

நற்றமிழ் கூறும் ஆசிரியம்

நூல்பயில் இயல்பே நுவலின் வழக்கறிதல்
பாடம் போற்றல் கேட்டவை நினைத்தல்
ஆசான் சார்ந்தவை அமைவரக் கேட்டல்
அம்மாண் புடையோர் தம்மொடு பயிறல்
வினாதல், வினாயவை விடுத்தல் என்றிவை
கடனாக் கொளினே மடம்நனி இகக்கும்

-- நன்னூல் 41

தெளிவுரை: ஆசிரியரிடம் பயின்ற பாடநூலை
மாணவன் எவ்வாறு கற்பது என்று நன்னூல்
விளக்குகின்றது.

மாணவன் தான் பயின்ற நூலின் உலகவழக்கு,
செய்யுள் வழக்கு ஆகியனவற்றை
அறிந்துகொள்ளும் வகையில் பயிலவேண்டும்.
மேலும் தான் படித்த பாடத்தை மறவாமல்
போற்றுதல், ஆசிரியரிடம் கேட்ட கருத்துகளை
நினைவிற்கு கொண்டுவந்து சிந்தித்து அறிதல்,
அவ்வாறு சிந்திக்கும்போது எழுந்த ஐயங்களை
மீண்டும் ஆசிரியரைச் சந்தித்துக் கேட்டுத்

தெளிதல், தன்னோடு பயிலும் மாணவருடன்
சேர்ந்து பயிலுதல், அவ்வாறு பயிலும்போது எழும்
சந்தேகங்களை அவர்களிடம் விவாதித்து
தெளிதல், உடன் பயில்பவர்களின் ஐயங்களைப்
போக்க உதவுதல் போன்ற செயல்களைக்
கடமையாகக் கொண்டால் மாணவனின்
அறியாமை பெரிதும் நீங்கும். (**Dr. Lalitha Bala,**
School of Education, SASTRA)

Tamil Literature, Nannool, on Learning: *This verse speaks how a student should learn what the teacher taught. The student should learn in such a way that s/he should know the practical relevance and grammatical aspect of what has been taught. Further, should remember what the teacher said, analyze it and clarify the doubts when doing so. Student should also learn along with other students, discuss doubts amongst themselves and clarify thereby learning and helping others to learn as well. A student who does these will be free of ignorance. (Translation by Vigneshwar Ramakrishnan, SCBT, SASTRA)*

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Editorial

The Evolving Roadmap of Effective Teaching

Another year has begun. The nation, and the world as whole, is staring at the advent of yet another variant

of the dreaded virus. With the enormous magnitude of challenges mounting up in all spheres of life, the precincts of teaching and learning are also changing colossally. In this fast-changing education landscape, a robust yet flexible roadmap has to be developed by systematic assessment of the present academic practices and pertinent course corrections. To this end, it is imperative for educators to develop novel approaches to impart knowledge, vis-à-vis evaluating the accomplishment of learning goals by statistical analysis of outcomes of the applied teaching methods. In this issue, we are happy to present contributions from the eminent awardees of the prestigious 'Guru Sreshta' and 'Guru of Gurus' awards of 2021. The contributors have presented a spectrum of insights on the diverse appurtenances of teaching and learning. The widely varied articles encompass different strategies, ranging from 'effective classroom interactions' to 'approaches for efficacious learning outcomes.' This issue is enriched with perspicacious outlooks on 'learning-by-doing

approach' and online tools for effectual communication with students. A major highlight of this issue is an analytical study of a survey on the self-learning perspectives of undergraduate and postgraduate students from different degree programmes in SCBT. More than 30% of the SCBT students participated in this survey, who provided robust metrics on statistical parameters, thereby revealing interesting trends of self-learning goals and comprehension among the different groups of students. We believe that the insights presented in this issue can be instrumental in developing new roadmaps for developing practical operative strategies for augmented teaching practices and enhanced learning outcomes. Here's wishing all readers loads of joyful teaching, blissful learning, and a happy new year.

--- Editors.

Analytics of Self-Learning among Undergraduate & Postgraduate Students of SCBT

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The ever-changing knowledge and opportunity landscape in today's world demands that our graduates are life-long learners. Life-long learning requires the ability to identify one's learning needs, identifying the needed resources and learning from it – in short, self-directed learning. In order to gauge where our students lie in the spectrum of self-directed learning, we conducted an online voluntary survey in December 2021 among the undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in various degree programmes in SCBT. We used the "Self-rating scale of self-directed learning", a scale developed by Williamson [1] and has been widely used to gauge

the self-directed learningness of students in various educational research studies [2]. Out of 421 participants who volunteered for the survey, 348 were undergraduate students, while 73 belonged to different postgraduate courses. The survey asked the students to provide their respective views (parametrically expressed on a 1–5 scale) about a multitude of facets from the self-learning paradigm. Herein, we are presenting a few results from the survey, which shed significant light on the students' perspectives on self-learning and the roles of teachers in their academic ascent.

In the first study, we estimated that more than half of the participants (57.18% of undergraduate students, and 57.53% of postgraduate students) are extremely aware of their responsibility of practicing self-learning (Fig. 1). Another 28-31% of the students from both

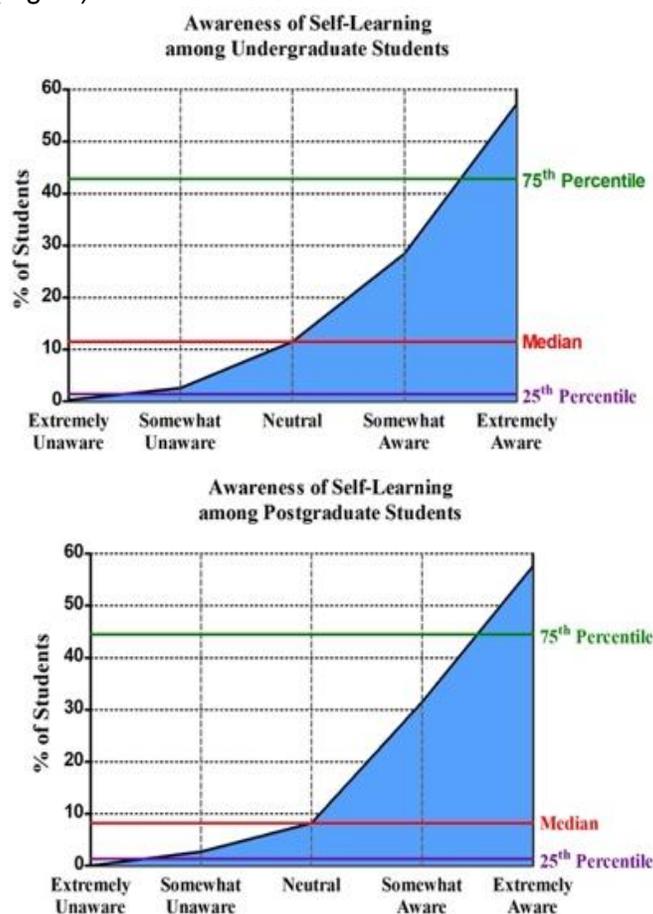


Fig. 1. Awareness of Self-learning among undergraduate and postgraduate students

undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are somewhat aware of the necessity of self-learning.

