

Aruna Sankaranarayanan

When I was a doctoral student in the U.S., I had a friend, who was also from India. Though I struggled initially, I started calling my professors by their first names, just like the other students in my department. My Indian friend persisted in calling her professors ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am.’ But she often spoke disparagingly of them, saying “X sir is an idiot” or “Y ma’am doesn’t know a thing.” When I asked why she didn’t refer to them by their names, she said it was disrespectful!

I often recall this incident, as I teach a continuing education course, where the participants are mainly in-service teachers, keen to upskill themselves. One of my requests to them is to call me by my first name without affixing a title. While many do so, a few are diffident, and a small subset reluctant to do so, despite repeated requests. But I don’t blame them.

In India, we have a strong cultural trope that puts teachers on a pedestal and reveres or even deifies them. But, as the anecdote above illustrates, does our construct of ‘respect’ embrace only superficial facets, or does it extend to actually holding a person in deep regard? In

In India, we tend to put our teachers on a pedestal but how many truly respect them? And, in the context of education, how does the concept of respect fit in with a participatory approach?

the context of education, what are the consequences of holding someone in high esteem for a participatory approach?

Implications

The reason I persist in coaxing all participants to call me by my first name isn’t purely rhetorical. This simple act also has pedagogical implications regarding the participants’ relationship to knowledge, how they perceive their own learning, and how they view me.

As they are all adult learners, I prefer to think of myself as a facilitator with some degree of knowledge and expertise in the areas we are discussing.

No ‘ma’am,’ please



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me, the facilitator, and participants. Rather than being a ‘sage on the stage’, I view my role as being aligned with that of my participants. We are all lifelong learners, seeking to enhance our knowledge and collective wisdom. Just as I have experiences and knowledge to draw on, the participants have deep wells of insights,

anecdotes, and examples to share that can either buttress or challenge some of the claims made in the discussions. For us to have truly meaningful exchanges, participants need to feel empowered to question, challenge, or critique arguments put forth in class, either by me or by other participants. They also need to question the

readings. Just as we assume that the teacher has the last word, textbooks too are often perceived as the fount of truth. To be effective learners, participants have to take ownership of their learning and not view the facilitator as someone directing – or worse dictating – their learning journey.

My role, perhaps, is to nudge each one to question many of the assumptions and preconceptions they might bring, and to help them define their own learning trajectories as they progress in directions that are meaningful and relevant to their unique contexts. But, I too am journeying with them, refining my own views, unpacking my presuppositions, and deepening my understanding.

Do my participants respect me? Sure, they do, just as I respect each of them, their perspectives and questions. When respect is earned, it is usually bi-directional. It is hard to hold someone in high esteem if that person doesn’t respect you as an individual.

Every student and teacher, regardless of age or level of education, deserves to be respected. What is the point of education if it doesn’t emphasise our common humanity? Finally, when participants express dissenting viewpoints or ask tough questions, everyone stands to gain. Often, the enriching exchanges we have in class leave me energised and enthused. I only hope that the participants look forward to the next session as eagerly as I do. My only request: No ‘ma’am’, please.

The writer is visiting faculty, Azim Premji University.

SCHOLARSHIPS

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Application: Online

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OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am preparing to take the UPSC exams this year. I have a B.A. Public Administration (Hons) from IGNOU. I’m also a writer with two anthologies to my name. I am not sure about my Plan B. What are the possible career options or further courses that I can do? Will joining an NGO help with the UPSC CSE? Siera

Dear Siera, What about further studies in Public Policy, Governance or Public Affairs, given your background in Public Administration? You will find roles in government, non-profit organisations and consulting firms after this. You can also explore media and journalism or content writing and copywriting. Does research and academia interest you? Joining an NGO or working in the development sector can be satisfying and provide valuable experience and insight into social issues, public service and community development. Try volunteering at an NGO that focuses on areas like education, child care, healthcare, human rights, social welfare, and environmental conservation as this will complement your UPSC preparation, offer insights into socio-economic issues, governance challenges, and grassroots realities, and enhance your understanding of public service delivery, policy implementation, and community engagement. It will also demonstrate your commitment to public service and will strengthen your

profile as a UPSC aspirant.

I’m in the first year of B.Tech. CSE. I want to take the UPSC exams. But I’m getting addicted to my mobile. How can I overcome this? Greeshmitha

Dear Greeshmitha, Remember that overcoming this addiction requires self-discipline, patience and persistence. Stay committed and focus on your academic goal. Create a healthy study environment and commit to yourself that you will stay away from the phone during study hours. Make sure it is not near you, may be in another room or put it on Aeroplane Mode or switch it off. Set reasonable boundaries on usage: such as using it when you take a break or after you complete your portion. Limit access and delete any apps that distract you and mute notifications. Use apps like Pomodoro timer that will help you navigate your studies and free time.

Also, identify triggers and situations when you use the phone excessively: boredom, stress, feeling low, procrastination... Once you know, work on developing healthy coping mechanisms. Engage in some form of exercise to recharge the mind and the body and/or social engagements that will help put the gadgets away. Meditation, yoga, and mindfulness practice will cultivate awareness of your thoughts, feelings and emotions. If nothing works, please meet a therapist to get help. Tech and gadget addiction is like any other addiction (the gadget being the substance). You will get support at the OPD of Rehabilitation centres, if not admitted for a detox plan.

