed!

Incidentally most **practitioners dread Teaching**; they reckon it to be a very difficult task.

Remark: Many of the students might get into careers which will give them better resources and status than the Teacher; but the Teacher will remain where he is.

Response: The students are not the standards for comparison (much less competition) against the Teacher.

The Teacher is comparable to a source of **Potential Energy** and the students, the Kinetic Energy. A Teacher is like a person who **knows the road but does not drive, himself.** The students are the drivers who don't know the road well enough. These two forces are the complementary parts of the same whole. The Teacher and the society should be willing to accept this dispensation and appreciate the fact that the Teacher is in a position to groom many, many students who would contribute to the society in various ways.

Remark: The Teaching job is a very routine and dreary one. Once the Teacher learns a Subject and prepares the notes, he can go on and on, merely repeating the same matter year after year. He has no scope or compulsion to up date himself. It is one long stretch of boring life lacking in excitement, glamour and dynamism.

Response: The lessons may not become different every year; but the batch of students is different – that's enough room for dynamism. Of course today's World is one of constant learning in every field.

In any career, there are **not many extraordinary assignments**; but there are many **ordinary assignments to be done extraordinarily well**; and this certainly applies Profusely to Teaching.

Again Teaching is the only position, which gives constant company of youngsters. That way the Teacher remains in contact with the world of youth, vitality and dynamism throughout.

It is true that a Teacher's day could begin and end as planned on most days. Without this kind of methodical and undisturbed schedule, it would be difficult to perform the job of Teaching. One cannot be a travelling salesman in the morning and do Teaching in the afternoon!

Remark: Some times, the Teacher is only five minutes ahead of the class. He is not necessarily a person of luminous brilliance.

Response: Of course good Teachers take great pains to re-learn constantly and up date their repertory.

Even for a moment accepting the remark without contest, it still remains that putting ideas into other peoples' heads is still a very difficult job; and a Teacher does it all the same, notwithstanding his own repertory.

While a businessman can do "business-talk", the factory executive "shop-talk", only a Teacher can do Teaching.

And the Teacher is in an unique position **to groom people better than himself !**

Changed Profile of Students in the 21st Century

The following paradigm changes in current generation of students are generally observed over the previous generation. While many of them are a change in degree, in some aspects it could be a change in kind. Of course it must be borne in mind that we are talking about general trends here. There could very well be exceptions to every single point listed below:

The students have become more ambitious – They are looking forward to quick riches and don't hesitate to negotiate very hefty salary packages. For the sake of a very simple argument, their general level of attire, appearance and eagerness to access comforts is visible in striking contrast to the apologetic ways of the previous generation. The improved economic scenario is also responsible for this.

More talented – In many cases they say, "Show us the Text Book, we will do the reading" The earlier-generation's expectation that the Teacher must methodically cover the subject in the classroom step by step, is loosing relevance.

Greater access to knowledge inputs: Explosion in media-supplied inputs. The Net is a friend philosopher and guide and is an inseparable part of this generations' wherewithal.

Seeing this from another angle, we find that the students are not un-comfortable with **impersonal learning**, too viz., learning through media (that's putting it mildly) in comparison to learning from other persons – the Teacher, friends or parents. This is also a marked departure from the previous generation.

Education has become more costly – With the advent of Self-Financing education and the gradual withdrawal of Government subsidies, education has become costly. Students and parents have also become conscious of the cost-benefits involved in Education.

More assertive- Students think that they can exercise the correct choice on many matters

including education- they think they know better on every aspect of life – it is common to hear parents lamenting “My son/daughter wanted it this way – so we have no say in the matter”. This was not the trend in the previous generation.

Willingness to exert higher levels of effort – The students want to prove themselves instantly and are ready for many sacrifices en route. Of course they are also careful to **project the fact of their hard work**.

More motivated by on the job considerations and less by affiliation needs - Less sensitive to criticism or even appreciation. They would respond better to job related threats or benefits- rather than bother about say, being appreciated by a colleague, much less being mistaken by him.