The remaining students are either unaware of self-learning habits or are indecisive about the same. Although no major differences were observed between undergraduate and postgraduate participants, a greater fraction of postgraduate students were found to be above the median value in comparison to undergrads (portion of the area under the curve, which falls above the median line). This gives a moderately greater advantage to the postgraduate students over their junior counterparts in the precincts of self-learning.

In another study, the students were distributed into three groups — Group I/Junior Years (freshman and sophomore undergraduate students), Group II/Senior Years (senior undergraduate students), and Group III/Postgrad Years (postgraduate students). All participants were asked to parametrically express their views on the statement: “*Teachers facilitate learning, rather than just imparting information.*” Interestingly, while 46.5% students from Group I and 49.32% of Group III members strongly agreed with this notion, only 33.51% of the senior undergraduate students (Group II) were in strong agreement (Fig. 2). Moreover, a large fraction (23.04%) of Group II members chose to remain neutral about the role of teachers in facilitating learning, while 16.56% and 17.81% from Groups I and III refused to agree or disagree. The most robust disagreement with this notion was also demonstrated by Group II students, 5.24% (3.66% disagreed, 1.57% strongly disagreed) of whom suggested that the role of teachers is to merely provide myriad information, rather than actively helping students with learning. In comparison to Group II, the other groups exhibited conspicuously lesser disagreement with the given statement. One-way ANOVA revealed significant difference ($P < 0.1$) among the three groups (Fig. 3). While no major distinction was noted between Groups I and III, both the groups individually showed significant dissimilarity with Group II ($P < 0.01$ with Group I, denoted by **; $P < 0.5$ with Group III, denoted by *).

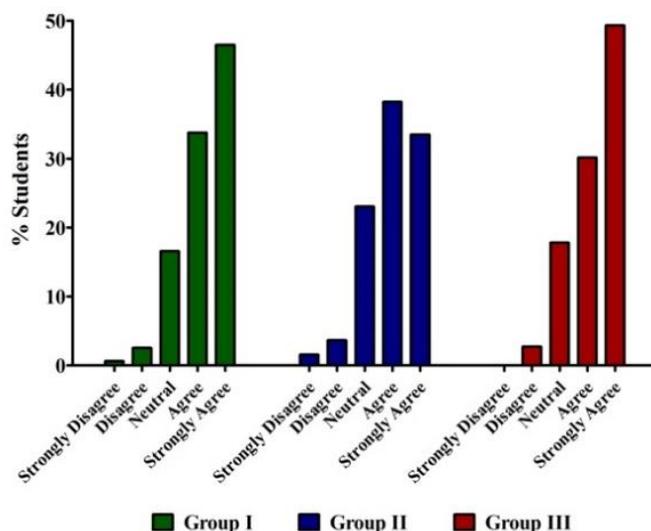


Fig. 2. Percentage of students expressing who agree/disagree to the notion of teachers as facilitators of learning among the different study groups.

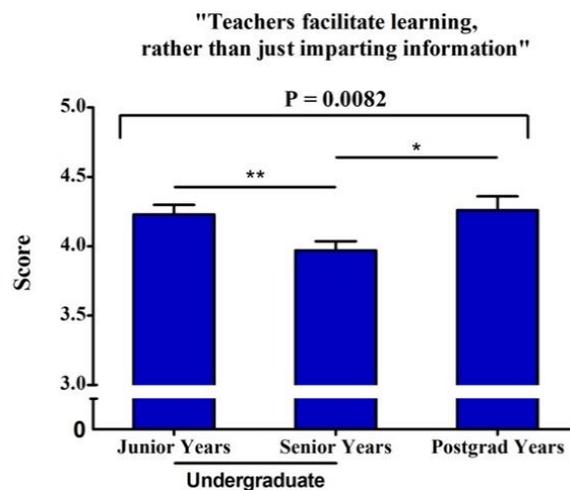


Fig. 3. Statistical comparison of the extent of agreement to the notion that teachers are facilitators of learning among the different study groups.

From results of both studies taken together, we inferred that in comparison to the undergraduate students, the postgraduate students of SCBT have greater awareness about their responsibility of practicing self-learning, while also understanding the role of a teacher to facilitate their learning process. Further, at the undergraduate level, the data shows that the notion of teachers as providers of information

sets in as they move ahead in the academic ladder calling attention to the need for pedagogical interventions at the senior undergraduate level.

At the undergraduate level, the data shows that the notion of teachers as providers of information sets in as they move ahead in the academic ladder calling attention to the need for pedagogical interventions at the senior undergraduate level

However, it is to be noted that we are only presenting the results from two chosen studies due to limitations of scope. These results are also subject to variations, since the studies were performed on a small sample size. Therefore, these results should not be interpreted as the holistic picture. Further studies in this direction are in prospect.

[1] S. N. Williamson, "Development of a Self-rating Scale of Self-directed Learning," *Nurse Researcher*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 66–83, 2007.

[2] K. Premkumar *et al.*, "Self-directed learning readiness of Indian medical students: a mixed method study," *BMC Medical Education*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 134, 2018, doi: 10.1186/s12909-018-1244-9.

Recollecting a Wonderful Journey

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Stakeholders' expectations dictate the dynamics of transactions and higher education sector that transacts knowledge is not an exemption to this. Moving away from teacher-centric academic transactions to learner-centric methods, coupled with learning-by-doing is one of the outcomes of stakeholders' expectations. I had an opportunity to be

the course teacher for CHE103: Particle Mechanics & Mechanical Operations during the academic year 2019-20. The learners were new to Chemical Engineering discipline and had plenty of time for self-learning. The course plan comprised of lecture sessions (60 %), visit to laboratory (15 %) and tutorial sessions (25 %). With an average of one visit to 'Particle Mechanics and Mechanical Operations' lab every fortnight, the learners were able to 'observe', 'question', 'comprehend', 'relate with' what they 'heard' during the lecture sessions. As a course teacher, I proposed team project (*active learning*) for assignment component, which was readily accepted by the learners. About 8 problem statements spanning the breadth of the subject and some outside the syllabus were designed and learners had the option to select one of those for the team project. The problem statements included development of computer programs and fabrication of equipment & demonstration of their working.

