

The Complete Education Portal

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Horizons

Guru-Shishya Bond



Teachers play an important role in guiding students, inspiring & mentoring which helps in the personal and professional growth leading to holistic development.

Education is a gateway for societal and economic upliftment. For ages, civilizations have emphasized the importance of education and the prominence of educators. Educating oneself, and educating others are duties as prescribed in Upanishad as, “Svadyaya Pravachanabhyam Na Pramadithavyam,” meaning self-studying and propagating knowledge should not be abandoned.

Next to parents and family members, children get inspiration from teachers and extracurricular activity tutors such as piano teachers and tennis coaches, etc. These days, with both parents being professionals and working to make ends meet, children spend more time outside their homes, say in schools, and in extracurricular activities; hence get influenced by people who engage with them in these activities. As children get shaped during their early days, say in elementary and middle school days, teachers at these levels of education play important roles and they remain role models in students' lives. Interest in specific subjects spark in kids from listening and following school teachers. This fact is evident from the views of many Nobel laureates who credit their school teachers for getting interested in science, which eventually led to having careers in science.



Dr Hemachandra Reddy

“Mentors can help you network with other scientists, which will advance your career. Mentors not only help you develop as a scientist but also advance your career. A mentor can help with finding jobs, collaborators, and research funding. Mentorship is important to career growth, personal growth, and development as a student and scientist,” stated Dr. Hemachandra Reddy, Professor at Texas Tech University Health Science Center, USA. Having gained education in three different continents, Dr. Reddy practices what he once received in terms of support from leading scientists such as Dr. Francis Collins, former director of the United States’ National Institutes of Health, who led the Human Genome Project.

India has been a forerunner of engaged teaching with students in a homely setting which is popularly known as Gurukula, where students stayed most of the time with teachers and were treated as their own children. It is an irony that with economic progress, in modern day education, class sizes have increased resulting in less attention. Parents and policy makers are constantly working towards reducing class sizes which will enable engaged and interactive teaching even in public schools.

Even in developed economies like United States, which leads the world in terms of scientific breakthroughs, resources have been an issue for school education as well as research in higher education institutions. Right from elementary school to doctoral research mentors interact with mentees

whether teaching basic mathematics, calculus, or experimental methods in molecular biology. Next to family, mentors know students closely and can judge their emotional and physical attributes and wellbeing. Such relationships are valuable and if continued lifelong, enable win-win benefits. Western education gives weightage to the mentor-mentee professional relationship and hence for admissions to higher education and other career opportunities, letters of reference play a significant role and help with admissions and growth.

Lifelong Mentorship and Friendship

As briefed earlier, teachers contribute to the overall growth of the next-generation, and in most cases lifelong friendship develops. As a doctoral advisor, I rejoice in seeing students defend their doctoral research and it is that time when students transfer themselves into collaborators and future research co-investigators. As we witness in India, in rural settings, guidance is sought from school teachers by youngsters towards their move to urban and foreign lands. Personally, I have benefitted from the guidance, support and friendship of my mentor, Professor V. Subramaniam, former Head of the Department, Textile Technology, A.C. Tech, Anna University, Chennai during my formative days in engineering. Known fondly as Professor VS by his students, he used to invite students to his house to help them with their research and developing writing skills.

Many students have benefitted not only from his research guidance but also from his kindness. He is an avid reader of not only research articles but also a wide variety of subjects. My interest in writing and reading books from science to philosophy to literature sparked by watching him many times at close quarters. Professors like VS, Professor Arubala Reddy of Texas Tech and Professor Hemachandra Reddy of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center whom I have known are true mentors who take care of the wellbeing of their students. In my case, Professor VS has given letters of support for international

awards which enabled my career as an international scientist. The motivation and support that Professor VS gave me enabled me to obtain research scholarship from the United Kingdom to undertake Ph. D. research at the prestigious Leeds University, England. While I was undergoing research at Leeds, I used to get handwritten letters from Professor VS always stimulating me to continue and complete my research amidst stressful situations. I have heard from many in Lubbock that Professor Hemachandra Reddy has helped people to obtain Green Cards and enabled research scholars from India and elsewhere to launch their independent careers. People like Drs. VS and Reddy are living up to the mark of educators not only caring for students' professional career but also personal wellbeing. It is important to know about the benevolence and out of the way of helping attributes of mentors and such teachers must be followed and revered.

Students fondly remember the support they receive from their teachers to make their life better both personally and professionally. Dr. Arubala Reddy is exhibiting attributes of a model tutor by providing comfortable professional atmosphere to students who are under personal and family distress, which is much needed in these stressful days for students coming Bangladesh and other stressful regions.

“As a successful parent and professor, the most rewarding aspect of my life has been the opportunity to cultivate both my children's personal development and the academic careers of my research students, by fostering a love of learning, critical thinking, and a strong work ethic, all the while ensuring they feel supported and empowered to pursue their passions, whether that be in the classroom or in their future professions,” stated Dr. Hemachandra Reddy.

Guidance and Support

Research scholars who migrate to foreign lands from their homeland often face stressful situations such as language skills, adapting to new professional culture and society. The support system that includes laboratory advisor, peers

and students should provide necessary support for newcomers to settle. Such a support must be followed in later days by those who receive help so that a supportive tradition and friendship can be established. Teaching should not be just didactic and formal communication, but it should be informative and engaged. Such a kind of support is not only limited to academic set-up, but also to other professional settings. In this flat world, there are professional continuous migrations and there is a need for onboarding in these communities. Professionals, entrepreneurs, and community leaders regularly engage with newcomers as witnessed in communities such as San Francisco Bay Area, Dallas Metroplex, Boston, Londo, to name a few.

The concept of “extend support network,” which has become a necessity has to be nurtured right from school days. Support groups organized and managed by students not only help students but also provide motivation to develop such peer-support groups in their next stages of their career. School in the United States encourage such student led groups to support less privileged students. Programs like MathCounts competition, and Science Quiz Bowls are organized by students under a teacher’s oversight, which builds confidence and leadership qualities. Such groups must be built and encouraged in India and other countries as they enable students to be global citizen scholars.

Emphasizing the importance of engaged tutoring, Dr. Hemachandra Reddy stated, “Children and students chasing their dreams often face hurdles like lack of support from family or peers, fear of failure, societal expectations, financial constraints, limited access to resources, negative self-belief, lack of mentorship, academic pressure, gender stereotypes, and uncertainty about the path to achieve their goals; particularly impacting those from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Engagement with peers and society is good for the mental, physical, and economic well-being of humans. We have witnessed the ill effects of isolation

during the COVID-19 panic which has had a negative impact on education in children.

As the adage goes humans are social animals, vibrant and supportive helpful groups in schools, colleagues and communities enable the overall development of children and society. Teacher-student support networks must be built and nurtured for the benefit of society.

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