General dilution of human considerations – It is a matter for big debate whether the younger generation does care enough about others. For example, a very huge majority of youngsters are clear that they won't live with their parents in the joint family set up- so what to speak of relations with others? Their relationships are now need-driven and purpose- driven, it appears. The term of expression is likely to be “I need you” rather than “I like you.”

General erosion of interpersonal skills – This is a by product of all previous items.

Changed Role of Teacher

The Teacher will do well to take note of his changed roles, powers , responsibilities and risks

1. The earlier role of equipping the student to gain mastery over the subject – **cover** the syllabus –is perhaps on the way out – now the trend is -**uncover** the syllabus little, enable them to study for themselves (by suggesting additional source material, case studies exercises etc. wherever possible,)

arouse their curiosity and let them **discover** the remaining.

2. The role as a tutor of dispensing of inputs (**trainer- centered**) is becoming thinner and thinner. The role as facilitator (**learner-centred**) is becoming more and more pronounced.
3. Doing a bit of **marketing and public relations** on behalf of their Institutions, is another add-on assignment.
4. Greater care to be exercised in **quasi-official activities**- like interacting with parents, advising students on their personal tangles etc., Such activities are being taken over by the Management progressively. Today's Teacher does not enjoy the unadulterated trust of the society as in yester-years.
5. Periodical interactions with **Regulatory bodies**, Certifying agencies and Inspection agencies on behalf of the Institution.
6. Assume responsibility for **personality development** of students. For example, students will always remember a Teacher who gave them a chance to do public speaking in the class or perform a number during College Day celebrations. Such is the importance of this aspect. The class room / campus is the safest place for such trials; outside, mistakes would be costly.
7. Greater involvement in **administrative matters**. For example campus discipline.
8. Teaching involves a few **allied skills** – The showman, the entertainer, the story teller and so on.. He has to have a smart turnout, a cheerful countenance and must be well groomed. It is the part of the showmanship. He must employ some amount of humor, which brakes the monotony and rejuvenates the teaching sessions. Such allied skills was

required earlier also, but more acutely so in the present scenario.

9. Today's Teacher deals with students who are exposed to very high degree of competition, uncertainty and the consequent stress. They have scope to get into despair and dis-orientation, often.. So the Teacher must be emotionally stable to refocus them on the objective and to reorient them properly. He can do this provided he has adequate **inventory of positive qualities**.

Certain common Temptations and Infirmities in-built in the Profession

Certain very subtle and refined aspects pertaining to the above are listed below:

Becoming a non- Teacher: Getting thoroughly absorbed in Project reports, Fund raising ventures, consultancies, arranging conferences etc., to the exclusion of student- centric activities. Perhaps, each Institution/Teacher must fix a quota or percentage of time for such activities out of their total time or provide such other suitable safe guards..

Promoting himself at the cost of the Institution: A Teacher grows, by acquiring experience and stature, with the support of the Institution-.for example, publishing books or patenting technology .The benefits of such development should flow back to the Institution and to the students. If the Teacher uses all these for personal promotion only, well.... it is certainly unbecoming of his Profession.

Becoming esteem-centric: As already stated, a Teacher has high dignity needs. This is certainly required for maintaining his self-respect. But, it could become a subtle trap beyond a point- he may unconsciously get favorably inclined towards students/others who show high degree of obeisance to him – notwithstanding other factors.

Castigating a student who has learning difficulties: Sometimes Teacher might be tempted to call such a student as “idiot, stupid, dumb, dim-witted, clay-head, unfit for the class/education etc”. No doubt, a Teacher may pull-up, criticize or reprimand a slack student; he may even punish a troublesome student through the authorities. But a condemnation or a denouncement as stated above, in respect of a weak student does not behove of the sacred relationship between the Teacher and the Student. No doubt there are such students but a Teacher shall refrain from such intellectual excesses. He must build wherever possible, not demolish.