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At least 75 % of the students were actively involved in the project as evidenced through their interaction with me related to project outside the office hours. A couple of teams made use of the learning from programming courses of the first year and developed the software and documentation related to the same. Another two teams took this as an opportunity to revisit AutoCAD that they studied during the first and learn 3D printing additionally so as to fabricate the prototype. Some teams interacted with students from other programmes in an attempt to complete the task to their *own satisfaction*. On a whole the assignment created a buzz and a sense of ownership & responsibility. As a course teacher, I experienced the pinnacle of happiness when (i) a team of students continued to work on the software development even in the next two academic years (after the course exam was done, dusted & forgotten) and are

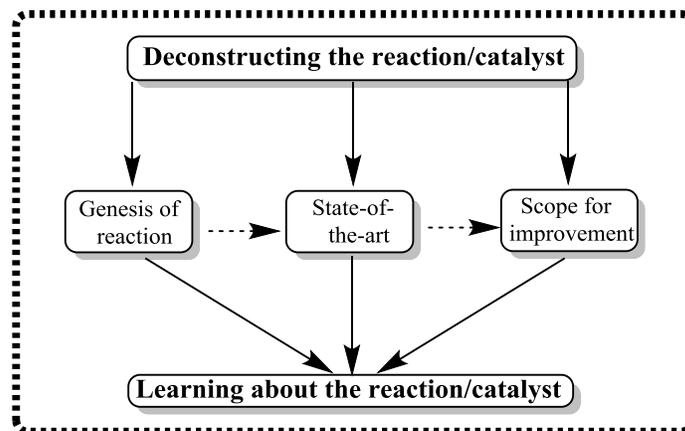
determined to translate the same as a product; (ii) a team of students carried out a mini project on 3D printing, inspired by their out-of-course learning of the same; (iii) the faculty member who handled the laboratory session opined that the students were familiar with the equipment and their functioning making the laboratory sessions more productive.

Learning by Deconstructing the Reaction/Catalyst

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In the Chemical Engineering curriculum, students study Applied Chemistry theory paper to learn about the fundamental organic transformations involved in the industrially significant processes. In addition, the structural significance and applications of the commercially important products were also taught in the class. Often, the students face difficulty in remembering various types of reactions, intricate structural details of the catalyst and the lacuna associated with the reported chemical processes. Such difficulties increase exponentially in an online teaching-learning environment. Hence, it was decided to implement a team activity on “Deconstructing the reactions and catalyst”. After completing the discussion on Unit-I in detail, the students were segregated into 17 different batches with three students per batch. The students were allotted to the batch based on their registration numbers. Each of the groups was allotted with a specific type of reaction/process/catalyst. In the Google Classroom, each group needs to post a PowerPoint Lecture for about 5 to 8 minutes on the assigned topic. Within each batch, one student can take up the details pertaining to the genesis of the reaction. The second student can delineate the state-of-the art technologies associated with the allotted reaction. The third

student needs to provide information about the lacuna associated with the reaction/catalyst and express the scope for improvisation. A pictorial outline is given below.



The students were given one month time to prepare the video lecture with duration of 5 to 8 minutes. The students were instructed that after submission, the video lectures will be scrutinized.

This activity also assisted the students to critically analyze each and every aspect associated with the reaction/catalyst which is vital to improve the efficiency of any chemical process.

Notable Outcomes:

To my surprise, most of the students completed the assigned task within the given time frame. Some of the key observations are: (i) Within each group, the students interacted well over phone/mail about the assigned topic and prepared the slides for presentation. (ii) The genesis of the reaction and state-of-the-art were discussed elaborately. (iii) More importantly, students started learning about every aspect of the chosen reaction/catalyst. Specific comments were given to those students who presented the content in the form of a paragraph or with smaller font size, etc.

Likewise, few students were advised to elaborate the content instead of reading from the slides.

Conclusion:

The activity of deconstruction of reaction/catalyst exercise was initiated to overcome the students' inherent reluctance to study the structure of catalyst or reactions involved in the industrially relevant organic transformations. The discussion with each group of students in the Google Classroom revealed that the students surpassed the hesitancy in learning new reactions and chemical structures. Apart from achieving this primary goal, the deconstruction exercise also initiated healthy discussion within the student groups and enhanced the organizational and presentation skills of the students. This activity also assisted the students to critically analyze each and every aspect associated with the reaction/catalyst which is vital to improve the efficiency of any chemical process. I wish to explore this activity in other subjects also since in this exercise, the learning takes place effortlessly and the students could remember the learning outcome for a prolonged period of time.

Exploring *Slack* as Effective Repository of Teaching-Learning

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As a faculty instructor of a course, especially during online teaching, has any of the following thoughts popped up in you?

- I am able to post my notes. However I am not able to see my students' notes and give my comments on their notes.
- Students do not share notes in a structured manner.

- Retrieving notes or comments in course or class WhatsApp group is a task in itself!
- I am looking for an easier way to offer comments, track students' responses and thus build reports/documents or their learning trajectory.
- In course google classroom, students cannot post their materials unless it is raised as assignment.
- GCR platform does not seem to facilitate peer learning.

If you have felt so, then '*Slack*' could be a possible solution for you

Slack (<https://slack.com/intl/en-in>) is a communication platform. We (students and faculty) can create account in Slack using our @sastra.ac.in. The key differentiator in Slack is the facility to have stacked notes, conversation threads for each topic and provision to upload & share files in a much more structured manner. The platform's GUI is professionally designed and looks elegant (that's my view, though). A person with average working knowledge in any social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter or with working knowledge in google classroom etc. shall be able to seamlessly work with Slack. Slack is available as a mobile app, as a browser app and also as desktop app. Most of you might have also known about 'Discord' (<https://discord.com/>) which yet another platform, more known for its team or group video & audio calling facility.

I explored Slack during this semester as an alternative means to engage with students, with a specific objective to have more structured documentation of files (notes, assignments, reports etc) uploaded by students. Workspaces in Slack are analogous to classrooms in google. As a teacher I created workspaces for my courses and also for my project teams. The invite link for the workspace was then shared with students and urged the students to also create account using their regno@sastra.ac.in and join my workspaces. Once into workspace, I created channels (which are like folders) based on the course / project requirements. Students upload

their documents (which could be worksheets, notes, assignments, project files etc) in the respective channel and these appear as threads in those channels. I read them and give my comments as reply threads. If required to revise, students revise and reupload the next version of the documents/ files as a new thread in the same channel. This process continues till we iterate and converge on the final document.

