

NINETY PERCENT OR BUST!

The parents, teachers and counselors jointly mould the careers and create destinies. A healthy symbiosis of the three is a must for a glorious future of the young generation. Dr. Seema Tatwawadi elaborates.

"If you can not score ninety per cent marks in the board exams, you are doomed forever" - booms the voice of the teacher in the class. The reactions of students range from bored indifference to fear, horror and amused facial expressions. In this class of fifty students (with the usual mix of five per cent outstanding, ten percent above average, seventy per cent average and the remaining fifteen per cent below average), one can imagine only one or two being in the ninety plus range, five to ten in the eighty to ninety percent range, a large majority in the sixty to seventy five percent range and a few failures.

Why then this misplaced emphasis on an unachievable target for the average students? Rather than setting an unrealistic target before the students and harping on high percentages, the teacher will do a great service to the society by imparting quality education. If the emphasis shifts from examination oriented studies to the general understanding of life sciences and arts and culture, it will create better citizens.

Admittedly, every class or batch of students has its complement of brilliant and outstanding students. That however cannot decide the threshold level of understanding for the class. Lack of choice in syllabus and fear, low level of understanding, poor quality of teaching, encouragement for extra coaching by parents, teachers and peer group, create a high level of anxiety among the average student. This builds up avoidable tension and stress. It affects the normal academic performance of a child. Poor performance leads to more anxiety and greater stress thus leading to listlessness and boredom, memory loss and depression.

Pratap is an above average twelfth standard student and his academic performance of the previous years bears this out. When his teacher upbraided him for poor performance in one of the school tests and told him that he was 'a nothing- if not a ninety per center', he felt humiliated to the extent of shunning school. Painting dark scenarios and a horrific future before students only creates a very poor impression about the teachers and parents who subscribe to such illusory

ideas of academic brilliance. It also subconsciously drives the students away from straight and conventional path of academic pursuit.

A large number of high fliers (at the board stage) find it difficult to cope up with higher education in technical institutions and on the contrary, the not so good average students show a remarkable degree of adaptation to these courses like the fish take to water! This only underscores the fact that there is a lack of aptitude testing in school boards. This also bares the home truth that the parental pressure can play havoc with the future of their children if they are unable to cope up with higher technical education.

There are very few instances of the parents seeking an aptitude test for their wards before deciding on a future career. Selection of a course is often a result of misconceptions and lack of knowledge about the available avenues for higher education within our local institutions and elsewhere. Children themselves are equally ignorant and decide on careers not suited to their abilities or liking. This can lead to frustration when mid way through the course they realise that their perceptions were totally wrong. Many times they are required to give up their hobbies and other interests just to cope up with the course studies and they hate it.

For the all round development of a child and a student, a mix of studies, games and sports, co-cultural activities and personal hobbies are vital. In the pursuit of careers, studies take top priority over other activities and quite naturally so. However, the students must be counseled to pay attention to these other aspects of their overall development. Career development should not become an imposition and a burden for the child.

It is not my case that the students should not be warned about the realities of a fast track competitive environment outside and in the job market. They must be conditioned and tempered to the requirements through motivation, hard work and gentle understanding. Use of force, derogatory and insulting language and comparisons with others may not help bring out the best in the child. And mind you, the best may be good enough only for seventy percent. In which case, why not seek careers; enquire about options and alternatives for a seventy-per cent student? Surely this will be a more sensible way to help in getting along a path towards a better future.

A joke goes around about the brightest student becoming an engineer, the mediocre one becoming an IAS officer and the village vagabond joining politics. Twenty years down the line, the vagabond becomes the guardian minister, the IAS chap is the district magistrate and the engineer remains a deputy engineer at the same place! Though ironical, there is some truth in this narrative.

Sustaining a career needs very high level of motivation and persevering efforts without let ups. Often the school level prodigals burn out by the time they come out of the universities. Their over confidence and superiority complex proves to be their undoing. Being confident of their academic prowess, they divert their energies towards other activities and falter. Contrast them with those who do not take studies for granted but set realistic goals and work steadily to achieve those goals. This second group is the group of achievers.

Students and their parents need to get adjusted to their capabilities. Radha's mother never bothered to interact with her teachers at school. Radha could not cope up with studies in school but camouflaged her weakness rather well from her parents. She fared badly in her board exams and her parents were shocked. Subsequent enquiries with the school staff revealed that she was consistently weak in studies but never informed her parents about PTA meetings or summons from school authorities.

We are outraged at teachers beating up the students; we berate the teachers and blame the school authorities for the poor performance of our children. We go and fight with the teacher when they complain about poor performances of our children. But, as a routine we never bother to check the progress of our children. We feel that the burden of educating our offspring rests with the school and the teachers, while we ourselves pursue own careers, hobbies and pastimes without feeling any remorse and guilt for the neglect, which we demonstrate so loudly.

We have no time together during the evenings because the children go for tuitions classes and after dinner it is the new TV serial or an interesting episode of a sex-scandal. We feel it undignified to periodically visit schools and meet teachers to verify the learning related problems of our own children! We force the children to stop all extra curricular activities and then complain that an overdose of studies makes them morose. We defy good advice and consider that counselling is

something related to the mentally handicapped. The list of things we do to damage the prospects of our children is endless.

Direction, firmness, sensitivity and sensible behavior some indulgence, a lot of encouragement and motivation, analysis of aptitudes, healthy communication and creation of an environment conducive to learning at home and outside are some of the main ingredients of future successful careers of our children. The parents, teachers and counselors jointly mould the careers and create destinies. A healthy symbiosis of the three is a must for a glorious future of the young generation.

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