Getting bogged down with administrative/office responsibilities: There are two types of powers- the Formal (official) power and the Informal power (the power of knowledge, persuasion, advice etc.). A Teacher is well-nigh with the earning and exercising of the latter. It would be quite befitting this profile, if the Institution does not overwhelm him with tasks involving the former. Again a balanced approach as in para1 above seems called for.

Lack of co-ordination: The Teacher's life could turn out to be highly individualistic and aloof. A Teacher can lead his daily activities without getting along with anyone – be it the colleague, the neighbor, the student or even the management. In contrast, a business executive must actively interact, co-ordinate, co-operate and practice lots of give & take with his colleagues, superiors, subordinates, customers and suppliers – which in turn reflects in his transactions in his personal life also. But a Teacher need not practice this type of active co-operation. This aloofness is especially pronounced when it comes to peer – relationships (relationships with equals). No doubt, he is in the midst of other Teachers in the Department /Institution. – but each Teacher could afford to be on separate islands with the main stream flowing all around them.

Intellectual domination: A Teacher should enable students, not dominate them, except where deliberately necessary (that too as a temporary ploy). He should not try to have a final say in each and every transaction with students. In fact great Teachers play down their role strategically, to boost the confidence level of the student.

Credit Robbing: A Teacher should not simply “appropriate” the ideas / contributions of others. It is a professional temptation to be avoided at all costs. He should take proper permission and publicly acknowledge them with due credit.

In the final reckoning, it would be ideal if the Teacher is **intrinsically a better person and a better human being**, enjoying good inner harmony and inner music, to shine through all the above profiles .

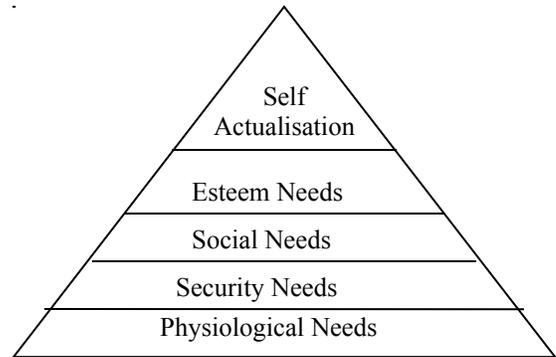
To sum up, we may recall an old adage, **”An ordinary Teacher narrates, the good Teacher, explains the better Teacher demonstrates and the best Teacher inspires.”**

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ANNEXURE- I

Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory Of Motivation

Abraham Maslow, a great Psychologist and expert in Organisational Behaviour propounded the Need-Hierarchy Theory of Motivation in the 1950s. He identified the needs that motivate people. They are listed below. The first two needs are categorised as lower order needs and the remaining three are classified as higher order needs.



Physiological needs: The need for food, water, rest, sleep etc.

Security needs : Protection of life, limbs and property. Also means and assured supply of Physiological needs – also called safety needs.

Social Needs : Man is a social animal – he needs to belong to his group – To affiliate with his members and to be affiliated. The need to be acknowledged, recognized and included in his group, to be identified as a member of a group.

Esteem Needs (or Ego Needs): The need to be distinct and unique in the group. The need to be recognized as the best (or at least different) in the group. (This is diametrically opposite to the earlier need)

Self-actualization : The need to be what all a person can be, the need to reach the highest performance in his trade or line.(does not refer to the spiritual meaning). It also means anything done for personal satisfaction or anything that is got after considerable effort or search

McClelland’s Three Factor Theory:

He identified 3 motives.

- 1) **Power motive** – the desire to exercise authority – to control people and resources – to sit over destiny of others.
- 2) **Achievement Motive** - The motive to do well and better – to accomplish difficult tasks – to derive satisfaction that he can do..
- 3) **Affiliation motive** - The need for giving and receiving love and affection , the need to understand and be understood , to appreciate and be appreciated, the need to acknowledge and be acknowledged , the need for praise, gratitude, to be recognised etc.

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