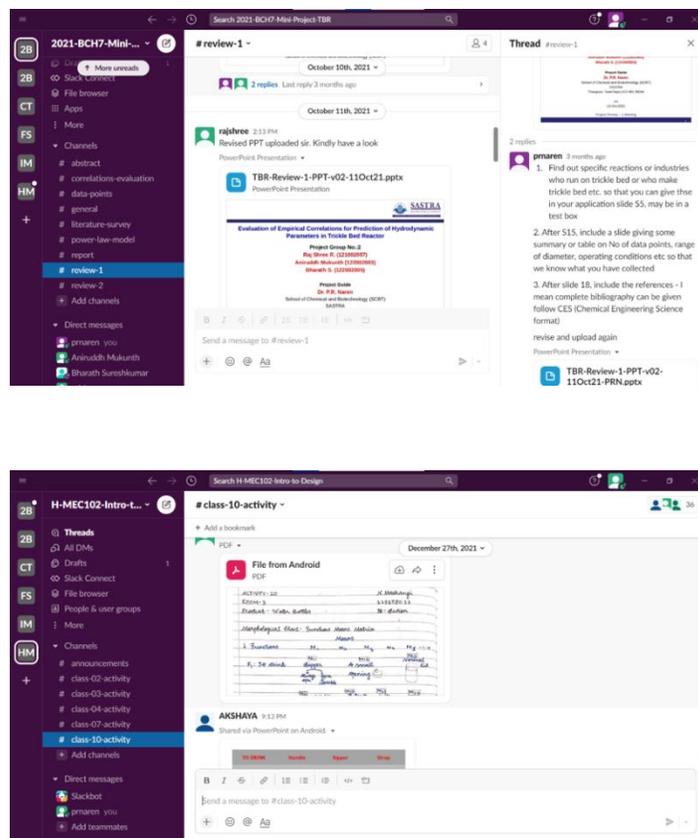
This workspace becomes our digital meeting space or log of project mentoring.

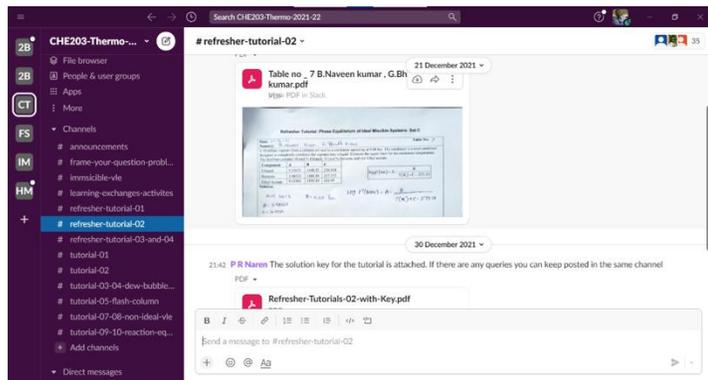
Let me explain a little more taking a few examples with screenshots from my Slack. I teach a course on Introduction to Engineering design for 1 year undergraduate Engineering students. As part of the internals, we have earmarked 10 marks for the activities that we provide to students during their regular class. Students are expected to carry out the activity and preserve their activity sheets. Well, as an instructor, I was not only interested to know whether they performed the activity, more importantly would also like to read & give comments and also wished those to be preserved. Provision of uploading these activity sheets in google classroom as assignment would render it hidden from other students. Asking all students to present in google meet during the online class is constrained by available time. Further this is compounded by plausible issues of internet & data connectivity, student might not be in a separate study room to unmute during the online class, etc. I used Slack and created a workspace for the course. Within the Introduction to Engineering design workspace, I created channels as class-02, class-04, class-05 based on the class on which an activity was planned for the students. At the end of that day's class or during the class, students would take photo of their worksheet and upload the same as a thread in that particular Slack channel. On similar lines, I also created a workspace for the mini project that I guided this semester. Within this mini-project workspace, created different channels such as Literature-studies,

Data, Review-1-Files, etc. wherein students would upload their project work. I would read those and provide my comments, which students take it up, revise and proceed appropriately. Thus, this workspace becomes our digital meeting space or log of project mentoring. Moreover, at any point in time, I would be able to track the comments given earlier and streamline the project as required.

I am happy with my first semester usage of Slack as a tool that aids my teaching learning activities. The one flip side of using Slack is that it is a proprietary tool and hence not free! So once, I run out of my free usage space, I need to delete my old workspaces. Nevertheless, it is still worth trying to have this tool to aid teaching process.

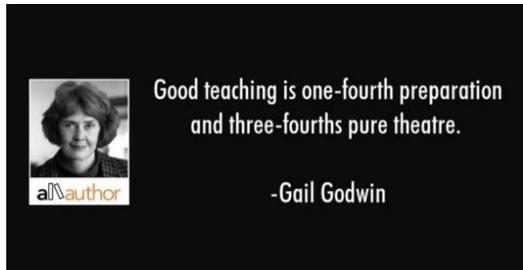
Slack Screenshots





Act of Teaching

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As a student with an average motivation, I always played outside and enjoyed life and procrastinated learning work like a typical student. But I was also sincere enough during the classes. Sometimes, I found the classroom environment too stressful and intimidating. I am unsure if I complied because of that authority-flooded atmosphere. Maybe it did. Some lectures were boring, and some were stressful. Occasionally, I enjoyed a few classes because of the classroom ambience. Different teachers taught different subjects as is typical of any academic setting. The classroom is the same, and the peers are the same. The only difference is the teacher and the subject. Some teachers were easy to speak to and approach, while we avoided facing some teachers.

The teacher's aura, reputation, irritability, and general composure instilled fear of the teacher, and we had no choice but to comply. The student community has a notion about every teacher, graded first by kindness and then knowledge.

Now, I am a teacher. Some students would smile at me, and some would avoid me. I am glad about those who smile at me and are hurt by those who avoid me. I am unsure which of my actions made them feel intimidated or caused dislike. Over the years of teaching, now I am immune to thoughts of others feeling bad about me! While I am happy about being immune in that sense, it still bothers me about what the students in my classroom are feeling. Are they happy to learn? Are they in a good state of mind to learn? Are they comfortable to sit in my class? Should I stop asking questions to students to avoid their discomfort? Should I set easier question papers to make them happy? Should I not point out when a student is using mobile in the classroom? Should I ignore those students giggling and chattering during the class? As a teacher, I can now see how difficult it is for the teacher to manage a class and teach simultaneously. I am biased because I give the benefit of the doubt to the teacher. I still vividly recollect the feeling I had when I stood in front of students for the first time to teach over a decade ago. I trembled, choked and had to sit for a brief break. The classroom is intimidating to the teacher as well!

The classroom is intimidating to the teacher as well!

Too many anxieties flood the mind. Would I say something wrong? What if they ask me a question that I cannot answer? Are they thinking bad about me? Am I looking funny to them? Did I write the spelling of giraffe on the board correctly? Too many fears, apprehensions, and fights in mind in real-time, yet we deliver appropriately for the context.

The classroom atmosphere is stressful to the student and teacher because not all the students are interested in learning, and the teacher will grade the students (the perception of judgment). The classroom is stressful to the teacher too because the teacher has to teach despite these hurdles. How well can we create a happy teaching ambience without compromising on the depth of the content and toughness of the assessment? How to maintain equality among the students' self-respect? How to manage the group to make the teaching-learning experience suitable for all the students? These are tough questions that can be answered better by humanities and psychology. I do not think we received enough training or had refresher courses on these lines. I guess most teachers are self-made through years of experience. I have been pondering on these topics for a while to improve myself. Here, I am sharing some of my perceptions, notions, and ideas that may be incomplete or require refinement. Please consider this an informal discussion and not a discourse.