After Class 12 (Science Stream), I earned a diploma

in Electrical and Electronics Engineering. I am interested in spacecraft design and realised that Mechanical Engineering would have been a better option. Considering my family’s finances, should I opt for another diploma in Mechanical Engineering or do a B.Tech. in a relevant field? My aim is to independently decide, plan and execute spacecraft-related works. Adhithyan

Dear Adhithyan, Make the decision to pursue another diploma in Mechanical Engineering or a B.Tech. in a relevant field after a detailed assessment of your career goals, personal circumstances and financial considerations. Can you seek guidance from your academic advisors and mentors who may be able to help you make an informed decision? A diploma provides hands-on technical skills and practical training in a shorter duration but a B.Tech. offers a more comprehensive curriculum, theoretical knowledge, and research opportunities. Evaluate how each educational option aligns with your career aspirations. Mechanical Engineering provides a strong foundation in mechanics, materials science, thermodynamics, and fluid dynamics, deeply relevant to spacecraft design. Mechanical Engineering with a specialisation in Aerospace, will probably better suit your career goals. Consider the financial implications of both courses. Research career prospects, employment opportunities, salary potential, industry demand and potential for career growth in the aerospace or spacecraft design industry. Finally, it is all about your personal preferences, strengths and academic interest.

I have completed my B.Tech. Information Technology and want to enter the banking industry. How can I go about this? Dinesh

Dear Dinesh, Have you considered an MBA in Finance? Enhance your financial fundamentals first to prepare for interviews and relevant job roles in the banking industry. You can also consider online certifications in banking operations, financial management, risk management, and regulatory compliance. You need knowledge and understanding of the banking industry, its structure, functions, products, services, regulations, and current trends. Network with bankers and industry professionals via networking events, industry conferences, professional associations, and online forums. Seek information to understand their career paths and explore roles that align with your skills, interests, and career goals. Highlight transferable skills from your IT background such as problem-solving, analytical thinking, attention to detail, project management, and communication skills, which are required in entry-level positions like technology analyst, business analyst, or data analyst. Look for opportunities to gain practical experience via internships. Stay updated with developments and trends in the industry and demonstrate your knowledge during interviews.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Introspection and reform in high school education and the current student assessment practices is necessary for student well-being

Akanksha Aggarwal

A 2017 survey by the World Health Organization (WHO) painted a concerning picture of adolescent mental health in India, revealing that nearly 35% of adolescents in the 13-17 age group experience high levels of stress. Subsequent research by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) in 2022 found immense pressure surrounding studies, exams and academic achievement. According to the NCERT Mental Health and Well-being of School Students report, 81% students experience anxiety and stress before crucial exams. A 2020 study by the National Statistical Organisation said that one in five students in India take private coaching to meet the pressure of exams. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), with over 13,000 student suicides in 2022, our current system, primarily relying on standardised tests and fixed grading, casts a long shadow over the holistic well-being of students.

Competency based In its attempt to potentially tackle this, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisioned assessment for learning to “continuously enhance teaching methods and optimise student development”. A shift towards holistic assessments can help student showcase their

Rethink assessments



learnings through classroom performance, oral examinations and written tests, thereby reducing end-of-the-year pressure. We must learn from the failures of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system, which increased fear in students who struggled in certain format of exams. Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH) has been introduced as a potential catalyst for change. It promotes competency-based assessment (CBA) through performance tasks, projects, portfolios, and even traditional tests. It addresses the need for flexibility, comprehensive teacher training and effective communication channels in student assessment.

CBA is directly linked to employability skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. It supports high-school students in successfully transitioning from adolescence to adulthood by equipping them with the 21st-century skills they need to thrive in the workforce. To address the challenges of the CCE system, PARAKH needs to offer flexibility to students and teachers, per-

haps allowing students to take multiple formats of tests and then allowing them to drop the lowest mark from the final grade to reduce weightage on a single format.

The Holistic Progress Card (HPC) is another hopeful initiative that offers a fairer representation of student achievement. It aims to promote equity by going beyond academics by giving detailed feedback and showcasing a child’s unique qualities. However, it grapples with challenges such as fostering healthy competition and managing teacher workload. A comparison of emotional competency and competencies could trigger unhealthy competition. A teacher may also complete the feedback process quickly by giving standardised responses. Hence, it is important to ensure that the onus does not fall solely on teachers. The government should recruit personnel for data entry of holistic assessments, thereby reducing the pressure of administrative work on teachers.

Training teachers

Teacher training sessions should also help them reconnect with their inner motivation to teach and move beyond focusing on

grades. The purpose of the HPC needs to be communicated to parents and students in simple localised language, as teachers may struggle to manage the added workload while communicating intricate HPC details to parents. Continuous teacher training and support in interpreting formative data and adjusting teaching methods should be provided. A collaborative effort involving teachers, students, parents and government is crucial.

In the pursuit of change, we must scrutinise aspects around the teacher-student ratio, diversity of students and college admission criteria based solely on grades, which shape the educational environment and influence the outcomes of students.

Let us advocate for introspection and reform in high school education, urging a collective effort to prioritise student mental well-being over the rigidity of our current student assessment practices. Finding solutions to these concerns is integral to ensuring the success of a revamped assessment system.

The writer is an Associate Manager for Research and Impact at Dream a Dream, Bangalore.

