

TO THE TEACHERS OF SCHOOLS†

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School teachers are advised to be aware of their great responsibility in shaping the character of the future citizens of the country. They should infuse in their students a spirit of enquiry, act as a role model to them, and should fight against the commercialisation of education. Suggestions are made for making learning an enjoyable experience for the students and for keeping themselves updated in their own subject.

I belong to the same community as the participants of this CSIR programme on "Faculty Training and Motivation", that is, basically I am a teacher. However, unlike you, I have taught only in Universities and in IIT Delhi. Also, my knowledge of current practices in school teaching is mostly indirect – through the two sons when they are studying in schools, and through the first year students of IIT. Some of my comments may not therefore be based on totally justifiable grounds and if that happens, I hope you would forgive me for my ignorance.

The memories of my own school education are not very pleasant or inspiring. Except for a few teachers, teaching used to be routine, with emphasis on committing to memory, 'how to do it' rather than 'why is it done this way' in mathematics and science, and reading the text book without much of explanation in subjects like History, English, Geography etc. The few teachers who left an impression on my mind were the mathematics teacher who would challenge the class with innovative examples; the English teacher who would ask us to translate into English some tough passages from the Bengali book 'Pathey Prabashey' by the noted litterateur Annada Shankar Ray; and the Geography teacher, who would explain, with maps, models and the Globe, much beyond what the text book contained. Things must have improved considerably at the present time with many B. Ed. and M. Ed. trained teachers,

but from what my sons used to tell me and what my students tell me even now, much more remains to be done. It needs to be understood that good infrastructure in terms of classrooms, play-field and auditorium, and the introduction of extra-curricular activities like horse riding or gliding do not make a school a good one. The heart of a school is comprised of you i.e. the teachers. Highly committed and qualified teachers can make a School a wonderful and enjoyable place for learning even if the infrastructure and other facilities are lacking in many respects. From my indirect knowledge, I have formed the impression that committed and devoted School teachers are few and far between. I do not know if I am wrong, but I shall be very happy if I am proved wrong. Why is this poor state of affairs, even after 58 years of independence?

A couple of years ago, I visited a friend in a small town and enquired about his son who was then studying in Class VII. I was told that he was very busy that particular evening because he had to attend three coaching classes, one after another, in English, Mathematics and Science. It was indeed shocking to know that nothing much is done in the school although there are assigned slots for these subjects. The same teachers coach them in the evening three days a week on payment of a hefty fee. I could not believe that education has become so commercial, even at the Class VII stage! But that was the reality.

You must have read the recent news about the 'copying mafia in Uttar Pradesh which undertook "contracts" from students, by charging a huge amount, to facilitate mass copying at centres run by the schools. This

† Revised text of a lecture delivered on 11 March 2005 at CEERI Pilani to Science Teachers in Schools under the CSIR "Faculty Training and Motivation" Programme.

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