Teaching-Learning ambience

Teachers are in direct interface with students for the knowledge transfer. Teachers are supposed to deliver, and the students 'may' learn. The students pay for the knowledge availability, and teachers get paid to deliver the knowledge. In the purest sense, teachers are responsible for not just delivering the knowledge but also making the students learn. We are supposed to make "door delivery" (delivery to the brain!) of the knowledge to the student. In other words, knowledge delivery is not the goal of teaching, but learner learning is. In addition, to instill self-confidence, knowledge, skills of the hand, skills of the mind and integrity in the student is the teacher's job.

We have restarted face-to-face classes after nearly three semesters. Why do we need offline classes when we are capable of online teaching? There is no dearth of material, animations and excellent lectures on YouTube. The students can acquire knowledge

from books and other available resources free of cost. Apart from hands-on experiments, why do we need face-to-face classes at all? Because not all students are motivated to find information by themselves, and sometimes not everything is understood easily. Because some students need an authoritative figure to maintain focus. Because some need encouragement and fellow students to learn and maintain motivation. Because some need narration and the physical presence of the presenter to make the human connection for the knowledge. Because some need a teacher to address specific questions as and when they arise. I guess that settles the essential duties of the teacher. To connect, coerce and encourage learning by the students. There are two requirements to be considered from the students' side; (i) the prior foundational knowledge and (ii) the student's willingness. Both aspects are essential for an effective learning process. However, willingness is more important for the learning process in a positive way. How can we make the students willing to learn in the class? We cannot distribute chocolates to students every day for learning!

While it is exciting to impact the students, it is also time for me to reflect on how to better the classroom atmosphere and ambience. Creating the ambience is about 50% of a good class because it gently nudges the learners to become happy learners. That is what makes a teacher a happy teacher. When every teacher does their bit in all facets of students' development, the institution's learning culture is heightened, and the visions are realized. This is easier said than done. There are numerous students in each class, and there are multiple classes to teach per day and other work such as research, paper evaluation, etc. Our minds are occupied, and it reflects in our personality and composure. Our personality and composure will impact how we perceive others, how we are perceived by others and the quality of teaching.

Just as a precedent to the difficulties in a typical learning environment, teachers have power and authority who make the rules, the giver, and the 'boss' of the classroom. The students, on the other hand, are the followers, the takers and the 'subordinates.' In a way, this is crowd management through blanket rules and preemptive intimidation, which numbs the students from expressing their views. We as teachers are worried more about insubordination, indiscipline or interruptions during the class. We prevent such uncomfortable confrontations rather than deal with them on a daily basis. Nobody is ever trained enough to deal with such situations. As teachers, we are stuck between knowledge transfer and crowd management, especially when the crowd is larger than 30 students. It is irritable when someone uses a mobile phone or starts chatting or giggling. It interrupts our flow or drags away our attention as well as the class. A typical approach I take is a preemptive strike by inducing some form of seriousness and stringency, some 'blanket rules' that there should be no talking. I am usually relaxed, but I impose that there should be no talking and giggling when the teaching is happening. I am stressed, and I am sure that at least 50% of the students are stressed.

As teachers, we are faced with diverse students with diverse attitudes, interests and levels of motivation. Some students are highly motivated but maybe slow learners or low knowledge base. Some students are intelligent but unmotivated. We have many students who are shy in general or shy to ask a question during a class. In some rare instances, some students might disturb the class. To give the benefit of doubt to the students, they have been listening to classes the whole day and for the weeks that have passed. The truth is that learning is a burden, to be restrained and absorb the enormous information without respite. To make learning pleasant is an uphill battle. There is no one way of addressing every issue of every student in every class throughout the semester. However, that is our job responsibility and satisfaction. In my experience, I have failed many

times. There are multiple situations where, upon reflection, I felt that I could have dealt with the situation differently to get a positive outcome. The answer is probably in expecting a change in the student not by force (or fear) but by increasing the student's willingness. The willingness for learning is dependent on multiple factors of which some are (i) the respect received by the students, (ii) the acceptability by the teacher and peers, (iii) the collective enthusiasm, (iv) the openness of the teacher (non-judgmental and non-intimidating attitude), and (v) initiatives of the teacher. In essence, we need to eradicate the seriousness, tension and judgement, and bring respect, peace and happiness into the class. I realized that the answer is to change myself before we expect any changes from the students. Changing ourselves is not easy either, but I think it is worth a try for the betterment of the students, profession and, more importantly ourselves.

"Never misunderstand seriousness for sincerity. Sincerity is very playful, never serious. It is true, authentic, but never serious. Sincerity does not have a long face, it is bubbling with joy, radiating with an inner joyousness." -Osho

Happy teaching

The parameters to enjoy teaching would be (i) successful knowledge transfer, (ii) conducive atmosphere for knowledge transfer, (iii) reciprocation of enthusiasm from the students, and (iv) the teacher and students are happy during and after the class. Since the authority is vested in the teacher, the responsibility also falls on the teacher to make the students feel comfortable enough. The ideal way is a class wherein I am teaching happily, and students are learning happily. It is almost impractical and impossible. Here, I am sharing my shortcomings and deficiencies in creating that "happy ambience" and in my inability to connect with students more effectively. To my envy, I noticed some teachers who create such an ideal teaching-learning environment. Over the past decade, I observed many wonderful traits

from my colleagues in dealing with the teaching difficulties, managing a class, soft composure and a happy demeanor. I am also sharing some of those observations of practices of my colleagues that I try to emulate.

If you ever walked by a class being handled by Prof. Sridharan's (Associate dean, SEEE), it is almost like the happiness pouring out of the classroom. The students are happy, and there is cheer in the class. That is a perfect ambience for learning. I guess Prof. Sridharan connects with the students and has a very positive impact. Once, I asked him how he is accomplishing what is impossible for me, a happy ambience in the classroom. He simply said, "I am happy teaching and that I think eventually makes the classroom happy." Being able to enjoy teaching is what we all probably aim for. The first step in this is to become happy.

Just for a start, what mindset and physical projection do we have right before entering the classroom? Are we happy in mind and are we projecting happiness? Are we peaceful, or are we carrying the effects of a tiff from a previous class or interaction? How are the students perceiving us? Are we disturbing their fun? Are we going to entertain them and also teach them? Honestly, I am confused about whom to look at or make eye contact upon entering the class—sometimes feeling tired and sometimes breaking the awkwardness of seeing the students' disappointment that the teacher has shown up! This awkwardness is eased for the eighth hour theory class just because I am also as tired as the students. The point is to highlight the burden of the teacher here. The students are not obliged to learn (at least in practice, that is what happens), but teachers are obliged to teach. The onus, obligation, and responsibility fall on the teacher to take the initiative in bringing in that positivity and happiness into the class.

I came across a viral video of a school teacher from China. The tired teacher walks up to the classroom entrance. Then, he takes a few seconds to shake off

his tiredness and puts on a broad smile and renewed enthusiasm right before he makes an entry into the classroom. It is irrelevant if the smile is real or fake as long as the impact is positive and as long as the job is done well. This practice reiterates the psychological notion of "fake it until you make it and become it." That is practicing and projecting deliberate and vivid happiness. Hopefully, the happiness becomes contagious and spreads to each student and makes the circle whole by coming back to the teacher. In response to this viral video, the teacher said, "I just want to be a good teacher."



[Smile, you're a teacher!](#) Images picked from a YouTube video. A tired school teacher in China deliberately puts on a broad smile right before entering the classroom.

We are all in the process of learning to teach and there would never be an end to learning to teach. We would come across limitless diversity of students over the period of time in diverse contexts, and therefore, there is always a scope and need for self-reflection on our personality, composure, and the aura we project during the class. Other than increasing the depth and breadth of the knowledge transfer and the most effective ways of deliverance, we are also creating our persona, aura, influence and image. These attributes travel far into the student community outside the classroom and beyond our pupils and mentees. The students preconceive our style and nature even before we get to teach them. If we succeed in creating such an admirable persona, half of our job is done in creating a cheerful ambience.

Creating, maintaining and improving that persona takes many years and a lot of effort. Practicing deliberate happiness is probably the most effective and quickest way.

In one of the episodes of "Big bang theory" (an American sitcom series), there is a discussion on teaching between the characters. The dialogue between Sheldon and Amy goes as follows.

Sheldon: Do you realize that teaching is the first thing I've failed at since my ill-fated attempt to complete a chin-up in March of 1989?

Amy: If this humiliating experience is really troubling you, there are things we could do about it.

Sheldon: For instance?

Amy: Well, the first thing that comes to mind is isolating the part of your brain where the memory is stored and destroying it with a laser.

Sheldon: Hmm, no. One slip of the hand, and suddenly I'm sitting in the Engineering Department, building doodads with Wolowitz.

Amy: All right. Have you considered improving your socialization skills, thus allowing you to communicate more effectively with other people?

Sheldon: Isn't that their burden? I'm the one with something interesting to say.

Amy: Fair enough, but in its essence, teaching is a performance art. In the classroom paradigm, the teacher has the responsibility to communicate, as well as entertain and engage.

Sheldon: I sense that you're trying to slow-walk me to an epiphany. Would you mind very much jumping to it?

Amy: Perhaps you should consider taking acting lessons.

I remember the training I received as part of Mission10X by Dr. Shailaja Shastri on "High impact teaching skills" in 2011. The workshop trained us about how to change ourselves for a better impact. Some of the topics were on body language, deliverance, breaking our shy barriers, lightening up and loosening from the fixities of our personalities. It also included a bit about acting and mitigating challenging situations and individuals. We were made to perform funny activities such as delivering a message to a girlfriend but with the attitude and body language of seeking casual leave from the Dean, delivering a biological concept in the form of a song, etc. We were made to perform activities that were very unusual. I would have felt ashamed to perform such activities in front of a group of people. These activities broke the shyness or the boundaries of stereotypical behaviours. The significance of these activities was realized at that time, but I stopped implementing them over the period. I again fell back into stereotypical teacher mode. Now that I am writing this newsletter, I am recollecting the many good things that were followed and reflecting on what I should implement in the coming sessions.

The most important thing I should probably change is my attitude about what I think of a student. Do I think of them as some burden, friend, duty, or teammate? What do I think the student perceives me to be? I think this is the primary aspect of the teaching-learning paradigm. In a tightly packed academic setting, it is common that both teachers and students are stressed and that there is not much room for positivity. Sometimes we may try to approach the students, but the students do not reciprocate the enthusiasm. The students have their own problems because they have to deal with the image they have with the teacher and also among other students. The students' responses are tough to come by. In November 2015, a workshop on "Challenges faced and Effective Mentoring of students" was conducted by Dr. Cresenta Shakila Motha, Assistant Professor, Department of Training and Placement, SASTRA. I cannot recall the exact verbatim, but towards the end of the meeting, I asked, "what to do when the mentees are unwilling to reciprocate our initiatives towards them? It is increasingly difficult and uncomfortable to keep going to the student when they are uninterested". To this question, Dr. Cresenta replied, "what would we do if our own child doesn't like it when we try to talk to them"? In my mind I thought, "my child won't run away if I scold her for not listening to me. My child will come back to me no matter what. My child will not complain to anybody else." But Dr. Cresenta's quip also got me thinking about how these scenarios are related. Firstly, why should we counsel our own children? Why bother about our children? In another perspective, assume three different kids. Consider that one is our own child, one our student and the other is unrelated to us by lineage or duty. Would our attitude and responsibility be different for each of them? Yes, indeed. It is a duty and expectation from us to raise our children to be responsible and happy citizens. It is *the* duty! I realized that it is the same thing with teaching and mentoring, more so because we get paid to be responsible for our students' learning. It is

our duty to do, and we are supposed to. It does not matter what the learner does from his/her side. It does not matter if the learner is interested in learning or not. Participation on their side is secondary, but our persistence is mandatory. Being a teacher, we have a golden opportunity to impact lives as a part of job responsibilities. All we need is to be nicer, respectful and create a happy learning atmosphere. At least, we can try to be the best of our ability without giving up on our students.

In my teaching philosophy, there are only two aspects, encouragement and assessment. Encouragement is about making the students comfortable, but assessment is about grading students. Encouragement and assessment are not necessarily opposing forces but coupling forces to create learners for life. Encouragement is about our personality and intent towards students learning. Assessment is about our knowledge and skill in measuring the students' learning outcomes. Both are essential for the upliftment of the students. Unless we challenge the students, we would never get genuine feedback on how good a teacher we are. Not that the students should be unable to answer, but the goal is that the majority of the students should answer even tough questions. To set a question paper with a mix of difficulty levels and incremental increase in difficulty level as the course progresses are the key. Probably, we have to customize the difficulty levels based on what we know of the class. Assessment types and techniques are not the subject of this article, but encouragement is. Each course goes by the formula "persistent encouragement with intermittent assessment." Being mindful of the students' mindset before the exam and after the grades are given is another aspect that is crucial to students feeling comfortable, confident and encouraged. The high scoring students need a certain degree of appreciation to maintain motivation, the average scoring students need encouragement to perform better and low scoring students need

personal attention or talk to arouse interest and motivation.

Some of the tips

I am sure each of us has learnt many things with diverse experiences in and out of the classroom. I am sure that each of us has developed different styles, focus and practices. I read somewhere that the students may not remember the content of our lecture but will forever remember how we made them feel. I am sharing some of the points that I practice, try to emulate the practices of others or intend to implement. The tips may be taken with caution that overdoing or misdoing these tips could derail the whole process of teaching-learning.

1. **Make positive sentences.** Our sentences, voice and tone are going to affect the recipient. We are aware of the importance of each aspect of the delivery. We try our best to cultivate a positive tone in our sentences. Here is an example of how we could improve it further. Sentence 1: "About 50% of the students have not yet joined the google classroom. Ask your friends to join immediately". There is nothing offensive in this sentence, yet it could trigger negative emotions in the learners because the sentence's tone is stern and authoritative. This sentence could be rephrased with positivity as "About 50% of the students joined the google classroom. Thank you for joining. Please encourage your other friends to join too." I guess this is much softer, positive and more effective.
2. **Smile often and steal a chance to laugh with the students.** There are many colleagues that happen to laugh along with the students. One would often find Dr. Uma Krishnan, Dean SASH, laughing along with her students. There are numerous colleagues who share a laugh with their students, a

remarkable quality. It must be comforting to the students. If we have the right to reprimand a student for an offense, we have the duty to laugh with them too. Laughing along will comfort the students to lighten and open up. They may be more receptive to what we had to convey.

3. **The three magic words. "Please," "Sorry," and "Thank you."** I guess we do not need an introduction to the importance of these magic words. However, because we are on a 'higher pedestal' and wielding authority, we might sometimes forget or forgo using these words. Sometimes we might feel that using these words could make us less or weak. All of us use the words "please" and "thank you" often. "Sorry" is a word seldom used. Sorry is the most important word of all the three because it tells our students that we could be wrong, that we acknowledge our mistakes and also we care about the hurt that we may have caused. Maybe, these magic words would keep us on a plain with the students as equals, and that is a sound setting for interactions.
4. **Respect everyone.** Life becomes easy and straightforward when teachers realize that there is no difference between the teachers and students except in age, experience and role. As persons, we are all equal. That is enough as to why we should respect each other. The point is how to show respect to the student. Often our respect for learners is proportional to the grades. The learners with lower grades feel looked down upon. What if we respected everyone equally just because they are our fellow human beings? We have nothing to lose. Instead, we might gain a student friend on our side to make the learning process more fulfilling. Dr. Naren's interaction with students is as if they are friends. I remember Dr. Jayapradha, SCBT,

saying, "I would take even the low-scoring students for the project because they need the help most." Another important parameter is to show respect for the students' time and efforts. Here respect for students' time is by never making students wait for us. For example, Ganapathy Subramaniam, Deputy Registrar, says, "Sir, you don't have to come to my office in person for this small work. You could have just made a phone call." That is a lot of respect for our office time. Respect for students' efforts is to never take students' time and work for granted. We could always work out an appointment such that the meeting is efficient in terms of time and effort. For example, if a student needs to meet us for a small clarification. We could say, "I will be at JVC at 3 PM. If you are free and willing, we can meet there or else some other time." In the said sentence, the intent is not to make the student walk to our office in ASK for clarification.

5. **What's in the name?** A lot of things are in the name, essentially the personal identity of the individual and with comes respect as well. I am good with faces and very bad with names. Especially after the restart of offline classes post-pandemic, the identification got much more troublesome. After being three semesters away from students' faces and now with masks, every interaction has become more of a puzzle. I found many of my colleagues that practice addressing the students by their name ardently. During project reviews and comprehensive viva, I happened to have noticed Dr. Senthil Visaga Ambi, SCBT, would address every student by their name even if meeting for the first time. Prof. Raghunandhan, SCBT (retired) can actually recall all the names of the students in the order as are given in the attendance register. Excellent skill and habit. I guess I

should work on remembering the names of the students more.

6. **Forgive sooner.** There will be mistakes ranging from simple non-compliance to rude behaviour by the students. The sooner the students are forgiven, the better the situation for both teacher and the student. However bad is the inflicted hurt is, the only solution is to forgive and move on. Forgiving will often bring closure to the issue, and sooner and smoother it will be to move on.
7. **Forget and live well.** There will be unfortunate interactions, do not let them impact future interactions. The goal is to return to the personal happy zone and happy learning ambience at the earliest possible time.
8. **The make up.** Sometimes we lose our temper, or sometimes we might rage on. Each time the challenging interaction happens, we lose a student from our side. Winning over a student is losing a student. Losing to a student is sometimes winning a student. The intended meaning here is that after reprimanding a student for unruly behaviour, end the discussion with a softer tone and amicable approach. Winning over a student is not important, but winning the student over is essential. If required, arrange a meeting to make up for any hard feelings.
9. **The positive punishment.** There is no point in shouting at the student or using strong words at them. Calling them names or derogatory words will pain the student. Make punishments private and positive so that the student gains knowledge from the punishments. The discussion with the troublesome student could be in private, away from the rest of the class. The punishments that are given could be academic in nature,

such as writing an assignment, etc. This will minimize the damage and may increase the orientation of the student. It is a good idea to appreciate when the student complies with the punishment; maybe give chocolate too! Such a series of acts could leave a positive impression and outcomes.

10. **The sandwich technique.** Sometimes we have to critique a student's knowledge or behaviour or give feedback as a part of our job responsibility. That is a challenging interaction that could lead to stress for the teacher as well as the student. Often, such interactions will leave the student with bitterness. I have learnt the sandwich technique from one of the coursera courses on teaching. Sandwich a criticism with positive comments. For example, a student is chatting or disturbing the class. We could probably say, "hi Raj, generally you pay attention in my class, but today you are disturbing the class. I hope everything is alright with you. Please maintain decorum like you always do." I noticed that many colleagues follow this technique, especially when we give feedback during project reviews.

11. **Eye meets the eye.** I have difficulty in maintaining eye contact with students. I end up looking at the sky, floor, road, wall or window. I recently learnt that it is disrespectful to the student. Making eye contact with the students when answering questions is an important activity for better outcomes in terms of impression and grabbing the attention of the students.

12. **The sense of common.** When do we lose interest in something? We lose interest when the topic goes beyond our comprehension or imagination. That is how we lose the attention of the students. How can we get back their attention? We can get back their attention by

talking about something that is within the comprehension of every student. Occasionally, talk of other common interests like sports, society, future, careers, etc. Involving such topics could also allow everyone to speak up and connect with the content. Along with knowledge of the subject, we could share our experiences and knowledge that could be useful to the student in social life. These could be career goals, paths, personality development, motivation, society and life. The objective here is to get the focus of those students that are wavering. The greater the attention we receive, the more impactful our teaching is.

13. **Available, accessible, inviting and responsive.** Most of our students have doubts, but either they are unwilling to meet us or uninterested. At least on our part, we could have a demeanor such a way that students do not feel intimidated. We could be open and soft in the classroom and outside the classroom. We shall always respond to emails or messages of the students without much delay. That shows our interest or respect for the students and our professionalism.

14. **Humorous and not humorous.** Humor is a fantastic tool to connect with the students. But not everyone can be humorous at all times. Often, humor comes at the cost of someone or some identity that could be humorous to some and hurtful to others. In a typical classroom setting, the class and teacher enjoy a good laugh at the cost of a student. That might hurt the student. Humor is important, not obligatory. If there must be some humor, we shall keep it neutral or at the cost of the teacher that is making the joke. We can present the silly mistakes that we made as a student or as a teacher. The ability to crack

jokes on oneself is empowerment rather than self-defeating.

15. **Nothing personal.** The most important thing probably is not to target the student at the personal level. In our enthusiasm that the student should learn, many times, we make personal attacks on the student rather than on the student's inability to focus on the study. For example, assume that a student does not know an answer to a question. Some of the comments that attack the person are, (i) "you are a final year BTech student, and you don't know the answer for this question"?. (ii) "you could have spent time on studying rather than hanging out at the canteen," (iii) "you should focus on your studies rather than on your hairstyle, dress and tattoos," etc. In the above examples, we are not addressing the problem, instead, we are targeting the student. What if the student was choking, nervous, forgot, anxious or uninterested, which is why he/she could not answer? Is it going to help the student by attacking at a personal level? Through my experience, I realized that I am hurting the student and further distancing the student from the subject. Probably, I should have identified the problem by focusing on the question that was asked and the inability of the student to figure out the correct answer. That is the boundary of my job. Maybe I could have said something like, "we discussed this topic in the class. Probably you forgot, and maybe you should revisit the topic."

16. **Encourage and Coach.** The teaching profession is the same as coaching a football team. We take all the team members along, create networking among the players, motivate them for practice sessions and encourage each member to put in their best efforts when it is time to exhibit the skills. Not even a single class should pass by without a

few sentences of sincere encouragement and motivation. We as teachers are transformed into unrelenting coaches who are sincerely desiring the learners' success, to take pride in learners' success and to make the learner's success ours.

17. **Sharing ignorance.** In my view, the teacher should be comfortable even when letting the guard down and being vulnerable to saying, "I don't know". We don't have to know everything all the time, and we make mistakes sometimes. Dr. Rajan K S (Dean, SCBT) said, in one of the workshops on guiding PhD students, "Share your knowledge with bachelors students, expertise with masters students and your ignorance with your PhD students." We should be able to share our limits in knowledge and skills with students. "I don't know" is not so bad to concede. Maybe then, we could work with the students to find answers together. We might become teammates with our students!

18. **Evaluating the answer scripts.** When I started my teaching career, I used to pick out the mistakes in the answer scripts; strike out the wrong ones. Over the period of time, I just mildly underline the mistakes and put bold tick marks for the correct answers. Many times, I try to also leave positive comments on the answer scripts. Positive comments include "fantastic work," "Great work," "Good improvement," "Good thinking", "Do better next time," etc., based on the validity of the answer. I think we would want the student to feel appreciated and positive even if the student scored less. It may have an encouraging effect.

19. **Games of grades.** We all must have saved some forms tokens we may have received from our teachers for achievements. Tokens of appreciation as simple as chocolates, pens,

books or diaries would improve the self-esteem and participation of the students in the games of learning. Often, I give such tokens to the toppers of the class in the first and second CIA exams (cumulative marks). This is typically announced prior to CIA 1. This way, I am encouraging all the students to attend both CIA 1 and CIA 2. There is another prize for the one that has made the best improvement (i.e., marks in CIA2 minus marks in CIA1). This way I am also encouraging the others as well and not just the toppers. All the prizes are equal in monetary value. Simple chocolates can do wonders.

20. **A friend is better than a teacher.** We hear a popular student quote since we were students, and even now, "we all have that one friend who teaches better than our teacher." A student learns better from a friend because the student is more willing. The student is more willing because there is no intimidation or judgement. My twist on this quote is as follows. We are teachers, and we are yet to become friends with students and to be one among them. If we realize that we are just ahead in age relative to our student friends and that we are all equal, the burdens of us being right all the time will be eased. The pressure subsidies, which would be the start of happy teaching and learning. Our effort in molding ourselves to become open and friendly teachers. Once we become friends, the learning atmosphere is less intimidating and more fruitful.

21. **Authentic in intentions.** Our intentions for the betterment of the students should be backed up with sincere actions. Irrespective of how we do these actions, with practice, we become authentic in our actions eventually. We shall not give up because we felt awkward when we tried some action or expression for

the first time. As time progresses, our intentions and actions are no longer effortful but become a general flow in our teaching style and living.

While we perform our duties as teachers

While we try to hone the students into responsible citizens

While we drive our students along the success path

While we strive to uphold the best of the professional ethics

In every while, we remind ourselves of the humane ways for happy teaching

Some additional resources from YouTube

1. The Science of Teaching, Effective Education, and Great Schools
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVLTxKyxi0A>
2. The 5 principles of highly effective teachers: Pierre Pirard at TEDxGhent
(https://youtu.be/_jdTtnWMLVM?list=RDLVKVLTxKyxi0A)
3. Psychology Hacks to Become a Better Teacher (or Student!) (<https://youtu.be/l4J7EyHah1A?list=RDLVKVLTxKyxi0A>)
4. Smile, you are a teacher!
<https://youtu.be/dSjxQiecwgc>
5. The Science of Teaching, Effective Education, and Great Schools
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVLTxKyxi0A>
6. The 5 principles of highly effective teachers: Pierre Pirard at TEDxGhent
(https://youtu.be/_jdTtnWMLVM?list=RDLVKVLTxKyxi0A)
7. Psychology Hacks to Become a Better Teacher (or Student!) (<https://youtu.be/l4J7EyHah1A?list=RDLVKVLTxKyxi0A>)

8. Smile, you are a teacher!
<https://youtu.be/dSixQiecwgc>

2. Teaching & Learning Inquiry
<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/TL/index>
3. To Improve Academy
<https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/tia/>

Some upcoming conferences on teaching and education

1. 4th World Conference on Teaching and Education, 03 – 05 June, 2022, Oxford, UK.
<https://www.worldcte.org>
2. Annual Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia (HERDSA) 28-30 June, 2022, Australia
<https://www.herdsa.org.au/conference>
3. International Conference on Engineering Education, November 18-19, 2022, Singapore
<https://waset.org/engineering-education-conference-in-november-2022-in-singapore>

Resources of interest

1. *Faculty supporting faculty...Supporting students: Peer Observation and Responsive Teaching Innovations:*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1987791>
2. *It's Time to Bring Students into the Conversation About Student Success*, Charles Balich & Kathleen Wise, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, Vol 53 (6): 4 - 11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1987786>
3. Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository, University of Central Florida. Contains a wealth of pedagogical practices that can be adopted, especially for online and blended teaching: <https://topr.online.ucf.edu>

Books of interest

1. *Grading the College: A History of Evaluating Teaching and Learning* by Scott M. Gelber
2. *The Instruction Myth: Why Higher Education is Hard to Change, and How to Change It* by John Tagg

Journals of interest

1. Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

(<https://nus.edu.sg/cdtl/engagement/publications/ajsotl-home/asian-journal-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning>)

Forthcoming issues

We welcome articles for this newsletter from all of you along various dimensions of the teaching-learning process. It is being planned that the newsletter will be released just before the vacation period starts every semester. A call for articles will be made once the semester begins. However, you don't really have to wait until then to plan for it. You can send in your articles at any time in the semester to stl@scbt.sastra.ac.in

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